The Romance of Thatmaiyo Bridge

Gentleman's Magazine.

Away on the borders of an ancient kingdom of Southern Asia a great gorge broke for centuries the continuity of the already sufficiently difficult road which still winds among dim teak forests and jungle-clad ranges from the banks of a turbid river through the Shan country into China. Even now, when the British government has built rest houses and police outposts all along it, that road is best traversed in broad daylight, when it can be seen if a landslip has gouged out some portion overhanging a precipice, while the few Europeans who cross it on official business halt and gaze down with wonder into the depths of Thatmaiyo gorge.

Riven through the mountains by some convulsion of nature ages ago, it lies an awful gulf of shadow where, just at noon, the sunlight touches the palms far away below, while at any other time the spray of a frothing torrent mingles with the mist which hides half the dripping jungles on the less precipitous sides until these in turn give place to stunted deodars on the heights above. Yet from time immemorial a stream of native commerce passed that way into the red country—tea, silk, spices, incense, coming down on the little hill ponies' backs, which the ancestors of Boh Maiyo plundered at will. Once a frail bridge of twisted creepers spanned the narrowest part of the chasm until the father of the Boh hewed it through, just when a band of armed merchants who refused to pay his toll were crossing, and the gorge became the scene of another tragedy. Afterward, for a generation, the pack trains spent three days winding down through transverse ravines and painfully scaling the heights again, and no one refused the Boh his due, until one day an emissary of the British government decided that such a state of affairs had lasted long enough and orders were given for a bridge to be built.

So two ropes were made in Sheffield from little bars of steel with blisters on them smelted with charcoal in Swedish forests and afterward melted down in small plumbago crucibles, so many pounds at a time, which is a costly and Old World process, though no modern method produces the same quality of steel, and the government demanded the best. Then the rods rolled from it were quenched in the old hardening water which is dearer than sherry, drawn into wire, and tempered in oil again by men whose skill was inherited, and when at length the ropes were finished each strand was proved to possess double the strength of common steel, while the outer ones could scarcely be scraped by a file. Coiled up on huge wooden drums, they suggested only the prosaic completion of work well done, and yet each roll of tough hard metal was to play its part in romance.

Next, Edward Kennedy, bridge builder, went up into the forests, taking with him one white assistant, several score of mechanics trained on Indian railways and at least as many Hindu coolies, besides ponderous elephants carrying portable forges and two heavy wooden drums, whose purpose the dusky natives made vague guesses at. It was in the wet season, and several loaded beasts fell over a precipice, while at times the elephants stuck fast in the mire. A landslip also obliterated one camp, and when they neared the gorge a number of the coolies, without acquainting Kennedy of their intention, departed hurriedly for the coast, while the rest declared they had seen malevolent faces watching them among the leaves. But Kennedy, who fell sick of dysentery, and was carried in a hammock, held on stubbornly, for he had expected this, and, in due time, with a third of his followers and various valuable sundries missing, reached the gorge.

It was a listless evening some time later when he sat in the doorway of his tent puzzling over a strip of paper which was covered with what seemed Chinese characters. High above the deodars were fading into dimness and the ranges loomed up black and solemn against the dying light, while the last glimmer of the cooking fires only intensified the gloom. He could hear the fret of the torrent in unseen depths, and there was a drumming of moisture upon vibrating leaves, until the strangeness of it all grew oppressive, and he felt, as it were, translated out of the nineteenth century into the begining of a primeval world. Then there was a sound of cautious footsteps, and Kennedy started when, half visible in the light of a dying fire, a white man approached the tent. His thin uniform was torn in places, his helmet bulged and shapeless from long exposure to sun and rain, and only the big revolver seemed cared for and new. Kennedy also noticed that both face and frame bore the stamp of the damp, hot climate in a certain gauntness, though the former was keen and resolute. Then the stranger smiled, as though enjoying his bewilderment, and waved the two Indian soldiers behind him away.

"Thought I'd come over the ranges and see you," he said. "It's very lonely here until one gets used to it; besides, I'm out of tobacco and haven't seen a white man for months."

"I am very glad," said Kennedy, passing his cigar box across. "Sit down; these are at your disposal. May I ask who you are?" and the stranger laughed as he answered, "Lieut. Cochrane, joint ruler of this delectable district with the Boh Maiyo. My jurisdiction extends so far as there is sunlight to sight a rifle in, and the Boh takes over all that's hidden in the shadow of the bush. We stalk each other on opportunity, and that's one reason I came so quietly."

