

every one knew) that under an effectively centralized government, loyally supported by its officials in the provinces, China's visible revenues might easily be trebled, without adding anything to the taxes actually levied from the people, by the application of business methods and by reduction within reasonable limits of the hungry horde of place-seekers. And if the ancient citadels of the salt gabelle have thus been successfully stormed by the foreign-led forces of reform, if the paramount authority of the President-autocrat has thus been able to secure results which, in the opinion of all the best observers, are likely to give China financial stability, we may be justified in hoping that the same forces will in due time be able to effect equally important reforms, under expert foreign supervision, in respect to the currency, land-tax, and *lekin* collectorate.

For the present, it is sufficient to ob-

serve that the great-man theory of government has once more been vindicated in China, and that, at a time when all the western world lies under heavy storm-clouds of war, the Celestial Republic shows signs of successfully emerging from some of the most grievous troubles of its internal disorganization. Yuan Shih-k'ai's recent mandates are an intimation to the world in general, and to Young China in particular, that the ends of autocracy have justified its means, some of which have been undeniably 'frightful,' and that, political agitation being barred as a means of livelihood at Peking, benevolent despotism is in a position to protect the state from the dangers which have so long threatened it from within. Of those which threaten it from without, this is not the time or place to speak; but, given a solvent exchequer and a little luck, the Velvet Glove should be able to deal with them also.

'ROMANCE'

BY WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

I

SPRING was born that afternoon, just before evening began to come down. Three days and nights the Equinox had labored, darkening all the coasts and crying out with the agony of shattered waters; and now, suddenly, the thing was done; an inscrutable warm essence ran through the city streets, the smoke of chimneys and the pennons on the tall masts along the docks veered to the northeast, and out there where

the pennons pointed, the foggy dregs of the gale drained away to sea, leaving the islands clear crimson in the sunset. Nondescript people on ferryboats craned up at the sky, straightened cravats or flicked dust from their clothes without knowing why they did it, and looked forward to a medley of quite ordinary evenings with an extraordinary and unaccountable excitement. Dogs, back in the Fens, tugged unnaturally at their leashes. A thin young woman, who coughed behind her hand when

she was sure no one watched, stood outside the employees' exit of the 'Great White Store' on Washington Street, weighing a nickel in her palm. The nickel was carfare, or a 'movie.' Which? She raised her face to the soft, flaming sky. It was spring!

Down in the lower city, 'Notes' was practising a pair of dance-steps on the splintery planks at the end of the fish dock. 'Notes' was very young and enthusiastic, and one day, when he had time, he would write a novel—something with color in it. That is why the city editor had sent him down to T Wharf to-day. Not a vessel had stirred out since the gale closed down, and not a vessel had come in through the smother. The docks had been dead for three days. It would be good for the young chap.

Every one had gone home at this hour except 'Notes' and the old lookout on the balcony of the Fish Commission; even the schooners, packed like matches in the basin, had a deserted look, for the new something in the air had sent their crews up into the city. The young fellow called up to the lookout, half in question, —

'Nothing doing to-night?'

'Don't imagine so, son.' The old fellow combed his whiskers with hard fingers. 'The fleet'll be hidin' out 'nunder the Cape some'r's. Them as got fish'll be driftin' in in the mornin', I should n't wonder.'

'Well, I'll be running along.' 'Notes' lingered for one last rehearsal of the dance-steps. The lookout stopped combing his whiskers.

'By Godfrey, there's a lucky fool!' He turned and bawled down the dock. 'Hey there, son, might wait a second. 'Magine thet's somebody outside the island there, towin'.'

'Notes' ran up the stairs, bouncing unreasonably on account of the air. Together they watched the smoke-flower

of a tugboat come along the island's ridge, and behind it two slim, pink feathers, that were the after sails of a towing schooner. The two craft came along and debouched from the island's tip into the open fairway, the one dingy and active, the other luminous, unhurried, like a rosy argosy returning.

'By George!' The boy turned to the old man. 'What made him try it?'

'Jest to do it — nothin' in the world but to do it. He's a devil, thet Ginny there — a plain, simple, square-rigged devil.'

'By jingo! Immense!'

'Mmmm!' The ancient flicked his whiskers with a gesture of impatient scorn. 'Holler, son, holler! I cal'late ye'd holler louder if ye hed an idee what them boys've been through. Know what the bay outside there looks like? Eh? Looks like nothin' — because ye can't see it. Can't stand up; can't lay down. Decks awash an' ever'thing adrift below decks. Scud cuttin' the riggin' to pieces. All hands hangin' on fer dear life an' prayin' to them Ginny saints o' theirn. Holler, son!'

