

The Women in The House, F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

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 of them 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"—there's no use even trying that.

Instead we come right out and state that the man in the case was 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 L.A. 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 I am going to take the modern privilege of starting a story twice, and begin again—at a medical laboratory in downtown Los Angeles, forty-eight hours after Emmet Monsen left the dock.

A girl, a pretty girl (but not the leading girl) was talking to a young man whose business was developing electro-cardiograph 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 here're the charts for your candid camera 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, and substituted the name of the patient.

"Maybe you better think about your job here," added the laboratory man. "Those cardiographs are supposed to go out by—"

Telephones interrupted him—but they by no means bore a message from 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 big 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.

"Marguerite? Have I got that name right?"

"Margerilla, Mist Monsen."

"Margerilla, if Miss Elsa Halliday calls up, I'm at home to her. But to nobody else—not a soul. Remember that name—Miss Elsa Halliday."

"Yes suh, I won't be like to forget that. I seen her in the moving picture. Frank and I—"

"All right, Margerilla," he interrupted politely. "Just remember I'm not home to anyone else."

Dr. Cardiff, having finished his reading, arose in half a dozen gigantic sections and paced up and down meditatively, his chin alternately resting on his necktie or following his gaze toward the chandelier, as if he thought his eight years of training were lurking there like guardian angels, ready to fly down to his assistance. When Margerilla had gone he sat down in his chair, interlocking his hands in a way that to Emmet vaguely suggested the meeting of two spans of The Grand Coulee.

"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 kind voice—too kind, Emmet thought, "are not radio plates. This is the cardiograph. When I made you lie down yesterday and attached the wires to you?"

"Oh, yes," said Emmet, "and forgot to slit my trousers—and get a last minute confession."

"Huh-huh," uttered the doctor, a laugh so mechanical that Emmet half rose from his chair, suggesting:

"Let's open some windows."

—but instantly the doctor's great bulk loomed over him and forced him gently 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 watched him—many thoughts crowding swiftly across his mind. Much too young for the world war he had been brought up on tales of it, and most of his thirty-one years had been spent along the fringe of danger. He was one of those Americans who seem left over from the days when there was a frontier, and he had chosen to walk, ride or fly along that thin hair line which separates the unexplored and menacing from

the safe, warm world. Or is there such a world—

Emmet Monsen sat immobile waiting for the doctor to speak, but the expression in his handsome eyes was 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. Don't worry—I'm not going to go to pieces."

Dr. Cardiff decided to tell all.

"Your heart is apparently enlarged to a—to a—"

He hesitated.

"To a dangerous degree?" Emmet said.

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

"Obviously," said Emmet, "since I can still hear my own voice. Come on Doctor, 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—"

"Damn it, please get to the point," Emmet exclaimed. "And I'm going to smoke"—as he saw the doctor's eye follow his reaching hand. "I'm sorry, Doctor, but what's the prognosis? I'm no child—I've taken people through typhoid and dysentery myself. What's my chance—ten per-cent? One per-cent? 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 colored maid was in the doorway.

"Mist Monsen, that there Miss 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 his way to the phone in the butler's pantry.

"Well, you did get a minute off," he said.

"I've thought of you all morning, Emmet, 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. What time are you coming out?"

A pause.

"Can I speak to the doctor?" Elsa asked.

"Sure you can. What? What do you want to speak to the doctor about?"

He said "Excuse me" as he realized that someone had brushed by him from behind and gone on into the living room; he caught a glimpse of a white starched uniform as he continued into the telephone:

"Sure you can. But he isn't here now. Elsa, do you know that except for those few 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 once more 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 wearing a powder-blue dress. Her face was roundish and her 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 made a response which he later decided was not brilliant.

"What can I do for you?" he enquired.

"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."

It is well known that we seldom take out our annoyances upon the objects that inspire them; Emmet repeated the words: "Secretarial Bureau!" in a tone which made the place into a day nursery for gun molls, an immediate field of investigation for Messrs. Dewey and Hoover.

"I'm Miss Trainor and I'm answering the call you made this morning. I have a reference from Mr. Rachoff, the musician. I worked for him till he went to Europe last week—"

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

"Never heard of him," he announced pontifically, then corrected himself, "Yes, I have. But I never believe in references. Anybody can fake 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.

It seemed quite a while to have been in the pantry; 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 was increasingly conscious that the doctor was waiting.

But not alone. He was in grave and secret conference with the figure in white who had brushed by Emmet in the pantry. So intense was their confluence that Emmet did not interrupt it—it flowed on in a sort of sustained mumble for some time after Emmet settled in his chair.

"Sorry I was so long. People kept coming in. They told me it would be quiet out here—this Davis even had guards and all to keep his admirers away."

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

An unconfident bell-shaped lady smiled and then appraised Emmet with the expression of a fur-trader looking at a marten pelt.

"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—four, wasn't it?"

"Four, Doctor."

"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. In any case, he was distracted by the sight of Miss Hapgood flat on the floor where she had tripped over the threshold. Before he could rise she was by his side, firmly clinging to his right wrist.

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

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

"One thing I think you ought to know is I happen to be very 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!" In fact he was about to blurt cruelly "Isn't there something you can do about it?" when the nurse answered the question by releasing his wrist, rising suddenly and in the same gesture toppling over a brass topped table bearing a twelve piece silver tea-service which Emmet had conceived as being placed a long way across the room.