"I was warned about him," said Kennedy. "Perhaps he sent me this letter. Can you read it?" and opening the flimsy paper under a paraffine lamp, Cochrane nodded as he answered: "Yes; this gorge was his favorite home until I hunted him out of it; we lost several Sikhs in the process. Now he lives mostly among the peaks up there, and it's strange he hasn't already called upon you. He has persuaded some trader to write you an indignant remonstrance, pointing out that from ancient days his people were custodians of the gorge, and he cannot allow any bridge to be built across it. You are therefore politely requested to go away or take the consequences."

This time Kennedy also laughed. "It's a chance I have long been waiting for, and the bridge will be built if all the robbers between here and China object to it," he said. "They can't burn that steel rope, and save for some made in two ancient cities no steel in the East can cut it," while Cochrane answered, dryly, "No; but human bodies are not equally impervious, and if I were you I would sit close in camp and confine myself to tinned provisions. I will answer this, if I can get any one to bear the message, for the Boh has a habit of maiming those who bring him unpleasant tidings. Now, tell me all about home, for we must start long before the dawn in case the Boh, hearing of my coming, is waiting for me."

The two lonely white men sat talking long into the night, and before he flung himself down fully dressed on Kennedy's trestle cot Cochrane promised to come again, while when the former opened his eyes next morning there was no trace of either that officer or his soldiers, except that the cigar box was empty and sundry bottles littered the floor. After this nothing happened for a week or so, and Kennedy, who stretched the two stout cables across the ravine, buried the anchor plates to hold them under loads of cement, and tried with indifferent success to get an average day's work out of his colored assistants, who began to mutter that evil spirits haunted the place, while, unobserved, little wiry men watched him from the jungles. Also, as one of them afterward testified, the Boh, who took counsel with his advisers among the fastnesses of the ranges, said it would be better not to destroy the bridge just then, but to wait until it was finished, when the blow would have treble effect. "Thus," he concluded, "all shall know that this jungle is mine, and no white man will venture again to build bridges in it. Meantime, why should this stranger sit down in peace?"

Then the Boh's hand became apparent, for a timber hewer was found with his throat cut beside the log he felled. Several of the coolies fell mysteriously sick, and Kennedy, remembering Cochrane's advice, grew cautious about his food, and sent home his white assistant, who, having lain helpless with fever most of the time, was glad to go back again. "I cannot do any good, and this ghastly place is crushing the life out of me," the latter said.

Sometimes there was a clinking in the darkness beyond the raving, and when in the morning Kennedy swung himself across the awful chasm in a traveling cage, he found the print of naked feet in the mold and a few slight dents on the stout cables. Then, remembering the percentage of carbon that steel contained, he smiled, dryly, and pictured the notched edge of the native blade. Twice, also, as he stood panting beside the forges in the fierce heat of afternoon, the crash of a long gun filled the jungle with reverberations, and the first time his leading smith, a big-bearded man from beyond the Indus, stood up and cursed the heathen in the name of the prophet, with two slugs in his arm, while the second something which whirred past Kennedy's head struck in the straight shaft of a palm, and on extraction proved to be of bright metal somewhat lighter than lead. More men mysteriously disappeared, and his sleep was broken by strange noises in the jungle or the rush of a charging boulder which narrowly missed the camp.

But, though he grew anxious and careworn, he determined to match Western stubbornness against the patient cunning of the East, and kept the remnant of his men at work in fear and trembling by pointing out that they were safer there than wandering unarmed through the bush. So he slept in the daytime and sat watching with the rifle across his knees all night, while day by day, as he and his invisible opponents played out the waiting game, the bridge grew steadily. It, however, struck him as unneighborly that Cochrane never intervened, and when once he told him so the latter said: "I will do my part in due time, but you see my main object is to take the Boh red-handed, which is a difficult thing to do. We are watching each other, and the one who makes the first move gives his side away. What's that—a bullet fired at you?—It was probably made out of a rupee, the result of superstition common to West and East. They can't cut your cables, while their neighbors down country found it easy chopping telegraph wires up. Ergo, it's due to magic, and you are a wizard who can only be killed by a silver bullet. It also shows the Boh considers they have let you go far enough, and is now contemplating vigorous action."