'Notes,' quite impervious to the other's irony, leaned on the railing and watched the luminous wanderer. The towboat had veered off now, and a soiled mannikin in its stern hauled in the line hand-over-hand, the water feathering pink at each successive jerk. The schooner, towering like a tranquil flame in the sun's death-glare, moved forward almost imperceptibly. A shadow from the high buildings beyond Atlantic Avenue came out, swallowed the hull and clambered up the masts, and she lay in the outer fringe of the basin, only the peak of her mainsail keeping the sun, a lofty, three-cornered beacon, like a flaming covenant with memory. Below that beacon was a havoc. Lines were adrift in the standing-gear; a tub, overturned in the scuppers aft, spewed out its trawl along the deck, sopping

and tangled like a witch's hair. The deck amidships looked curiously lopsided, because half the dories were gone from the starboard nest; their lashings, broken at the knots, writhed on the planks.

From his height above the field of decks, 'Notes' watched the crew making the vessel fast: small, far-away, tired figures, ragged, their heads all alike in shiny round oil-hats, one of them with his arm swathed and bound across his chest. 'Notes' wondered how long it was since they had slept, and even as he speculated, one of the tattered figures straightened up and gesticulated toward the city cliffs, where rows of lights began to twinkle in the dusk, with a feeling of exuberance and anticipation that carried clear to him across the basin. A blue smudge trailed up from the galley stove-pipe; a man stopped to spread his palms in it; and 'Notes,' because he was so young, could almost feel the warmth in his own palms.

'Say! Say!' He clapped the rail. 'To come out of *that*' — he waved both hands wildly toward the waning cloud-wrack beyond the island — 'to come out of that — into *this!* Why, man, it's a Fourth Act. They ought to live happy ever after, eh? Stunning!' He looked up at the sky. In the dying glow of the zenith one star appeared, so suddenly that it was like a dim explosion. 'This,' said 'Notes,' 'is Romance. Just plain, sheer Romance.' He clapped his companion between the shoulder-blades. 'Well, be good. I've got to run. I want to write this thing while it's hot!'

He was halfway to the office, booming along in the tunnel, before he happened to think that he had neglected to ask the vessel's name, or her captain's. But after all — color! He had the color, all right. Warm crimson, with a shadow of angry, hard gray behind it. And the smoke curling up

from the galley stovepipe, blue and acrid. — Romance!

II

The last light drained out of the sky and a multitude of stars prickled through the masts in the crowded basin. Down in the forecabin of the Valerie, Justin Jason, the 'plain, simple, square-rigged devil' of the lookout's panegyric, was 'mugging up,' his elbows planted wide on the table, a triangle of pie in one hand and a saucer of tea in the other. He was a thick-set, swarthy fellow of forty, a sober man, with the flaring mustachio of a swashbuckler, the beginnings of a paunch under his belt, and a brace of sons, the younger of them almost half his own age.

The two were there now, fidgeting along the bench, drifting aimlessly in and out of the galley, staring out through the open square of the companionway and sniffing curiously at the air. Now and then they cast significant sidelong glances at each other and then back nervously at the silent man across the table. If he would only say something — no matter what. They had shifted to their 'shore-clothes,' their hard collars and hard hats; they were acutely aware that he had observed them doing it, yet he had said nothing. He continued to brood over his 'mug,' his brow puckered slightly.

'Aw, come on ashore, pa.' 'Hands,' the younger, had come to the end of his endurance.

Justin Jason raised his eyes slowly.

'Shore? Yes! Yaaas! What for? Huh?'

'Aw, have some fun.'

'Come on, pa.' John, the elder, rubbed the point of a russet shoe with one hand, avoiding his father's eyes. 'Come on, le's go up to the Swede's.'

'You make me tired, the both of you!' Justin Jason glowered at the pie in one

hand and the tea in the other. 'This city makes me tired. Everything makes me tired — working — loafing — everything. Why, *hell* —' He slammed the saucer down, spattering, on the table, and cast the pie to the floor. 'I'm tired of *eating*, I tell you!'

He got to his feet with an unnecessary violence and stood beneath the companionway, staring up at the stars and muttering. 'I wonder what's ailing of me. I'm tired of eating.'

'Aw, come be a sport, pa. Come on up to the Swede's.'

