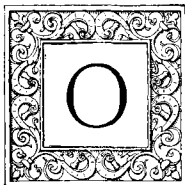


# North's Bargain

BY G. B. LANCASTER



ON the strip of No Man's Land where sea and township pledged each other in cocoanut-husks, empty meat-tins, seaweed, fruit-rinds, and broken coral from the Great Barrier Reef, North was watching his tar-pot bubble and smoke on a driftwood fire that burned white in white sunshine. The still heat of a Queensland summer rose at him from the sand and weighted the air. The soundless sea, where a pearly-lugger rode with reefed sails, was like oil. The smell of tar mixed warm with the long-gathering odors of pearl-shell heaps, refuse of every kind, bilge-water, gum-trees, and moist, decaying vegetation back in the bush; and in the vivid light North's shadow crouched, squat and ink-black, at foot of his tall, easy-moving body.

There was a shimmer of heat down the foreshore where the Bangalo palms sloped seaward; and North looked through it with his clear, far-seeing eyes grown suddenly restless at sight of the long excursion-steamer, gay with awnings, which lay out from the stub wharf beyond the corner of Flannigan's hotel. A moment he looked, with tight lips. It spelled all the past to him, that white-decked steamer. Then he picked up the tar-pot and trod back into the shed where the boat which he was caulking showed on the slips—dimly, after the aching glare without. North's skin was copper-brown, and damp with heat; and his dungaree trousers and thin, coarse shirt hung on him loosely. But he carried marks of breeding yet, along with those which hard work and hard living had scored on him. And he had a conscience, for he was paid by the hour, and yet the soft patter of his tar-brush and the rasping of the land-crabs over the pebbles brought two unceasing sounds to the ears of the little man in

the uniform of the Australian Merchant Service who presently came up the beach, nodded the casual greeting of the tramps of the world, and sat down on the slips to mop his forehead.

"Didn't get this heat in all the Solomons and New Guinea," he said. "The old *Mana* will be opening up like a clam on the beach."

"The excursion stunt again?" asked North, and his voice held the English roundness for all its Australian drawl.

"Excursion it is. Showing grand folk how we poor devils have to sweat for a living up and down the Islands. They called it picturesque. Picturesque! My hat! How's the kid?"

"Very well, thanks."

"Walk and talk yet, eh?"

"Hardly. She's only a year old."

"Next year," said Birkett, ponderously, "she'll be two. And after that she will be three. And before you can say knife she'll be quite a big girl."

Humor softened the lines of North's thin face. "So she will, I suppose."

"Well, what you going to do abaht it?"

"Do about what?"

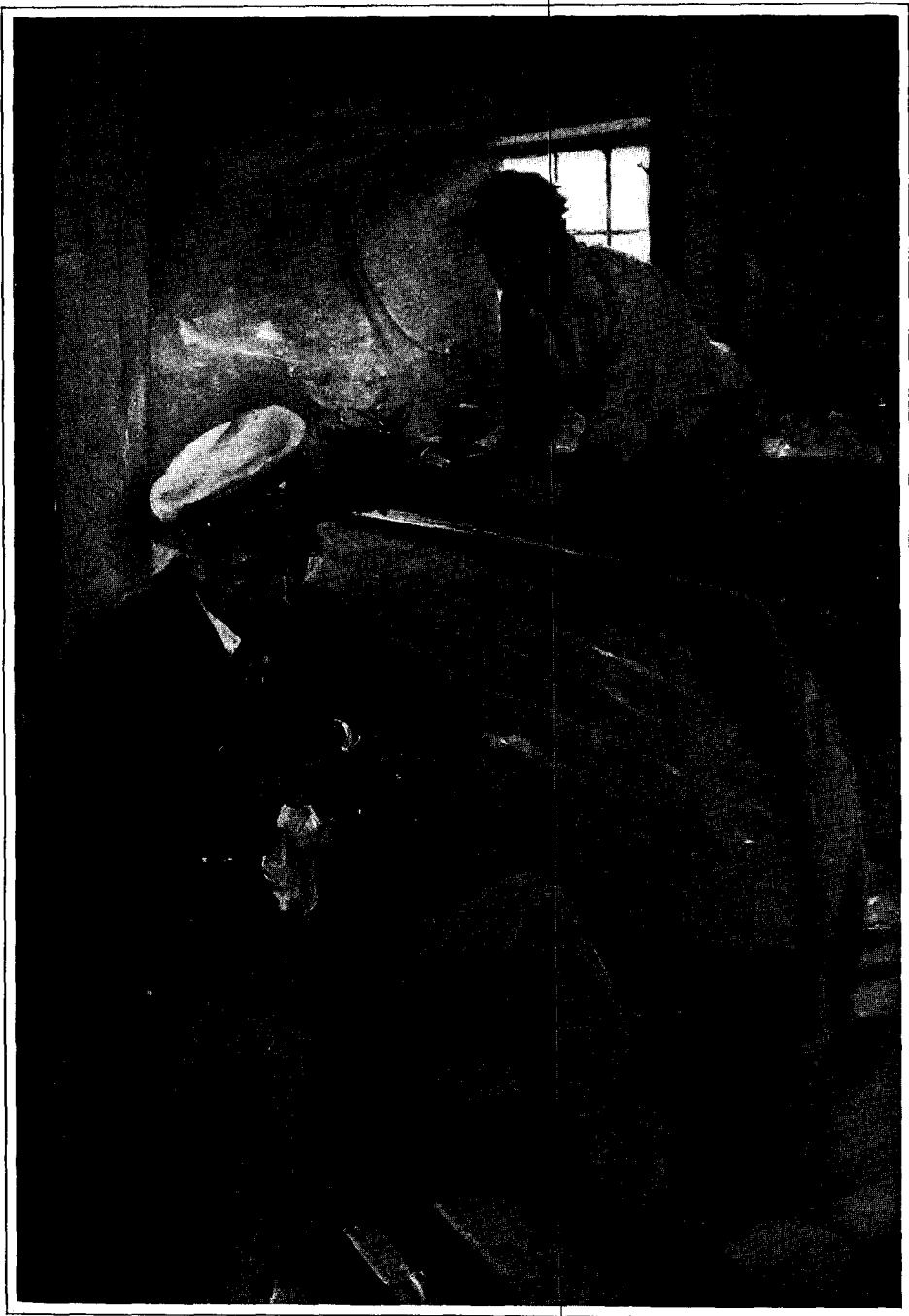
"When she's a big girl. If she turns out like Flannigan's Meg or Wild Honey—"