"And what have they been doing meantime?" asked Kennedy, in choleric astonishment, while Cochrane laughed as he answered: "Amusing themselves, and seeing you did not get too happy. No, I am not going to undertake any wild-goose chase among the ranges after the Boh; can't afford to throw away my men like that you know. My plan is to lie perdu and wait for him, but I'll leave this messenger with you; he will find me if I'm wanted badly."

He departed, leaving Kennedy in a state of righteous indignation, though the latter, who was by no means a timid man, redoubled his precautions. He had worked with Death for a neighbor before, when pestilence mowed down his comrades in Brazil, and had been shot at surveying for light railways in Western Africa. Still, he was decidedly unwilling that the Boh should destroy him or the results of his labor, and his whole heart was set upon the completion of his bridge. Therefore, with destruction hanging over his head, and sometimes descending at night to miss him by a yard or so, he continued doggedly at his dangerous task, a most unheroic, stumpy figure, in old alpaca jacket, very dingy topee, and, when the sun was bright, a pair of smoked spectacles.

At last one morning his storekeeper came running in to say, "Last night I slept outside the store and heard no one, but when the sun rose the door was open and many tools had gone. This must surely be the work of jungle devils."

Kennedy, with practiced eyes, noted what was missing, and said, half aloud: "It is time I sent Cochrane's messenger. The jungle spirits don't use sledge hammers and cold chisels, so it's fairly evident some dusky mechanic has been hiding beside the forges to study modern workshop practice. You don't understand, storekeeper, but you may remember that if by witchcraft any more tools are missing the count of your wages will be the less for it."

A week passed and nothing happened, save that the messenger returned with the laconic answer, "Keep both eyes open; he is ready to move," while Kennedy, who realized how hard it is to match the Oriental at a waiting game, drove the work forward, for at last he felt both nerve and patience yielding to the strain. Then one hot night he sat somewhat limp and dejected outside his tent, looking several years older than when he first came there. A full moon was rising blood red above the jungle through filmy vapor, and though his side of the valley lay wrapped in deep shadow he could see the growing light travel slowly across the bridge, which hung a fairylike structure above the black abyss. The sweep of the trusty cables was fair to the eye; the web of well-braced metal beneath them seemed the perfection of strength with lightness, good in design and workmanship; neither could the builder's keen inspection find any fault in it. Then he remembered how pleasant it would be to breathe the cool English air again, hear the voices of his fellows, and feel the pulse of civilization beating about him after that dreary sojourn in the primeval solitude. Already, in fancy, he could inhale the freshness of green English meadows, until a monkey chattered and recalled him to the steamy dimness of the tropics.

Some beast moved through the undergrowth; with a shock of rattling branches the monkeys fled, and the bush seemed filled with noises, then the silence that followed grew almost overwhelming. Kennedy looked about him, but no one stirred in all the camp and the fires had sunk to circles of pale embers, until he heard a sentry stumble among the creepers, and the sound brought comfort, for at least it betokened a tangible human presence. Then a stick snapped sharply, and though nothing followed he became a prey to the feeling that the surrounding blackness was filled with hostile beings; but the sentry gave no warning, and he determined to dose himself next morning, for Kennedy, who was materialistic, smiled at psychology. But the feeling would not be shaken off, and presently, hearing a rustle like that made by a tightening tent line, the bridge builder rose sharply—too late.

Something smote him from behind, and as half dazed, with fingers tightening on the rifle trigger, he turned, there was a patter of naked feet, and little men came pouring half seen out of the shadows. Once the repeater flashed, and though the bridge builder fired from the hip a choking cry rose up in answer; but it did not flash again, for some one crawling in the grass gripped his ankle and he lost his balance. Then he had only a dim recollection of hearing a clamor break out in the startled camp and seeing his alien laborers leap into the jungle, while sinewy hands closed tightly about his throat. Next, while his temples throbbed distressfully, he found himself lying bound with creepers upon the threshold of the tool store, where two little, narrow-eyed men also sat scowling at him. There was plenty of light to see them by, for the moon was clear of the forest now and the red glare of a burning hut fell athwart the bridge.