Then, as if the sound of many gongs being struck were a cue in a motion picture, he saw the young face of Carlos Davis in the doorway and beside him the Trainor girl. Carlos 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—trying not to crush a small cream pot under his foot.

"Hello there, Mr. Davis."

"Greetings!" said Davis, adding reassuringly, "And don't think I'm the 'looking-in' kind of landlord. It happened I ran into the Doc and I wanted to ask if there's anything I can do."

"Well—that's very kind of you."

Davis's eyes swept fractionally aside to where Miss Hapgood was having some vague traffic with the silverware—which could not accurately be described as "picking it up," for the gong sound continued at intervals throughout the conversation.

"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 head-shake, bade farewell in a wave-salute, vaguely

reminiscent of Queen Elizabeth arriving in Canada, and departed with what developed, as he reached the hall, into a series of long athletes' leaps.

Emmet sat down and spoke to 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?"

"Sure. 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—except that instead of pigtails she wore her russet, yellow-streaked hair at shoulder length, and that her smile with its very special queries and promises was like nothing he had ever encountered.

"I've written a sort of scientific book. It's in the kitchen—the delivery man left the box from the publishers there. It's being published tomorrow and nobody's going to read it." He looked at her suddenly. "Do you get all flustered about ocean changes and the genesis of tidal waves?"

The girl looked at him, as if considering.

"Why not?"

"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 go into the geographic sections of libraries and gather termites till somebody new comes along with the same quirk I had. Meanwhile I've got a hunch for an adventure book—might interest boys. Fun to have somebody actually read what you wrote. I've taken thousands of notes—will you see if there's a brief case 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 returned with the briefcase he continued: "The stuff checked with a red crayon ought to be typed up so I can take a look at it. It'll be clear enough. Now the question of hours. I don't think the doctor'll let me work very much—say five or six hours a day."

She nodded.

"So you can meet your admirers in time for dinner," he continued.

She did not smile and Emmet felt as if he had been a little fresh, and wondered if she were engaged or married.

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

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

"I was born in New Hampshire."

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

Perhaps Miss Hapgood misinterpreted their expressions, or else remembered that this was a crucial case, for she asserted her presence with a sudden up-tilt of a bridge-lamp.

"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 brief case 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 arose and followed her toward the stairs.

"I'm not going to try to help you Mr. Mom—Mister—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 his laces expertly into a cat's cradle. The same knack applied in a moment to the removal of his coat brought to mind an improvised straitjacket he had once seen on a berserk dockhand.

"I can take care of the trousers myself," he suggested—whereupon Miss Hapgood stepped lithely around to the other side of the bed, dislodging a brass fire-screen, which spread itself in three great gasps on the floor.

"Quite all right," 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."

She walked to the window and cast an eye over the early harvest of the San Fernando Valley.

"Do you think Carlos Davis is going to marry Marya Thomas? Don't try to answer till I take the thermometer out."

But it was already out and Emmet was sitting up.

"That reminds me—I didn't intend to go to bed until after Mss Halliday paid her call."

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

He swung his legs out of bed.

"Couldn't you give me an emetic or something? I could get rid of the pills. Some salt and water."

"Bring on a convulsion?" Mss Hapgood exclaimed. "In a heart case?"

"Then order some hot coffee—and dig out that silk dressing gown. Next thing I'll forget my name."

He did not mean this as a reproach, nor was Miss Hapgood offended for she merely shook her head, sat down and did piano scales with one hand.

"Well, I'll sleep for a while," Emmet decided desperately. "Mss Halliday probably won't be here for a couple of hours. You'll wake me up, won't you?"

"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 it was dark outside, and in the room save for a small lamp shaded by a towel. Miss Hapgood was not in evidence but his eyes accommodated themselves to the fact that another woman in white sat in an overstuffed chair across the room—a woman from the same gigantic tribe as Dr. Cardiff. As he looked at his wrist watch to find it was half past ten the lady started awake and gave him the information that she was his night nurse, Mrs. Ewing.

"Have there been any visitors?"

"Miss Halliday. She said she'd try to drop in tomorrow. I told her you couldn't possibly be disturbed."

He mourned silently as Mrs. Ewing rose and ballooned into the hall; he was conscious of a conversation outside his door.

"Who is it?" he inquired. A breathless voice with a glow in it answered:

"It's your secretary, Mr. Monsen."

"What are you doing here at this hour?"

The two women—one monstrous, one simply a woman, reduced almost to frailty beside the other, blocked out the doorway. A failing yellow bulb in the hall still revealed Miss Trainor's smile—repentant now, almost mischievous, but as if she was quite sure that he wouldn't be too severe about it.



"Frankly, Mr. Monsen," said Mrs. Ewing frankly, "—frankly I didn't know what sort of man you'd prove to be when you awoke. And when I found the maid was out frankly I asked this—this—" she glanced at Miss Trainor as if for some final confirmation, "—this secretary, to stay until you woke up."

Emmet's eyes were not quite accommodated to the dim light, either in the bedroom or the hall but he could have sworn that at some point the Trainor girl winked at him.

"Well, perhaps you'll let her go now," he suggested.

"Good night, Mrs. Ewing," said the Trainor girl. "I hope you have a good night, Mr. Monsen."

As her steps faded on the stairs Emmet asked:

"What sort of person did you expect to find when I woke up?"

"I didn't know."