'Shut up, the both of you!' He wheeled fiercely. 'You want to go get soused and make faces at broke-down women on the street. Fun! Paah! — Cook!' He turned to a shadowy, silent figure leaning against the after side of the ladder. 'Cook, I'm tired of eating. What's ailing of me?'

'The year is on the make.'

He was a queer piece, this cook, an enigma in the fleet, a man without lineage or friend or birthplace — a bit of wreckage cast up on the docks. He spoke but rarely, and then with a precise diction and an inscrutable barbed quality, perhaps of derision. Justin Jason stared at him, another shade of red on his cheeks. Why could the fellow never talk straight?

'Romance! Romance!' the oracle went on in his musing, level voice. 'It is quite natural.'

The skipper retreated to the bench, glowering. 'Romance?' What's that?'

'I know, pa.' 'Hands' had been a year in high school down home on the Cape. 'Same's excitement — Romance is.'

John thrust in with a bawl of derision, deep like his father's. 'Aw, you gimme a pain. You don't know what you're talking about. Romance is a movin' pitcher, ain't it, cook?'

'Well — not exactly.'

For the first time since this inexpli-

cable fellow had joined the Valerie, Justin Jason had heard him hesitate.

'What is it, then?' he demanded with a new-found dominance. 'Sing out!'

'Well, it's hard to — Well, listen!' The man edged forward, so that the light picked out his flabby face, livid from long stewing in galley-steam. He indicated the boys with a quick gesture. 'Their mother —'

'Dead, ten year,' the master snapped him off.

'Yes — yes — but when you were courting her.'

'Oh! Same's fighting a lot of fellows. I see.'

'Naw, naw, pa.' 'Hands' wagged an impatient head. 'It's same's going round a lot — seeing life — colored lights and dance tunes and —'

The vocal burden passed mysteriously across the fore-castle, and now it was the shadow behind the ladder that spoke, quietly, as though to himself.

'— Dance tunes, yes. And women in soft gowns dancing to them. You can see them passing this way and that and hear their voices through green fronds. Or a cab through the Park, or through a crowded street, bumping just a little when you come to the car-tracks. Or a fire in the grate when you come home. Or clean, new money counted right and pushed out through the wicket. Or the Head coming into the cage with his hand stretched out — and nothing the matter with your books. Nothing the matter with your books.'

There was silence again. When it had endured perhaps a minute, Justin Jason rose nervously, climbed the ladder, and stood on deck. Far off through the lofty grottoes of the city an elevated train sang on a curve. The slow, warm, choking wind came out of those cañons, bearing a whisper of beaten pavements, and a confused and multitudinous murmur of voices, and a memory of green things breaking ground

far away in the Fens. Justin Jason turned to his two sons who had followed him up, watchfully discreet.

'Well — there's only one thing I want you to remember,' he said. 'These fish starts going onto the dock at five sharp, and I don't want no dead ones round this vessel, or they'll get what's coming to 'em good and plenty.'

He leaned on the rail and watched them go, crawling, swinging, leaping, diminishing across the huddled decks toward the dock. After that he stepped to the companion and called down.

'Cook! Was that you was talking about same's a traveling man? A man like that sees a lot of life. One was telling me once. Eh?'

Then, receiving no answer, he turned aft with a sudden determination, descended the ladder to his stateroom, opened the locker where his own 'shore kit' lay, and took down from the shelf above it the blue razor-box and the soap and brush.

III

A fine lifting wind came off the Adriatic and ruffled the beaches where the naked children splashed, shining like angels of pearl under the sun. A dozen old men sat on the foreshore above, their capes fallen from their shoulders and their hats cast carelessly at their feet, for the 'First Green' was stirring that far-off land. One of the old men recounted an episode in lively pantomime — a blood-warming episode — he had been young once. His toothless gums flickered when he laughed. Above these again, where the village dwellings filed along the cobbled street, young women paced singly or in pairs, rallying one another in graphic gesture, because they were not able to keep their eyes ashore. And out there on the lagoon the fishing boats rode in a gorgeous black-and-white cluster, draped

to the peaks with nets, for all the world like merchants from the Orient with their goods over their shoulders. And there, too, came the young men, wading through the shallows, deep-colored, finely muscled, the curves on their wet legs catching up white flares from the water. One of them turned and faced the thin girl who coughed behind her hand when no one watched. His brown chest was open to the air; he smiled, his teeth incredibly white under the black shot of his moustache; he tossed his curls back with an exuberant splendor and held aloft a great, shimmering fish. 'Come,' he seemed to cry, though no words came out of his moving lips. 'Come, out of the ends of the blowing Spring. Come and eat this fish with me. We will put brown in your cheeks, coughing girl, and gladness in your feet. Come!'