Quaint figures with naked limbs in loose drapery scurried to and fro across it, hewing at the cables with glinting blades, and wrenching up the half-laid roadway, while others plied hammers that were too heavy for those unaccustomed to wield them, or howled when as the chisels slipped from the elastic steel a comrade brought the sledge down upon the holder's arm. Even then Kennedy smiled as he watched them, knowing that twelve months' labor so applied would be thrown away; for, though the light structure vibrated under the blows, the men who made those ropes had done their work thoroughly, and the wire resisted all efforts to cut it in that fashion. Still, in other directions, the destroyers did damage enough, and Kennedy wriggled fiercely under his bonds when each thud rising out of the blackness below told of some heavy piece of metal hurled into the gorge. The veins of his forehead grew swollen, the tough creepers bit into his flesh, but they refused to yield, even when his guards, seeing him helpless, slipped away to join in a search for plunder.

Nevertheless, he looked on with grim satisfaction as, with lighted torches, they approached one particular hut, for a quantity of giant powder was stored in it. So while shattered cases and cement bags were strewn about, diminutive men flitted round it under burdens until the roof fell in with a crash. Then a sudden blaze shot up, fragments of burning timber hurtled out of it, and, though giant powder requires a detonator to produce its full effect, the expansion was clearly sufficient to burn and badly frighten some of the depredators, for they vanished into the shadows, screaming shrilly. Afterward there was only the clink and clash of hammers on the bridge, until some native genius suggested a new procedure, and a group of bent figures appeared rolling a boulder toward where he cables sloped to the anchor plates.

With that for an anvil their efforts might become dangerous, and Kennedy groaned, feeling he would give the rest of his life to save the bridge. Yet, lying there, with bleeding wrists and ankles, coughing in the acrid smoke, he could do nothing, nor even decide whether when the ruin was completed he would be held for ransom or hurled into the gorge. From Cochrane's description he could recognize the Boh, a slight yet commanding figure moving among the others, whose flashing tools and garments changed color under the firelight like the glasses of a kaleidoscope, and then a regular clang of hammers broke out, different from anything which had preceded it, for the destroyers had the boulder beneath the chisels now. There was no more running to and fro, the clamor died away, for men waited methodically for their turn at the hammers, and Kennedy realized the end must be near. He could hear the cables vibrating in a duller tone, and once he fancied a sound in the jungle which made his heart beat wildly. But this also died away, and he started when a shadowy object wormed its way through the grasses, and he recognized the voice of his Pathan artificer.

"Lie still, Sahib; stretch out your hands," it said. "There is help in the jungle. The ankles now," and Kennedy felt his bonds yield beneath a knife. He lay still after the first movement, which sent a shock of pain through his stiffened limbs, then following the other, wriggled toward his tent, hoping the looters had not found the revolver under the pillow of his cot. No one saw him, and he weapon was there, while the Pathan had discovered a crowbar which he whispered grimly might serve, and again for a space the two sat still breathing hard, while Kennedy debated how to commence the diversion he knew was urgently needed.

Even as he did so, sudden and intense, the call of a whistle pierced the shadows, and, following it, spurts of flame streaked the jungle. Something rang metallically upon the bridgework, unseen missiles hummed out of the darkness, and the swarm of wreckers opened out, clamoring like a flock of startled wild fowl. Where they all went to Kennedy did not know, though he could hear a few smashing through the creepers, for his eyes were fixed upon the twos and threes of running men in uniform, and he shouted hoarsely at the twinkle of bayonets, remembering how Cochrane had said his messenger would find him when he was wanted. Then, as some converged upon the opposite head of the bridge, one man who was not a soldier ran back along it alone, leaping over the gaps in the partly finished road, and Kennedy, who saw it was the Boh, scrambled forward to meet him. A bare-headed white man followed, and when Kennedy and his Pathan stood waiting to cut off his retreat the fugitive halted and glanced over his shoulder toward his pursuer. Once the engineer's revolver flashed, but his hands had been cramped by the bonds, and the bullet went wide, while there was a shout from the white man: "Quit firing; you nearly shot me. Give him law; the Boh is my property."

Then for a few moments Kennedy scarcely breathed, as with straining eyes he watched the tableau on the bridge. Drawn together, lithe and catlike, with a blade that made pale flashes, the Boh waited as though ready for a spring; and, lowering the stumpy revolver, Cochrane, helmetless, in thorn-rent rags, stood still erect before him, saying something whose purport Kennedy could not catch. Then, as in fierce excitement the latter clenched his hands, the two men—Oriental and Briton—who had fought out each in his own dogged way a quarrel which had lasted two years now, stood silently face to face, until he saw Cochrane shift his grip on the revolver, as the other moved one foot. Next a black shape leaped forward under a circling blade, but instead of a crack of the pistol Cochrane's arm swung out as he sprang aside, and Kennedy fancied he heard a thud. The Boh lost his balance, staggered forward, dropping his weapon, then turning half round stepped sideways with a growl of defiance, and vanished suddenly. Several seconds passed; then a faint crash like that of a broken branch rose faintly out of the abyss, and there was an impressive silence, while Cochrane, stooping, looked down through the gap in the bridge.