"Didn't you talk to Dr. Cardiff?"

"No. I had only the nurse's chart to go on—and some of it I couldn't read, but I've done a good deal of work with alcoholics and junk addicts."

Emmet was as wide awake as he had ever been in his life but this last expression conveyed nothing to him except a suggestion of some stories of Booth Tarkington about an antique dealer.

"Dope fiends, to you laymen," said Mrs. Ewing casually.

They regarded each other and Emmet swiftly recreated her past—and a wave of sympathy went out from him toward the helpless drunkards and drug victims that she must have crushed into the ineffectuality of swatted mosquitoes.

Then he wanted to laugh but he remembered that Dr. Cardiff had told him he must not laugh very deeply or do anything to agitate his diaphragm, so he took it out in a remark:

"I have my opium cooked right in with my milk toast. And the liquor—well, what I'm sore about is that I didn't go at it a year ago, when we had to put tablets in our drinking water. But if you can't read the chart please call Dr. Cardiff."

He added politely:

"You see Miss Trainor has work to do in the daytime. You wouldn't want to have to help her with her typing, would you?"

Mrs. Ewing changed the subject firmly.

"Shall we have a bath?"

"I took a bath today. Am I running much fever for the day—I think Miss Hapgood wrote it down."

"You'll have to ask Dr. Cardiff those questions, Mr. Monsen."

There was nothing much he could do about this but, concluding that his mood of irritation was his own fault, he decided it was his turn to change the subject.

"Mrs. Ewing, there's some stuff I got in Melbourne that usually takes down these fevers," he said. "I forgot to tell Dr. Cardiff. It's made out of some sub-tropical herb. You'll find it in that medical kit that Margerilla put in the closet across the hall."

"She went off for the evening, Mr. Monsen. I'll give you some medicine."

"No—you can find the kit—brown leather—the stuffs in green capsules."

"I couldn't very well give a medication without the Doctor's permission."

"Find the stuff, call him up and read him the formula that's pasted on the bottle. Or I'll talk to him."

She swelled near him and their eyes met. Then, with ponderous doubt, she launched herself across the hall and presently he heard her in the impromptu medicine cabinet, clicking open a case. A minute later she called:

"It isn't here. There's quinine, and some typhoid scrum and some first aid things, but no green capsules."

"Bring it in here."

"I've got my electric torch, Mr. Monsen, and I've taken everything out of the bag."

He was out of the bed and starting for the trunk room, impatiently grabbing at a quilt in passing as he discovered that he was damp with perspiration.

"Mr. Monsen! I told you."

"I'm sure the stuff's here. One of those side pockets."

There was a gentle click behind them—the significance of which neither of them realized as Emmet groped into the bag.

"Please turn that torch here—" He realized in mid-sentence what had happened: the door had swung gently closed in some casual draft. Moreover, in the full inquisitive light of the torch it was apparent that there was no bolt or handle on the inside corresponding to the lock without. Simultaneously as if from the shock the battery of the nurse's torch expired without a sound.

### III

Emmet's mind, travelling faster than Mrs. Ewing's, was the first to realize that they were in a situation. His second thought was quite selfishly of himself: it was cold in the closet and he drew the quilt around him Arab fashion, conscious of the nurse's heavy breathing, thinking of men in trapped submarines, and of how long the oxygen would last when consumed and expired by that pocket-cruiser of a chest.

"Cruiser" was an apt thought for within a minute Mrs. Ewing was in such active motion as to convince him that the closet was not as large as he had imagined. Whether she suspected that this was part of a plot, or whether she was already fighting for air, he could not determine in the darkness—so he merely dodged about for a minute in his dampening burnouse, trying to keep from being crushed against the wall. Until relief came with her sudden explosive announcement:

"There's a window!"

There indeed was a window and only the blackness of the night outside had kept them from perceiving it before. The question was whether it led to a roof or opened on a sheer drop—presently the forward section of Mrs. Ewing was outside the window, trying to determine which against a sightless sky. Then she made an exultant discovery.

"I can see now," she said. "There's a roof below this and I can reach it."

The spirit of the girl scouts sprung into fire somewhere in her geography, and before Emmet could even caution her she was entirely out the window and he heard a tin roof give a discouraged creak. The aperture let in a cool breeze and as Emmet crouched down on the floor Mrs. Ewing's voice blew back into the trunk room.

"I can't see anything."

"The doctor will be here in the morning," Emmet said hopefully; deciding hastily that humor was out of place, he added:

"Call for help. No—don't call 'Help'! Call 'Trouble at Mr. Monsen's' or something like that. And say: 'no burglars'—otherwise somebody's liable to come over with a shotgun and spray you."

"Trouble at Mr. Monsen's," she thundered obediently, "—no burglars!"

She continued without response. In the interval Emmet imagined them castaway there for a week, living off the green capsules and then the iodine from the medical kit.

Between shivers he realized that Mrs. Ewing was in conversation he could only half hear with someone below. In a moment she reported:

"It's a man in a white coat."

He listened.

"How'ya baby." The voice was outside and far below.

Then the nurse:

"The kitchen door may be unlocked. If it isn't, you come up here and I'll give you directions."

"Got couple drings for us, baby?"

"This is serious," Mrs. Ewing said indignantly. "I am a Registered Nurse—locked in a medicine closet."

"Any my kind of medicine in that closet?"