And then the whole vision was gone, swallowed in the arbitrary night of the 'Photoplayhouse'; the girl's eyes were wet, and her hands, stretched out impulsively, found only a varnished seat-back. She fell to coughing once more in the rank air, so violently that more than one shadowy, impatient head turned in her direction. But she did not care. On the seat-back before her was a contrivance of metal with two slots in its upper side, one marked 'Bonbons' and the other 'Caramels.' Almost unconsciously her fingers strayed to the bottom of the box and jiggled it slightly. Once upon a time she had done this accidentally and the thing had flown open with an ecstatic pop. She liked to think that one day there would be another. She always held her breath a little at the test.

Her hands dropped in her lap and she began to weep without any sound. She was not thinking about anything in the world, not even of the fact that there was no logical reason for her weeping. She ought to go home. The 'Evacua-

tion Day Parade' was announced on the screen. She had seen the parade, and the picture. Her neighbor on the right began to fidget and glanced covertly at her.

'What's the matter?' he whispered, after a moment of indecision.

She had lived in the city long enough to know that she must not answer his question. This had been impressed upon her a great many times.

'Nothing,' she murmured. She remembered, with a curious lack of dismay, that this was just what 'they' were always looking for — an 'opening.' Any exchange of words, beyond a reference to the police, constituted an 'opening.' But somehow, to-night, she could not seem to care. She even speculated, with a queer stoppage in her breath, as to what his next move was to be. She could not make much of him in the dim light, beyond a general tendency toward stoutness, a pointed moustache, and his hair brushed up in a slick swirl over one temple. A typical, low-caste 'masher,' at any rate.

He appeared ill at ease. He folded his arms and immediately unfolded them to beat a tattoo on the seat with his finger-tips. He peered down at her, and then, as though to cover his indiscretion, hunched about ponderously to cross one knee over the other. She was aware of a hand groping in front of her, and a click of metal touching metal.

'D'you know how to work this?' he whispered in her ear.

She took the nickel from his fingers, slipped it in the slot marked 'Caramels,' turned the explosive disc, and held the carton out to him.

'Here,' she murmured, jogging his hand a little when he did not take it. She looked up and found his eyes intent upon the screen, where a brass band rolled forward with mute gesticulations and vanished out of the bottom of the picture.

'Looky 't them gentlemen in cabs,' the man soliloquized under his breath. 'Them's same's cabs, ain't they?'

'Here — here's your candy.'

He pushed the carton off with an impatient palm. 'Don't like candy,' he muttered. 'Go on, eat it, miss. I'm sick of candy.'

The rejected carton dropped in her lap. She sat up a little more stiffly and stared at the head of the frowsy woman in front, and the feather of color that always lay along her cheek-bones spread out to cover her temples. When she had first appeared at the Great White Store, a blond floor-walker had slipped a box of chocolates under the ribbons on her counter, and she had thrown it on the floor ostentatiously, because the whispering women had told her why he put it there. That was before she had taken to coughing. Of a sudden, a bitter and unreasoning rancor at those whisperers swept over her. The frowsy head in front waved and shattered in the rush of her hot tears. Oh, why *did* she have to know? Her rebellious fingers ran over the smooth surface of the carton. It was not that there was candy in it — poor, tasteless stuff at best: no, it was something quite apart from that.

She heard the man's voice, subdued and rambling.

'Must be sport riding in a cab like that. Looky 't the cushions in the cockpit there — bet they're soft's anything.' He began putting questions, presumably as a matter of strategy to follow the 'opening.' Her mind was dull and acquiescent, and his queries ran in with a stream of interrogation reaching back to the ends of her memory: 'Is this real satin? Was this honestly forty cents before the sale? Will this match in daylight?'... 'D'you think they like it bumpin' over the car-tracks — ever rid in a cab same's that, eh?' — 'I — I feel very fai-n—t —'

She realized dimly that her own lips had moved to the last. As dimly she was aware of something pinching her right arm roughly and of being miraculously in the aisle. The light marking an exit advanced upon her like a gory moon.

Once outside, where the arc-lights made a narrow day, Justin Jason allowed his burden to droop on the ledge of a convenient shop-window, took off his derby, mopped his head all over with a red handkerchief, and swore distractedly under his breath. A small boy, crying the evening papers, came around a corner and stopped short with half a headline still in his mouth and his eyes fixed upon the limp figure. He gestured feverishly to another boy across the alley and then, as though cleared of duty, fell into a more permanent attitude.