Afterward he came forward, picking his way, and said, quietly: "Gone! and somehow I am almost sorry. We hunted each other so long that I shall miss him. Whether it was felo de se or an accident I don't exactly know; but in any case it was better so. He was a worthy enemy, and I wouldn't like to have seen him working in chains, like a petty thief. However, as a matter of duty, I did my best to take him."

Kennedy did not remember what his answer was, though he wrung Cochrane's hand, while when the dusky turbaned soldiers came back out of the undergrowth the latter said: "Got nobody; I did not expect they would. Still, there will be a safe passage through this region now, for they have no one fit to replace the Boh. At least, he made a characteristic ending, and there was some excuse for him. This kind of work was born in him; and for generations his ancestors collected the forest tolls. I guessed what he was plotting, and lay low; but he was quicker than I expected, and might have succeeded only for the staunchness of your ropes."

Then he laughed, as Kennedy answered, dryly: "I can't exactly appreciate the part you made me play, but, all things considered, I am much obliged to you. Meanwhile, you must be hungry; and now—the first time for many weeks—we can enjoy a meal in peace."

In little groups the coolies crept back again, and Cochrane, who knew pursuit was useless in the dark, enjoyed a much-needed rest, while next morning Kennedy found that a few relief tackles were all that were needed to secure the bridge while he made good the slight damage to the cables. After this the work proceeded without interruption, and perhaps the ringing of hammers set the creepers trembling above the grave of the Boh. His body was never found by the white men, and Cochrane, who said his followers had stolen it away, declared that he was not sorry the grim ruler of the jungle should sleep undisturbed among its fastnesses. Also, in accordance with his advice, Kennedy made only a bald statement, for he said the authorities objected to sensational reports just then, and few white men ever heard the story of how the steel ropes defeated the Boh.

But the bridge was finished, and now the dusky drivers of the pack trains which pass in safety bless the man who built it, and Kennedy, who looks back upon those anxious days, also remembers his farewell in an Old World Eastern city. Each time he recalls it he can smell the wood smoke and faint odor of spices, and see the group of Europeans sitting round the long table, a few bronzed to the color of coffee, but the most part pallid and hollow of face. Also, when Cochrane, who had made a long journey to bid him good-bye, rose up after the one toast which has a special significance in the unhealthy tropics, "Absent friends," he raised his glass and nodded toward him, saying: "To the memory of Boh Maiyo."

—Harold Bindloss.

Isn't there considerable consolation in considering the troubles of our ancestors during the house-fly season of prehistoric days?

THE HORROR OF THREE SANDALS

By Charles Fleming Embree.

The Argonaut.

The old monster of revolution, long since drugged to sleep, some think to death, yet sometimes stirs. Its movements are dream-movements, its snake-like convolutions are harmless. It is merely the habit of the dead past, when Diaz was not yet Power, which causes the beast to heave its lethargic sighs and open up, from time to time, a red orb devoid of meaning.

Up over the Cuernavaca railroad comes now the military detachment lately sent into Guerrero. The little company eats dinner by the Cuernavaca station. Five lank soldiers in sandals sit at a distance on the ground; and, whereas all the others are gay, these five sit depressed with gloom, recalling a strange thing.

The heart of Guerrero, state of golden miracles, is not yet opened to the world. Mountains and mysteries shut it away from modern life. Away down south, 200 miles from the railroad, is the town of Three Sandals. Into it came, five years ago, an American named Stirge. He bought a mine and worked it all alone, and they said he stacked up gold in an adobe house as high as the roof. He was tall, with silken beard, feline grace, mild, deep, unreal eyes. Gold turned his head; gold made his house an empire, Three Sandals the center of the universe. He dreamed of severing this southern land from Mexico, and insane ideas of a monarchy came to him.

The chief of police was fat and flabby, and often full of pulque. He lived in a large house on the plaza by the palms. His sister was a beauty, aged nineteen, named Otilia.