At this point Emmet missed a few sentences but presently Mrs. Ewing looked back into the closet.

"He seemed to understand," she said. "But he was awfully drunk. He's going to try the kitchen door."

Once more a character passes out of this history. Neither of them laid eyes upon this stray personage again. But later, perhaps twenty minutes later, Emmet spoke up.

"Come in and shut the window," he said. "It's getting colder."

"I prefer to sit out here."

"Shut the window then."

A pause.

"I'd come in, Mr. Monsen, but you understand I hardly know you."

"I understand. I hardly know you either."

She hesitated a moment longer—then she came to a decision and climbed back in, half shutting the window after her.

"We'll just have to wait," he said drowsily. "I took some aspirin."

There was another gap in time for which Emmet could not accurately account though he felt sure that Mrs. Ewing, crouching delicately across from him, did not close her eyes. Then he was awakened by the sound of her fists beating on the doors, her voice calling "Margerilla! Margerilla!"

"What!" he demanded.

"It's Margerilla," she cried. "I heard her car!"

"Solution," muttered Emmet, but the tone of Mrs. Ewing's cries had not served to reassure Margerilla below—it was some time before the key turned in the lock.

Margerilla atoned for her dilatory attitude by a burst of coy laughter.

"Why, you two!" she exclaimed. "Whatever you doin' in there?"

Emmet stood up, drawing his burnouse around him. He called in vain on the chivalry of his youthful reading, but nothing occurred to him.

"We got locked in the medicine closet," said Mrs. Ewing majestically.

"Yes," said Emmet haughtily, "we did."

Like Caesar in his toga covered with many wounds, he could only follow the nurse past the giggling Margerilla, and collapse into bed behind the door of the sick room.

He woke up into a world that even as he opened his eyes seemed vaguely threatening. It was still May; 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 sharp reaction from the humorous desperation that had carried him through the day before. Had he been told the absolute truth about his condition? And would Elsa Halliday come today—and be the same girl whom he had parted with two years before? Would he himself seem different with fever burning in him, its secret in his heart?

When he was indiscreet enough to open his eyes it was to see Miss Hapgood, back "on duty" and rushing toward him, with a thermometer held stiletto-like in a wavering hand.

Something would have to be done about her he knew—as she arrested her rush and shook down the thermometer—shook it in fact all the way to the floor where it rolled in sections beneath the dresser drawer.

Wearily he rang twice—a signal arranged for the secretary the day before. 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. "And Miss Halliday sent flowers this morning."

"Did she?" He grew eager. "What kind?"

"Roses." After a moment she added, "American Beauties."

"Get them, will you, Miss Hapgood?" Then to Miss Trainor: "What are these on the porch?"

"Talismans—with a few Cecile Brunners." As the door closed behind Miss Hapgood, she volunteered: "I'll drive down to the drug store and get another thermometer. I see there's been an accident."

"Thanks. The most important thing is to see that I'm awake when, and if 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 nurses to keep me sort of frozen—like that woman in the magazine."

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 he read the newspaper."

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

"Well, any phone call from Miss Halliday comes first, and I wish you could find out when she's coming without appearing too anxious. About the work—I felt like it yesterday—now 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."

"Oh no."

He was half out of bed when Miss Trainor yielded suddenly. In possession of the chart Emmet settled down and 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 too—words that he merely hoped Miss Trainor didn't understand, impeded as they were by the increasing bronchitis contracted in the medicine closet.

"Get me Dr. Cardiff on the phone! And then read it—read it yourself! Lie on my right side three hours—then I ask the nurse to turn me gently to the left! This isn't a routine! These are instructions for an undertaker, only he forgot the embalming fluid!"

Some of the blame that later fell on the Trainor girl must fairly be partitioned to her, for it was from the moment that she 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 in Emmet's state of mind this suggested a chase, perhaps the greater of the two evils.

Emmet descended to the living room, sat in his armchair and brooded.

He asked the Trainor girl to sit in the room because something about her made him rather ashamed to speak crossly or harshly. Her eyes with their other-world astigmatism, their suggestion of looking slantwise upon a richer and more amusing universe must never be corrected back into the dull vision of the truth at which he stared at present. Emmet did not want her to see the things he did. When Dr. Cardiff arrived he felt comparatively calm.

"Let me have the first go," he suggested, "because what you say will be the final authoritative word and all that."

Dr. Cardiff nodded, with obvious patience.

"I looked at that chart," said Emmet, "and Doctor—I can't live like that for four months."

"I've heard that before," said Dr. Cardiff scathingly. "I've heard dozens of these so called 'high pressure' 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—"

"But that business of staring at the ceiling all day—and the bedpan and the mush diet—you'd have a nut on your hands!"

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

"So do I," Emmet interrupted, "I'm not refusing to lead a completely vegetable life—I'm saying you'll have to modify it. 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. Now, sir—"

He slipped off Emmet's dressing gown and said, as he adjusted a blood-pressure apparatus:

"You should be in bed this minute!"

The machine sighed down—Dr. Cardiff looked at the gauge and unwound the flap; then Miss Hapgood was at her patient's side and Emmet felt a gouge in his arm.

Dr. Cardiff turned to Miss Hapgood. "We'll get Mr. Monsen upstairs."