'Wife sick, mister?'

Justin Jason glared at the boy and mopped the back of his neck. He became aware of an increasing murmur behind his back and a shuffling of many feet. Some one was telling some one else in a high whisper that the gentleman's wife had fainted, and from the corner of his right eye he observed a small spare man with side-whiskers jabbing a thumb up the street and repeating 'Drug-store — drug-store' — like some obscure incantation. Several people thought of the word 'Doctor' at the same moment; one or two of the word 'Physician.'

'You make me tired,' Justin Jason mumbled in his throat. 'The hull of you.' His spine tingled with the burden of all those curious eyes. He stared down heavily at the tip of one shoe, then up at the gilded legend over the shop-window. 'Wish t' God I was aboard!'

The girl had roused a little. He became aware of her eyes fixed upon him, glinting unnaturally in the hard light

like some bluish metal; but he avoided them by finding a milliner's sign still higher on the building. A hand touched his elbow. He shook it off roughly, muttering, 'Sheer off there!'

'None of that, my friend!' The officer's grip tightened. 'You're blocking the street.'

'Oh!' Justin Jason looked around at the blue fellow with an uneasy humility. He possessed a certain awe of the city police, as of something which touched him but distantly. His gaze traveled back to the shoe-tip, sullen and nervous.

'Well — what's the matter? Wife get faint in the pi'tures? Say! Speak up there!'

'Ummm.'

'Look here, man!' The officer jogged his elbow impatiently. 'Come out of it. Do something! Get a cab and take 'er home. . . . Hey! Taxi!' He raised his free arm and beckoned across the throng. 'Over here, taxi . . . Out of the way there! Let him through! Get off the curb there. . . . Here, lady, up with you — just a step. Help on the other side there, mister. That's the eye! In you go! What's the address? Speak up. . . . Oh, well, never mind, then. Driver, get 'em out of here. Stand back there. Stand *back!* You guys *deef?*'

Justin Jason sat bolt upright in the purring gloom, staring through the glass at the driver's back. He had a feeling that the man was going ahead too fast through the crowded street. A dray laden with beer kegs shot out of nowhere and towered close ahead; he felt himself shunted over the smooth, humpy cushion; the dray was no more; his finger-nails relaxed in his palms; he had not uttered a sound.

For the moment he had almost forgotten the girl. He turned his head covertly and found her lying back in the other corner, a shadowy presence hardly visible save for the gray oval of

her face, out of which her eyes were watching him, unnaturally large and intent.

His discomfort increased. He resumed his stiff contemplation of the driver's back, but still he could not shake off those watching eyes, so motionless and vigilant and queer. What was wrong with the woman anyhow?

He muttered aloud, 'What's the matter?' She did not answer.

The cab edged out of the traffic and halted in an open space beside a church, and the driver, getting down, came to open the door on the man's side.

'Well, now, where to?'

Where to? Justin Jason had not thought of that. He fingered his chin and scowled and temporized: 'Well — well —' But at that the girl's weight came against his shoulder and he had a side vision of her white face peering out at the man.

'Hemlock Street! Two-ten Hemlock Street!' There was a tight breathlessness about it that spoke of panic.

The door clicked shut and the motor bucked and hammered with the trouble of starting. Justin Jason was conscious of the weight withdrawn gradually from his shoulder. He glanced around, but even that faint loom of her face was invisible now, blotted out by her arms. She was crumpled down in a little heap of woe in the corner, weeping, not silently this time, but with the wild revulsion of a child kept home at the last moment from a long-promised party. The man groped and found her shoulder and shook it.

'For God's sake!' he burst out. 'For God's sake, what's ailing of you?'

A pencil of light found its way along the wall and picked out her face, thrust out at him, wet and rebellious.

'What's ailing me? My father and mother, and their fathers and mothers, and theirs. Did you ever see another night like this? Tell me!'

He peered down at her with an uneasy feeling that she was somehow not 'just right.' 'Mmmm,' he floundered. 'Fair weather t'night.'

She caught him up: 'Fair weather!' She leaned closer and plucked his sleeve. 'Fair weather! And I'm going home to Mrs. Dorgan's boarding-house! Did you ever live in a boarding-house? Tell me, did you ever live in a boarding-house?'

'No — no — that is I knew a man once that did. Had some high times there — that's what he told me.'

'Yes — yes. High times!'