"Otilia, I call you a failure," complained the chief, drinking three quarts of pulque in the patio, while she lounged languid under those enormous yellow flowers called "cups-of-gold." "Manjarrez killed himself for you. Elias slew Negrete for you. Olivares robbed the hacienda to buy you a ruby, and was shot. The governor at Chilpancingo made a fool of himself for you. Bah! what good is all this if you can not find out the revolutionary schemes of that cursed American, and save my reputation. I want to kill him, and, alas!"—with a comic shrug, spilling pulque—"there is no way."

"Hang him by his sweet, soft beard, Pepe, my love," said she, with a smile.

"But!—the shadow of an excuse! I know he plots, but never a finger can I lay on him. Make him fall in love with you, witch; worm it out of him. Our reputation is at stake."

She dreamed, lying there graceful, beautiful, mischief in her languid eye. "I will," she said, and plucked a cup-of-gold, and buried her flushed face therein.

She was shrewd. She was not of the dashing type. She was leisurely reserved. She had watched Stirge for months. She knew him slightly; she had smiled at him. Into her deep thinking came the knowledge that there was something of the mystic in his nature, that mystery might win him where other means would fail.

Every evening at 6 she wrapped herself in a black rebozo so that eyes glowing and portions of a face artificially pale were seen beneath lustrous hair. Then, solemn, sad, a moving statue, she walked to and fro, to and fro, before the American's house. When he stood in the door stroking his silken beard and gazed on her she nodded slowly, as though unseeing, and sighed a heavy sigh. At dusk, having walked to and fro for an hour, she sighed more heavily still and went away.

After one week of this mystery, the form of Otilia began to haunt him. She was very beautiful, said he. There were lurking in her eyes vast dreams, restlessness, towering ambitions—ah! like his own, like his own. He tossed in the night, somehow drawn to her. After all, was it good to be lonely? With such a mate to what grand heights might any man not soar! So, from seeing her by chance, he came to watch for her, and when she passed his hand was frozen on his beard, or burned with fire that ran in all his blood. Meanwhile a plan to overthrow the town's authorities, to gather men, to march on Chilpancingo, took form. Two officers nearest the person of the chief were Stirge's fellow-plotters.

On the eighth evening of this moving to and fro, wrapped in mystery, she let her rebozo wave a little wider open. He was devouring her with his eyes. He was like a god, strong and full of grace. Her sweet lips were pinkish; her neck was white. She sighed, but she looked on him wth quick flames bursting from her eyes. The street was lonely. He stepped out and laid his exceedingly long slim fingers on her arm. She paused, and they gazed at one another.

"Otilia, some dread thing haunts you."

"Yes, senor." Her eyes were down.

"Otilia, a great weight is on you. I am one used to speaking out. When God puts fire into a man's heart, the man should never hide it lest it burn him. Otilia, I seem to see myself in your eyes. Heart of my heart, I love you."

She, exceedingly white, raised her eyes just enough to see his chin; and with a startling mixture of mischief and emotional upheaving, she remembered her words: "Hang him by his sweet, soft beard, Pepe."

He kissed her as the dusk came. She went home, bewildered to find that her eyes seemed blind. When she put her rebozo to them it came away wet. She walked statelily, looking at all the low, barred windows. She entered her brother's patio and sat down under the great cups-of-gold. At supper she could not eat. In bed she could not sleep. In the night her little bare feet went softly up and down the room. In the morning she was afraid of herself, something within her heart scared her so.

The love passage thus began, and Otilia, in winning him, had lost herself. Ah, his god-like form, his foreign strength, his whiteness! She loved him. The same old difference between so many loves characterized these. The man's vast schemes were mightier than his love. The woman's love was mightier than all else.

At the edge of the town was a deserted alameda full of mango trees. Here were aged stone benches seldom used. Here the shade was like dusk at noon, like midnight at dusk. Here they met, evening after evening, she falling panting into his arms, he gazing at her scarcely seen face with hungry eyes.

"You are incarnate truth," he said.

Blood flew to her face; her brain seemed drowned. "Yet—I was false."

"What bad jest is this?"

She lay trembling. Somehow a fear entered him.

"Speak!" he cried, almost letting her from him.

"I—I plotted against you."

"How—it is a lie!"