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

Miss Trainor, who happened to be in the hall saw him go—assisted on either side. She was a grave, slow-thinking girl, despite the very special delights that showed in her face, and she 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 it even more strongly the next day at one o'clock as she sat at her typewriter looking out a window and across a rose bed into the kitchen. Mr. Monsen was at the stove in person, accompanied by the increasingly faint Miss Hapgood.

It seemed that Margerilla had not yet appeared though it was long past one o'clock. She had telephoned from some vague locality about eleven and Miss Trainor had received the vague impression of a grandmother with a broken leg. Margerilla had promised to arrive later but the patient was in an increasingly impatient and nervous mood.

Miss Trainor listened:

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

"Why not? Think of the Huns. They used raw steak for their saddles all day—that broke down the fibre of the meat—just like a modern kitchen range."

"Mr. Monsen!"

Miss Trainor heard him chopping savagely at some meat and bent resolutely to her transcription. He had seemed such a pleasant, attractive man.

"You're too weak," said Miss Hapgood forlornly.

"You think so? Well, there's a bottle of fine brandy in the pantry there.

Do you think it makes me any stronger to take those sedatives, that keep you in a daze for twenty-four hours?"

The patent percolator cracked and the chopping sound ceased.

"I won't want anything to eat anyhow," Emmet declared. "And please don't apologize. We'll send Miss Trainor for sandwiches. All I really want to do is stew that medical chart in castor oil and feed it to Dr. Cardiff."

The Trainor girl wished she had better news for him than what he had received over the telephone half an hour before—that Elsa Halliday was not able to come out that day—would probably manage it tomorrow. She heard him wander into the living room—then she was suddenly distracted by the sound of a car driving up to the back door.

Five minutes later, followed by Miss Hapgood, she hurried into the living room.

"What's the matter?" he asked, looking up drowsily from his chair.

"It's Margerilla," chattered Miss Hapgood. "You know she did come at last, but she smells so funny. Well—"

He interrupted, demanding of Miss Trainor, "What is it?"

"The maid's drinking," she said. "We suspected it yesterday. She just turned up—she has a big fellow with her down there and he's drunk too—he's asleep across her bed—"

"When I asked her if she could get luncheon for us," wailed Miss Hapgood, "—all she said was I ain't even hungry'!"

Miss Trainor resumed:

"I can call the police—or else get some gardeners from Mr. Davis, but I didn't like to do anything without telling you. The man's too big for Miss Hapgood and me to handle."

Emmet got up. The situation was rather stimulating in the oppressive calm, but realizing that he was in no shape for trouble, he whipped himself into imposing indignation. With a menacing tread he entered the kitchen and approached the scene.

Margerilla, eyes unfocused, mouth ajar, teetered uncannily in front of the stove, doing something undetermined with a sauce pan. In the doorway of her bedroom, adjoining the kitchen, stood a huge, well-built negro. He lowered a flask cheerfully and grinned at Emmet.

"Morning, sir. Took liberty of coming along, Mr. Monsen. I valeted a lot of picture people and I thought—"

"Why, Mr. Monsen," cried Margerilla happily. "You know I told 'at nurse I wouldn'ta come back at all less be brought me. I knew you such a nice man you wouldn't care, and you got plenty of women look after you."

Emmet walked past her and up to the negro.

"That your car in the court?"

"Sure is. Have a drink, Mr. Monsen."

"Turn the car around, pointing out. Then go into Margerilla's room and help her get her things."

"Mr. Monsen, you wouldn't fire Margerilla for a little thing like that. An' if you did, then how about me taking care of you—"

"Get out!"

The expression on the man's face changed; he recapped his bottle and looked Emmet over.

"I don't know Margerilla ought to be workin' in a house like this. One of them composers got fresh with me one time and I—"

As Emmet took a step forward the man's face changed. He broke into a silly laugh, turned and went out the door. Encouraged, Emmet steered Margerilla by both arms into her bedroom.

"You be out of here in five minutes," he said. "Pack quick."

She started to collapse but he opened a bureau drawer and propped her on it. Returning through the kitchen he saw that Miss Trainor was leaning against the door to the butler's pantry—and too late she tried to conceal the brown gleam of a revolver inside the folds of her dress. Then he understood the change of expression in the negro's face and felt somewhat less formidable.

"Whose revolver?" he asked.

"Yours."

"Thanks. Will you please make out a check for Margerilla?"

From Margerilla's room came sobs and protestations to her boyfriend, who was assisting her. Emmet sat down in a kitchen chair before the self starter had commenced to hum and was resting his head on his hand, trying to think things out again when he heard Miss Halliday's name pronounced in the pantry. He was tense again as the Trainor girl brought him the message.

"That was Miss Halliday's secretary. Miss Halliday's on her way out—be here any minute."

"Where's the nurse?" he exclaimed, jumping up.

"Making out her chart. Can I help?"

"Hold Miss Halliday downstairs," he shouted back from the stairs.

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

This was possibly the great moment of his life. It had been Elsa Halliday's face on a screen in Ceylon that told him he was a fool to leave her—Elsa's face meeting him on the dock three days ago that made him sure. And now he must face her only to stall, conceal, evade because he did not know himself what was in store for him.

—I've done harder things, he thought grimly.

"We haven't had a temperature for hours," said Miss Hapgood—and as though to prolong that situation she cracked the thermometer in her hand. The tiny glass snap acted as a signal: Emmet and all his immaculate clothes were instantaneously drenched with sweat.