She turned away to look out of the open window. A procession of trees was passing on that side, and beyond, in an open space, a light reflected in a pool of water, thin and shattery, and beyond that again the downtown mesa gave off its pale exhalations to the sky. Against this faintly luminous mat the man could see the silhouette of her profile, immobile, almost lethargic.

She had not answered his question, and after a little while he forgot about it himself. Her languor communicated itself to him, his shoulders sank back against the yielding cushions, and he crossed one foot over the other.

'This is sport,' he thought to himself. 'Say, this is a lot of sport,' his lips repeated with an anxious emphasis. He had lost a good deal of time. He sank a-little further into the cushions, flung an elbow over the sill of the window at his side, and began to look about. A ribbon of lights drifted past, flicking interminable foot-passengers into limbo, along with a hand-organ couple and a fugitive newsboy who fluttered a blur at him. And then there came an abrupt glare, a screeching of car-brakes, a motorman's angry wail, and the cushions jounced and squeaked slightly as the tires beneath them threw the car-tracks away.

'Like that, eh?'

The girl did not appear to hear. He returned to his own outlook, shifted his feet, muttered with studied enthusiasm, 'Say now, this is something *like*,' and was in the act of rummaging his pockets for a possible cigar, when his attention was taken by an illuminated disc staring at him through the forward pane. He regarded it with increasing wonder as a numeral in a tiny oblong window snapped out of sight and was replaced immediately by another.

'Now *that's* a piece o' gear,' he puzzled. He nudged the young woman's elbow and indicated the affair with a thumb.

'What's it for?' he questioned.

'What? Oh, the meter!' She studied him for a moment, half suspicious, half amused. 'That's what tells you how much you have to pay.'

'Oh! Hmmm! I see!'

The thing fascinated him with its hard, shiny face. He shrugged his shoulders and gazed out of the window with an attempt at luxuriousness, but for all he could do his eyes would sneak back, and there the numeral had changed again, mysteriously. He was not a stingy man, this Justin Jason; on the contrary he had never cared enough about money, as such, to get very far ahead. But this was another thing — this unhuman and inexorable business of addition. And then, there was no telling when it would end. If only he had some idea where this street of hers was. . . . He leaned out of the window, moved by a vague impulse, but ahead of him the twin thread of the street lamps ran straight away and converged into one luminous point. His hand slipped cautiously into a trouser pocket. There was some small change there and three bills, ten-dollar bills, he remembered. He cast a quick glance at his companion, made sure she was not looking, and transferred one of the bills to the opposite pocket.

'There,' he breathed. 'Can't be more'n that, anyhow.'

He had a sense of relief at this definite setting of a limit, and of mild triumph, feeling that he had somehow outmanœuvred the shiny contraption. He had lost more time, though. He settled his elbow on the sill once more and fingered the tips of his moustache.

'This is all right, ain't it?' he spoke across to the girl.

She opened her lips and then closed them without a sound. A frightened look came into her face and she jerked about to study the passing fronts.

'Oh, dear! Oh, dear!'

The man felt her hand fluttering on his wrist.

'Stop him — please! Right away!'

'Wha — What for?'

'Quick! Oh, *why* did n't I think!'

'What's the matter?' he gasped, thoroughly bewildered. 'Here! Here!'

The girl's knuckles were pounding wildly on the front glass. The driver made no sign but the machine swerved abruptly toward the curb and came to a halt. The man twisted round to speak through the window.

'Yes, ma'am?'

'We'll get out at the corner. You need n't go into — wait — we'll get out here. It's only a step.'

She swung open the door and stepped out unsteadily, casting anxious eyes this way and that along the sidewalk. What if she had n't thought? What if she *had* actually driven up to Mrs. Dorgan's boarding-house in a taxi, with a man? Supposing Mrs. Dorgan had seen, — or any of the Dorgan inmates, for that matter, — the nasty, respectable little Dorgan inmates such as she, herself. She might have been put out. She had known girls . . . A sudden wave of self-hatred swept over her. She was so puny with her anxious calculations in this lusty, wide-flung night, so contemptible, like an infini-

tesimal renegade in the train of spring. A slight dizziness followed her fright; she sank against a lamp-post and coughed and giggled.

Justin Jason, busy with the cabman, glanced about uneasily. He took off his hat, fanned his face, and counted the bills that the man laid in his palm.

'And thirty cents,' he prompted. 'The log there stands one-seventy.'

The fellow stared down at him with an expression of faint surprise.

'I ain't got any silver to-night.'

'Well — what we going to do, I wonder?'