"Oh, my soul's soul! I set about to win you, instigated by my brother, that I might learn your plan of revolution, and conquer you and bring you to death. Crush me if you must—thus have I lost myself—thus have you overthrown me!"

He let her fall on the old stone bench. The shade of the mango trees was deep. He stood a little way off, tall and still, and looked at her. Just here the revulsion came; for gold had made him insane with dreams. His love was second to his plot. Distrust sank deep in him. He felt himself betrayed. Cold drops were on his forehead. He had walked as in a deep gold mist. He gazed on this girl. She was incarnate treason; his love for her was turned to fear.

Wounded, ignoble, but grand with rage, he turned, and she was left alone. After that he smiled at her no more, nor looked at her. He dared not flee; that were confession and meant death. He dared not prolong delay.

She had groped her way home from the mango grove. Though she was sweet and leisurely and shrewd, she had in her that fuel which, touched with fire, burns on to vengeance. But she was sad; and it seemed some second self mercilessly drove her on to the revenge which her better nature did not want. She wept, and grew thin in three days miraculously. Sometimes she joked with herself even yet, in manner ghastly. "Hang him by his sweet, soft beard," murmured she in bad night-dreams; and she saw his head, in visions, hung thus, horrible.

The first night of their estrangement the fat, pulque-drinking chief found letters at the home of one of his subordinates. They incriminated the subordinate, who was arrested and put in the little adobe jail across the plaza. The chief strove in vain to find one word of those epistles which might give ground for the arrest of Stirge. But the American's tracks were yet covered. The chief shed maudlin tears of exasperation.

The third night Otilia came knocking at his door at 10 o'clock. She was admitted; the chief sitting in a gown on his bed's edge.

"This subordinate, the arrested one," said she, steady-voiced, "when is he to be shot?"

"At sunrise. I am writing the order for the soldiers who will arrive tonight. Oh, you failure!"

"Come, keep these railings for another. Give me the order, but leave the name a blank."

Her manner was cold, stern, and she was pale and sick.

"Why?" he growled.

She put one hand on the footboard and leaned close to him. "I may do that which your secret soul longs for," whispered she. "Do I not know that it is his gold that you want? Think! They say it is stacked to the roof."

"But I should be called to account for a baseless execution, you fool!"

"I have a fading ink. I write the name and show it to the captain. He executes the order. The ink fades. You substitute the rightful name, and on the captain lies the blame."

He fell back in bed with a choking noise.

"It's on the table," he said, weakly. She brought him the blank. He filled it out—all save the name. She left him staring stupidly at her, and presently heard him call for three more quarts of pulque.

Otilia was not so villainous as she seemed. She was tottering. She had scarce an idea that she should execute so dreadful a plan. It was the warring between those two differing selves of hers that drove her on to make these preparations. In these ugly hours, too, was the playfulness yet alive in her. She thought that to threaten him, in play, with this ghastly thing would be sweet mischief's way to win him back. If he would but smile at her once more! And deep in her the other self said: "Kill!"

She could not rest. She wrapped herself in her black rebozo and went out. She walked by the jail and paused and scanned it. The plaza was dark and the palms rustled. She went down a street and sadly walked to and fro before the American's house, recalling the day he kissed her as the dusk came. At times hate raved in her. Memory drew her at length to the alameda, and beyond it. Under these trees had she rested in his arms. Beyond, where the fields were rocky—yonder in that lonely spot beside the gorge—was the tall iron post to which criminals were chained to be shot. Out of the mango-grove, out of the days of love, she might lead him here to this iron post—and her fingers held the paper of death. The night was very black. She shuddered.

Suddenly she heard a crying out. Women and men were shouting back there by the town. She walked in that direction. The shouting was increased, and there was a scurrying about near two thatched huts.

"The ants! The warrior ants!" was the shout.

She came nearer to a hut. Men in sandals went leaping with torches. There was a strange crackling in the thatches. Behold! the ground was black with marching millions. Scorpions, lizards, spiders, ran terror-stricken from that army. The thatches were being pierced by thousands of unseen marauders. Human beings, seizing all things of value, fled crying into the night.

These ants march in terrible battalions. There is no way known to man to stop them. They have their officers. They select a goal. On they come, and all things flee before. A house is overrun. Every living thing, or piece of food, vanishes. All other insects are devoured. Men must absent themselves till the ants depart. Returning, all is bare. The army has conquered, devastated, passed on.