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

Miss Haggood was still looking hopefully at the two pieces of thermometer when Miss Trainor knocked. At her announcement that the guest was below Emmet pressed her into service to collect another outfit, and redressed gingerly in the bathroom. Then he walked downstairs.

Elsa Halliday was a brunette with a high warm flush that seemed to photograph, and long sleepy eyes full of hush and promise. With the exception of Priscilla Lane she had made the steadiest 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 he felt on brow and chest.

"How are you?" Elsa asked.

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

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

At this his 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 was equally angry with them both, but he 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—less than a silent picture to them; 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.

—Of course Elsa must learn not to make remarks like that, Emmet thought, as he recalled the plots of Port Said Woman and Party Girl.

"The gift of vividness," he said after a minute. "Vividness in beauty—like those painters who discovered motion where there was no motion—though perspective came at the same time and overshadowed—"

He realized he was over her head and came down quickly:

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

"When I talked about marriage," Elsa supplied, coming awake.

He nodded frankly.

"I used to feel like an art dealer, or 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 Juan Gris and Picasso prints—I still tell people they're real—though I've developed a lot of taste now and 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. My director's sick but we may be shooting again tomorrow and I wanted to see you while I could. You know—catch up? Really talk about everything—let down my back hair—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," her voice became less brisk. "Heaven knows 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 these last three days. In the industry you're just an ottoman, you know—you've got no more control of your time than if you were a shop girl type or something—"

"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 your doctor said—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. "Several times we planned to go to Nevada. You have to wait four days here—and every time—"

"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 time the moment when it would arrive at the lining of his coat.

"Excuse me," he said, getting up.

In the pantry he steadied himself at the sink. Then he 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! It's part of your job!"

"I understand, Mr. Monsen."

"I don't ask so much," he continued unnecessarily. "But I want it well done."

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

He turned to the closet where there stood the brandy bottle.

#### IV

A rash youth taking down his first few gulps of spirits is moved not to homicide or wife beating, but to a blatant commotion, expressed in every fibre of heart and soul. An Englishman climbs, an Irishman fights, a Frenchman dances, an American "commotes" (the word is not in the dictionary).

So it happened to the abstemious Emmet—he commoted. It was in the bag from the instant that the cognac tumbled into contact with his burning fever—and it had gathered momentum while he sat on the side of the bed and let Miss Hapgood try 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."

"Margerilla's gone, Mr. Monsen."

"Then I am going to eat Carlos Davis."

In a moment he was on the telephone in the hall, talking to Mr. Davis's butler. If Mr. Davis was home would he 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 advised her. "I'm going to act now, 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 one of those unpleasant nightmares 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 preparation to 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 quick events of the next few minutes—of how Miss Trainor looked into the twilit garden and saw Carlos Davis making a short cut 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, closing the door behind her.

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

"Mr. Davis, just after Mr.—Mom—" in her anxiety she parroted Miss Hapgood, "—called you, his brother phoned from New York. Mr. Mom wants to know if he can get in touch with you later—or tomorrow."

As the Trainor girl prayed that there would not be a sound from beneath the kitchen sink she heard the slow bounce of a potato across the kitchen floor.

"Cripes yes!" said Davis heartily. "Script's held up two more days. My writer's on a bat! That rat!"

He whistled—and then looked admiringly at Miss Trainor—a reversal of the usual process.

"Like to see the swimming pool sometime? I mean you don't work always. 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 was ten feet off she stepped back into the kitchen. Emmet Monsen was no longer there but there was not any doubt as to where he was, for she heard the sound of spokes leaving the bannister, of window glass splintering—and then his voice:

"No! You going to drink it. I know what it is—it's chloral hydrate—it's a 'Mickey Finn.' Why, I can smell it!"

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

"Drink it!" Emmet commanded, not even pausing in his wrecking task, which consisted in throwing the extracted spokes through a broken window into the garden. "When that Cardiff comes I want to have you all passed out in rows before he drinks his! My God! Can't 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 smile, as if it was all so pretty. California!"

The name of the state was 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—on her chart."

Miss Hapgood rose to the occasion. Perhaps a vision, like Joan of Arc's, had come to her, a ghostly whisper from Florence Nightingale:

"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 mouth 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. There was Dr. Cardiff, massive in himself; there was Mrs. Ewing coming on her shift; there was a gardener from the Davis estate with a letter in his hand.

"Get out of here," Emmet shouted. "That includes Dr. Hippocrates."

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 him disbarred at the next port. Write him a check, Miss Hapgood. You're off the case. I'm treating myself. Go on! 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've got insurance on the sockets!"

While the doctor hesitated Emmet proved 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.

"All of you get out!" Emmet cried, "while you're still whole. Before I—" The world was spinning around him in cyclorama—

—and then suddenly he knew that the hall was empty. There was no sound in the house. For a few minutes he stood there, all his energies bent upon an attempt to focus. 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. He lay on his back on the floor and 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, and accidentally flung his legs out over space through the gaps where the spokes had been. The house was absolutely quiet now. There was an echo as he experimentally dropped a last spoke down into the stair well. Presently,

he told himself, he would get into bed. It was so nice and quiet. There were no people in the house. He had won.

V

When Emmet awoke there seemed to be no light save in the lower hall, but he had the half-waking 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—somewhere 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 felt for his revolver in the drawer of his bureau. Snapping out the chamber he found to his annoyance that it was unloaded; and his hand came into contact with no bullets in the drawer. The chances were that anyone trying to break in was some discouraged tramp, but he put the empty gun in the pocket of his gown as he tiptoed down the stairs.