Justin Jason shuffled his feet and cast another worried glance at his companion.

The cabman slammed the door shut, rattled a small lever abstractedly, and looked up at the sky.

'Some other time,' he suggested.

'That's right — some other time.'

Justin Jason took out the red handkerchief, mopped his face, and watched the glossy vehicle move off, with a sense of relief, and, at the same moment, of depression and regret. He had missed most of it. He had not been able to give this thing of the cook's a fair trial. 'Some other time,' perhaps. He turned.

'Which way now?' he asked.

'You've been awful good,' she evaded. 'You don't know how good. Please don't bother to come any further. It's just a step, and I — I can —'

He broke in with a deprecatory explosion.

'Bother! Well, guess it won't tire me too much!' He was amazed to hear himself guffawing. Somehow, without any particular effort on his part, affairs had come suddenly into hand. He squared his shoulders, twisted his moustache, and when the girl faltered, 'But — but listen —' he swept her hesitation out of the way with a splendid gesture.

'But *nothing!* Come along!'

Why could n't he have done that before? It was exactly so that the big bronzed fellow had looked at her out of the Photoplayhouse screen. The discovery made her gulp a little, and something turned over somewhere inside of her, something that had always been wrong. She could not speak just then but indicated the direction by a nod, slipped her hand into the crook of his arm, and smiled up at him.

Justin Jason carried his arm with a careful rigidity. He was not accustomed to walking in this fashion; it appealed to him as rather idiotic, and at the same time curiously pleasurable — even more pleasurable when the fingers on his biceps tightened with an excess of nervousness.

'Do you remember that picture with the boats in it?' There was a flutter in the girl's voice. 'And the fish? I was just — just wondering — Please would you mind telling me what you do? your — your life?'

He felt his face flaming. He walked on without answering, his eyes doggedly ahead, pretending he had not heard. Perhaps she would not ask again. At her gentle urge on his elbow he rounded a corner where a delicatessen shop threw fans of light across the sidewalk, and came into a deserted, high-walled street, the houses in it all alike, a crumpled newspaper, tumbling over and over in a gutter, the only object stirring in its arid length.

Not far from the corner a ground-floor window was half open, on account of the new weather, and a man was singing inside. The song was an extremely popular one, the accompanying piano wanted tuning badly, but the singer did not appear to mind these details so long as the stream of creation went forward unailing.

Justin Jason halted, glad of the diversion, for he was still fearful of the repeated question.

'That's nice, ain't it?' he mused. He stopped and peered into the room, squinting through the leaves of a rubber-plant in the window with an unabashed curiosity. He could get little more than a general impression of what was going on, a kind of colored mosaic of festivity.

The singing man broke off and there followed the screech of a piano-stool as he swung round.

'You play that "Hurly-Burly," Miss Jenkins, and I'll show you a new step, something I saw them doing down at Prince Hall last night. It's a marvel. . . . Say! Where's the fudge gone? Who swiped the fudge?'

A chorus of female voices came tumbling out of the window, excited and protesting; one higher and shallower than the rest obtruded.

'Mr. Rosenfuhg's got it behind him on the sofa there. I saw him.'

The colored mosaic shifted pattern and there came out the lively, good-humored tumult of a scuffle, and then some one shuffled on carpet to a chattering melody.

'Dancing, eh? Say!' Justin Jason looked down at his companion and jerked a thumb toward the rubber-plant. 'Say, is that there a *frond*?'

The girl laughed happily, as though he had made a great joke, and held his arm tighter. 'Why?' she whispered.

'Oh, I dunno.'

He edged forward, encroaching upon the grass-plot in his excitement. Here, beyond a doubt, was the thing of which the cook had spoken. 'Say!' he breathed with a furtive enthusiasm. 'Be sport to go in there.'

She laughed again, this time not so happily.

'But you haven't told me,' she reverted, shaking his arm with a gentle insistence. He had a side-vision of her face, held up to him with a light on it of a desperate revolt. 'You *must* be some-

thing. Oh, I don't know what makes me so silly — but the way you look — and act —'

His eyes traveled along the barren thoroughfare, with its dusty, diminishing lamps and its lone newspaper tumbling in the gutter, and returned again to the window, an inconceivable, voluptuous garden hanging in a desert. And this time, instead of writhing at her question, he smiled.

'Guess,' he said.

'Oh, I — I could n't —'

'Go on and guess,' he commanded her.