Fascinated, she stood with some sandaled laborers, who, on the outskirts of this scene of ruin, watched it by torchlight.

"Where will they go next?" cried one.

"Yonder, yonder, in this direction. See! The vanguard is already advancing thither!"

She beheld the leading battalion forming in fours, and heading away across the barren field. She looked up. A strange chill ran over her. That iron post, yonder by the gorge, stood in their track.

At midnight she passed Stirge's house, and he was going in. His door was open and a faint light shone on him. She paused, where he saw her. She looked at him, with her soul in her eyes, and he spurned her. Her bad self flamed up. She ran away, wild with hate. She stood a moment under the palms, and there a diabolic purpose came to her.

It had long been a custom in this district to lead the culprit out very early in the morning. Chained in darkness to the post, he was confronted by a priest. The black hours dragged on, giving the criminal that most solemn season for repentance. Five soldiers and an officer were stationed near. When dawn came, and they could clearly see, they fired.

At 11 o'clock a detachment of soldiers had arrived. About 1, Otilia came to the door of the decrepit barracks. The captain had orders to obey the chief of police. She came to him and said: "My brother is ill. His servants are sitting with him. So he sent me with this order."

She disappeared. The captain read the command for the immediate execution of one Stirge, American.

A little later the unfortunate Anglo-Saxon schemer was seized in bed. They put on him clothes somewhat similar to those worn by runners in athletic contests, so that he was nearly naked. In the night they led him out and on through the black mango-grove. In that stony field by the gorge they chained him to a post. A priest came, was received with haughty contempt, and went away. Well for the soldiers that they stood ten yards to the gorge's left. Thus did the flank of that black unseen army pass them by unharmed.

Silence, darkness, weird waiting for the dawn. The gold-maddened dreamer was a stoic. He was as iron as the post and chain. Out of the night shadows a ghost-voice called from yonder in the rocks:

"I can free you. I can free you. Tell me once more you love me, and life is yours."

He did not answer. The soldiers believed her crazy, or thought that St. Mary had come down.

"It is I who brought you here. Give me your heart, and it is I who shall take you away."

The night was yet black. He did not answer. What stoic, beyond man's dreams of stoicism, was that man of Anglo-Saxon blood! Aye, Indians can endure. Savages can suffer and emit no sound. But of all God's creatures there is none so strong as the American steeled to bear.

There was wild war in her. She had meant to torment him. She had not meant that he be shot. She could never consent to kill, her better self was too timid. But his spurning had crazed her. At dawn, she thought, sinking down on the rocks, she would confess the substituted name, release him. But the second self joyed in torture.

The dawn came. Yes, the chained man's face began to show a little, white, out of the shadow. The captain formed his five men and bade them be ready. So, the day thus slowly coming, they stood waiting till they could see; and he stood yonder, his arms chained high up on the post.

The minutes went by. The scene was wild and rocky. The east began to faintly glow. Strange—strange. As he appeared yet a little clearer—how still he stood—how white. Merciful hand of Mary! Is that hanging creature there a human being?

"Aim!" commanded the captain.

The guns were raised.

"A minute more and it will be light enough to see."

They waited. The light came rapidly. Behold! Suddenly the culprit seemed to start fully from the shadows. A second more and they would fire.

The guns fell. The men staggered. Horror chilled them. The face that looked on them was the face of a skull. The body that hung there by the chain was a clean, white skeleton. So terrible is the devastation of the warrior ant. So perfect is the labor of millions.

Stumbling away they found Otilia swooning on the rocks.

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She'd Do That.

Philadelphia Press.

Shye—I want your advice. I feel that I'm falling in love with a lady, and I'm afraid if I keep on I shall be miserable, because I'll never have the courage to propose.

Newitt—Is it the Widow Bright I saw you with today?

Shye—Yes.

Newitt—You needn't worry about proposing.

Horrible Revenge.

Philadelphia Press.

Mr. Brutle—I'm going to bring Cadleigh home to dinner on Thursday.

Mrs. Brutle—Why, I thought you hated that fellow so. Beside, I'll have to cook the dinner on Thursday.

Mr. Brutle—Yes, I know.

Took Them With Him.

Puck.

Friend—How much money did your defaulting cashier get away with?

Bank Manager—Can't say.

Friend (in astonishment) — What! Haven't you had his books examined yet?

Bank Manager—No; he hasn't returned them yet.