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

He took the revolver in his hand and crept to the door of the living room—

A voice spoke suddenly from a corner.

"It's Miss Trainor, Mr. Monsen."

"What?"

"Trainor. 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.

"You can't get on relief at night," she said. "So just stayed."

"I heard something," Emmet said. "And if you're asleep it couldn't have been you. Know anything about the bullets for my revolver?"

"Mrs. Ewing took them out, that first night."

"You mean that gun was empty when you brought it in the kitchen?"

Miss Trainor nodded.

"Sh!" he warned her suddenly, and flipped out the light. After a moment he whispered:

"There's somebody here. Do you know where she put those bullets?"

"No, I don't. And I went through the house myself a little while ago."

Unconvinced, Emmet prowled back toward the kitchen. Either his nerves were still in collapse or there were intermittent creaks that might be footsteps. Again he whispered to Miss Trainor, primed with suspicion:

"It isn't those medical masqueraders? That doctor or those nurses. Tell me frankly."

No answer—and for a moment he thought he had hit upon it—then he realized that Miss Trainor was no longer near him. A moment later, as she approached softly from the drawing room, he repeated his question.

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

Emmet forgot the suspected prowler as he asked in astonishment:

"Why?"

"Well," she seemed embarrassed. "I had nothing to do—so I gathered up the spokes."

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

She paused, then her voice brightened.

"Well, it didn't stick in him, because the spokes were all out there in the garden—and if they're back in place he'll have a hard time suing you."

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

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

"Damn nice of you." He added suddenly, "Sh!"

They listened—but when Emmet looked at her she shook her head negatively; her smile was sad; she wanted to agree with him that there had been a noise, but conscientiously she couldn't.

"It's this house," he decided suddenly. "The place is thoroughly haunted. I'm going out and walk a few minutes. I think if I could smell a field growing—"

He was in the hall putting a light overcoat over his dressing gown when Miss Trainor suggested:

"Do you mind if I walk along with you?"

Suspicion came back into Emmet's voice.

"You won't give me any orders?"

Ashamed of himself, he changed his tone:

"I don't mind."

Passing in front of the garage Emmet once more thought he heard a peculiar sound—but when it was not repeated he struck out with the Trainor girl across a dirt road and off Carlos Davis' property.

It was a down-hill path and presently, with no particular fatigue, he sat down on one of the mounds of new-mown hay that dotted the field.

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

Presently she spoke from a rustle ten feet away:

"There may be animal life here, but 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? You don't suppose I'd find Miss Hapgood!"

No answer. He stared at the waning moon for awhile, then murmured drowsily, "It all smells good."

–This wouldn't be a bad place to end, he thought drowsily. Even Elsa didn't seem especially to matter. But for a long time there had been no sound from the other pile, and curiosity made him ask: "Dreaming about New England?"

"Not dreaming at all—I had coffee with father.—I'm wide awake."

"I feel saner myself minute by minute."

"You were never very bad."

Emmet sat up, feeling almost insulted as he wiped the glossy bristles from his ears.

"What do you mean! Why I was menacing! I was told to vacate!"

The Trainor girl was on her feet and near him.

"We must face the truth," she said, "There's a heavy dew and this hay is dampish. I'm leaving you."

"What do you mean? It's the finest hay."

No answer.

"Leaving me!" he exclaimed. "I thought you asked to come along."

Her voice reached him from thirty yards off.

"The hay's damp—and you told me not to give you any advice."

"You might at least wait a second."

He sighed—he stood up, and started after her. The path was up-hill now and when he caught up with her they stopped every few minutes. After the third time they had established somehow the convention that each time they stopped they would wink at each other.

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

"Virtue is its own reward."

But she slapped the particles conscientiously from his coat—and she did the same for herself as he 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, brighter than anything Emmet had ever known.

VI

We shift the Camera Angle: Shooting toward Carlos Davis getting up in an exclusive bedroom set. It is eight-thirty in the morning but he awakes upset by the events of the night before.

Carlos Davis had scarcely begun his morning exercises when his Philippino came in.

"Doctor take care of Mr. Monsen—he want to talk to you on phone. Ver important."

Carlos Davis removed the encyclopedia from his abdomen while Manuel plugged in the phone. A few grave sentences between himself and Dr. Cardiff established the facts of Emmet Monsen's conduct of the night before.



Then the doctor's voice sank almost to a whisper.

"Did it ever occur to you, Mr. Davis, that there may be another factor in this eclusion—this coronary thrombosis?"

"Is that what you call it? I thought it was just delirium tremens. Cripes! When they beat you with bannister spokes—"

"That's about the idea, Mr. Davis." The doctor spoke slowly. "But we know there was only that one bottle of brandy in the house—and he drank less than half of it..."

There was a pause over the telephone.

"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 a whim!"

"When the patient has only a twenty-five per-cent chance for life the doctor naturally wants to know the facts—so he can inform the next doctor."

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

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

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

Davis found this hard thinking for this hour of the morning—a difficult script.

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

Davis 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. He was within his legal rights. It was past nine—the hour he had set. However, he wanted, above all things, to avoid a scandal, and as he was not a timorous young man he left his followers outside and went in alone by the kitchen door.