'Well — you — Oh, you live somewhere *else*. Not here — no, some other wonderful place. You see other people and other things — and — and you take your life in your hands — because there is *danger*.'

Her eyes, shining in the checkered light, were begging close to his. He smiled, showing his white teeth, for now he was on the very threshold of the cook's enchantment.

'Yes,' he said.

'You go and come,' she went on. 'Your feet are free. Women — women are crazy about you —'

Her fingers pulled at the cloth of his sleeve, and he would have marked a sudden heaviness in her voice at the last, had his brain not been reeling a little with the subtle wine of adventure.

'Yes,' he nodded.

'And you — Oh, *tell* me!'

'Well — aw, nothing — I'm nothing but a traveling man,' he lied without sin, for Carnival was abroad tonight. He did not look at her: he threw off his information in a casual tone — a paltry matter: he feigned an interest in the rubber-plant which, for the moment, he did not see. When she spoke, he tasted the sweet flattery of her unbelief.

'You — you *are*!'

He looked around quickly, for her

hand had left his arm, and found her halfway up the steps of the house.

‘We going in *there*? Say!’ It was now his turn for incredulity.

‘I live here.’ She seemed to have trouble with her breathing. ‘I — I — You’ve been awful kind. I wish you knew how — Good-night!’

She was gone so suddenly behind the storm door that he had not moved. He turned dully to the window once more and heard the small tumult of her arrival within. The young man who had sung cried, ‘Hullo, tardy!’ and moved across the bright pattern, his purple cravat skipping from chink to chink. ‘Mrs. Dorgan! O Mrs. Dorgan! Anything left from supper? Oh, just this once: be a sport. . . . Maude, eat a piece of fudge to Poverty. I’m fired. Yep. That fool of an editor could n’t get it through his wooden dome — could n’t see the color of the thing. Oh, marvelous color and movement and a background of storm. Immense, Maude, immense! Well, here’s to Grub Street! Say, where you been, girl? You’re as white as a pillow-case. Fagged out?’

The fellow’s patter streamed out of the window, bustled vacantly about the watcher’s ear-drums, and dissipated itself in the long street.

‘I bet she’s got a case on him,’ the man mumbled heavily.

By and by a policeman appeared in the vista, twirling his night-stick lazily. Observing his approach, Justin Jason stepped from the grass and moved away along the walk in the direction of

the delicatessen shop. The tumbling newspaper kept him company for a passing instant, then, outpaced, gave up and leaned against a brick. Coming on behind, the officer paused to listen to a fresh burst of melody emerging from the fifth window from the corner, holding his night-stick poised in the air, not unlike a flaming sword.

The cook stirred slightly and stretched his legs, which were cramped from sitting long on the schooner’s after-house.

‘They’re beginning to put out the lights,’ he mused. ‘Not all of them, of course. They leave enough in the streets so honest men can go home to their fathers’ houses. And that’s a joke on them — because that is exactly Romance — and they don’t know it. Romance — to have a light street safer than a dark street.’

He got up suddenly and moved forward along the outer rail with a habitual noiselessness. From the shadow of the foremast he watched a sombre figure draw in across the cluttered vessels, hoist laboriously to the after deck, stand for a long time brooding over the dark and empty harbor, then disappear down the after companionway.

‘I wonder if he found it,’ the cook put to the sky. The infinitesimal light of the stars falling on his face discovered a sort of haggard mirth.

‘Of course he did n’t find it. He might — *to-morrow* or *yesterday*. It’s not here, you know: it’s over there — where the other fellow is.’

MINE

BY AMORY HARE COOK

THIS day is mine; and I have wandered far,
Bent on beholding what it is I own.
Each slow unfolding hour has priceless grown,
And I am covetous of every star.

The smell of hay and daisies is entwined
Upon the heavy summer-scented air,
And 'mid the mellow silence, lingering there,
Replete young Noontday, drowsing, lies enshrined.

Here will I rest where faintly comes the sound
Of fir trees murmurous, and crooning breeze,
Where in a breath the fragrance of the trees
Is born and dies amid a peace profound.

And now where slumbrous Noontday lay at ease,
Pale evening trails her gown of gauzy gray,
Lighting the dim brief moments of her stay,
With one clear candle, low among the trees.

With gentle hands she cools the earth and fills
The air with her own tranquil breathing sweet,
Till straying westward with reluctant feet
She slips away beyond the distant hills.

As spreads the peacock wide its gaudy train,
Night spreads her stars and all her subtle snares.
She knows her power and, knowing it, she dares
Bewitch when all but she would think 'twere vain.