The house was silent. He peered into the secretary's office, approached the living room—where he stopped short in the doorway. There, stretched on the sofa, apparently alive, but lost in the softest sleep, lay Miss Trainor. He stared at her momentarily, frowned, uttered a sigh, was half tempted to wake her and ask the address, but, with Macbeth's reverence for sleep, forced himself to turn away. He mounted the stairs.

In the big bedroom he found Emmet Monsen, also in a peaceful reverie.

A little puzzled he began to retrace his steps, when suddenly he remembered the spoke that had flown from the window—and stood transfixed, staring at the bannisters: the spokes were there. Lightly he bounded up and down several times, then, with a slight feeling of nausea, he tried his eyes on several other objects—retreating finally to the kitchen.

Here he recovered his aplomb—certainly a half empty bottle of brandy 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! Dope—the subject was somehow confused in his mind with the movies of Boris Karloff 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—he groaned—she had probably led a pretty 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. Since he was not apt at phrases he quoted the doctor.

"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 of 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 it ought to be cut down and burned—"

"All right—all right."

"—because I read how them G-Men are cutting it down—because guys sell it to school children, and I had to chase some fellas out of there one day—"

Davis stopped.

"What are you talking about?"

"That marijuana, Mr. Davis. The peddlars make them reefers out of it and it drives them school children crazy. And if it got in the papers that marijuana was on your estate—"

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

## VII

The Trainor girl, lately subject to Carlos Davis' commiseration, awoke about noon feeling that there were people in the room and that they were staring at her. She stood up, with those indispensable dabs at the hair that, though symbolic in their result, give a woman a sense of being "fixed up."

The party that had entered consisted of Dr. Cardiff, and two husky younger men with a firm, alert manner—and, hovering tentatively in the background, that celebrated shadow known as Carlos Davis.

Dr. Cardiff said Good Morning somewhat 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 a syringe can be."

The young men nodded. One of them said: "We understand, doctor. We look under

mattresses and down the drains, and inside of books and powder-boxes."

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

"And be pleased to examine those bannister spokes," proposed Dr. Cardiff. "Monsen may have been trying to get at it." He brooded momentarily. "I wish we had one of those broken spokes."

Carlos Davis spoke up uncertainly.

"I don't want any violence. Don't start looking behind his ears till you get him in custody."

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. This time, behind the wink, he divined a warning.

Other signals were going on. 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 shortly—and then, "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!"

Dr. Cardiff may have detected the sudden sweat upon the young actor's forehead, for he gave him that headshake that all over the world means: Don't pay any attention.

Pettigrew reached out and patted Emmet's knee gently.

"Mr. Monsen, I understand you've been sick, and sick people aren't always responsible for taking the right medicine. Ain't that true, Doctor?" He looked at Dr. Cardiff, who gave him encouragement. "Now I'm a deputized commissioner from the county police—and I'm also a male nurse—"

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

Upon the steps stood a pretty girl in a state of agitation, holding a package in her hands; she stared uncertainly at Miss Trainor.

"Are you the lady here?" she asked.

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

The new arrival gave a gasp of relief.

"If you're a working girl you'll understand. I'm from the Johanes Laboratories—and there was a mix-up, a hurry call and I—and they sent the wrong cardiograph here." For a moment she tried to bluff it out—fell before the infinite forgiveness of the smile. "You know? The wrong heart chart?"

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

"It was almost very serious. The man who got Mr. Monsen's chart thought he was so well that he was just going to take up polo again—and his chart that Mr. Monsen got—"

She ran out of breath—but by this time the Trainor girl's smile had brightened—by what can only be measured in ohms. She took over.

"Does this package have Mr. Monsen's correct chart?"

"Yes."

"All right—I'll take care of this. You needn't worry. Dr. Cardiff isn't on this case anymore."

After the girl had gratefully departed Miss Trainor stood there unwrapping the envelope. The cardiograph meant little to her—but she was so presumptuous as to read the explanatory letter that went with it before she went back into the living room.

The situation there was physically unchanged but—enlivened. The second young man had returned from his search of the house and stood over Emmet, weighing half a dozen capsules in his hand. Emmet was not amused. His expression was one she had never seen before—it was like the calm he had described in his book, before the up-rush of some immense monsoon.

"Those are pills that Dr. Cardiff gave me," he said slowly. Then he turned to the other man and sank his voice to a confidential note:

"If you want to know who's been giving me this stuff—" He turned toward Davis. "There's a certain plant that grows wild in various sections—"

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 you doing here?"

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

Miss Trainor spoke up, addressing Carlos Davis.

"This man's a nurse too," she said. "I had him come here after Mr. Monsen dismissed the others."

"She made me keep out of the way," Jim complained. "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.

"Find any junk? Say, that's what I slept in—a 1932—"

"That's my car," objected Miss Trainor. "And a very good one."

It was perhaps this last remark which prompted her to step forward and hand the revised cardiograph to Dr. Cardiff—with a few of those brisk words—the kind that are sometimes described as "well-chosen."

There were still roses around the door a week later—Angele Pernetts and Cherokees

and Cecile Brunners in the yard, and Talismans and Black Boys climbing over the porch in a multi-colored rash and peering around the corner of screens. They seemed to have a curious herbal effect not usually attributed to roses, for Emmet did not even use the last of the green capsules to cure up 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 of them merely communicated. And though the roses were quitting for the year pretty soon, it seemed likely it would go on between these two forever.