"I won't lay it up to you, Birkett."

A more sensitive man would have been warned by the tone. Birkett rubbed his knees with slow, moist palms. "We-ell, she might, y' know. These coast-townships are the very devil and all. She'll be pretty, too. Now, look here. What I came to say is—if you're still wantin' to get rid o' her I know some one who'll take her off your hands."

North had exchanged the tar-brush for the putty-knife. He did not cease working, but a kind of rigidity came over him, and the white line of forehead between black hair and bronzed face showed a flush.

"Oh, that's what you came to say, is it?" he said, softly.



*Drawn by C. E. Chambers*

"WHAT DID SHE SAY—THE WIDOW?"

"You are wantin' to get rid of her? I know you meant to advertise."

North had once gone so far as to write out an advertisement. He had afterward torn it up—with his teeth, as though those iron-hard hands of his could not be final enough in their destruction.

"Who is it?" he said, ignoring the question.

"Fine lady aboard the *Mana*. Widow wantin' to adopt a kid. When I showed her that photo Miss Hayes took o' your nipper she was on to it right away. I told her I guessed you'd part for five pounds down. But I shouldn't wonder if you might work it for ten, North. She has the tin, all right."

North stood up suddenly, and Birkett might have learned several things if he had seen his face and eyes. But he was polishing a button with his handkerchief and whistling underbreath.

"What did she say—the widow?"

"Eh? What's the matter?" Birkett looked up, startled. "Yes, she's coming to see you in the morning. We don't pull out till dusk." He got to his feet, and settled his cap. "Now, you take my tip and close with her, North. You won't get a chance like this again, and that kid's keeping you tied all the time. She's a real lady, I tell you. Money's like dirt to her. You do it, old man. So long."

North stooped to his work again, but now his hands were shaking. Since the wild blood in him had called him out to fight and curse and love among his roving fellows; to know the long surf combing across the reefs, and the smell of warm, wet islands on the Line, and of drink-sodden townships along the burning plains, he had trodden far through the knowledge which a man may reap. The rough give-and-take of life, the lawless nights and fiercer days, the idleness when the croon of the sea lulls the body and fills the soul with its eternal unrest, had seared him—given him the calloused mind and the Ishmael desires. But that girl-child who was his own could play on his fibers yet. She could yet make real that world which he had lost the right-of-way to years ago. There had been ladies in that world. Clear-eyed, white-souled women to

whom a man might fitly render love—but not the love which these feverish years had bought and sold; not the women which they had flung along the edges of his life.

North's face had darkened, and the lines around his mouth were harsher with his thoughts when at last he thrust pot and brushes into the locker and rubbed the tar from his hands with some blue-gum shavings from the bench. A shadow, lengthened by the low sun, fell suddenly across him, and he glanced around. Then he turned, looking, half sullen, half embarrassed, on the girl who stood there, with the blood burning to his forehead and the shavings curling about his blackened hands like helpless baby fingers.

"I beg your pardon"—there was just that delicate intonation in her voice which placed him at an infinite distance; "I was told that I should find Mr. North here."

"My name is North," he said, staring under dark brows.

"Oh—!" The pause was momentary, but it stung North. "Then—then it is you I have come to see. I am on the *Mana*, and a friend of yours—a Mr. Birkett"—she said the name reluctantly, as though it was rough in her ears—"told me about you. He—he said I would find you here."

"Yes?" said North.

He knew her sort now, long foreign though such as she had been to him. Proud, this breed of women; dainty of body and soul; cruel even with that innate virginity of outlook which revolts from the cruder, more primitive passions. The lace at her slim throat, the white shoe at hem of the fine muslin of her gown, the jewel at her small ear, where the shining waves of fair hair meshed it—all these and much more made a barrier about her whereof her calm eyes kept the key. She looked at him consideringly, with just that gentle aloofness which North knew her to have given every barefoot sailor and naked native whom she had passed in her pleasuring.

"Mr. Birkett showed me a photograph of your baby—your little girl," she said then. "He told me that you wanted to find a home for her."

North did not know that he was staring at her until he saw her pale skin flush faintly. Then he dropped his eyes to her slender, ringed left hand, and his words came in a hurry.

"I see. Yes, Birkett told me. I didn't— But she's not here, you know."

"But I may see her, please?"

"Birkett said you were coming to-morrow—"

"I have taken a room at the hotel for the night," she answered. "I found that I did not want to wait until to-morrow."

Quick dusk of the tropics was in the shed now. But she stood in the last red light, and he stood looking at her with lips set and a sudden wolf-savageness in his eyes. Imagined that she could dispose of his child in a casual hour between her day's amusements and her dinner, did she?

"I am afraid that you will have to wait until to-morrow," he said. "My humpy is on the other side of the township—nearly a mile from here. And I do not care to bring her out at night. It's getting dark now."

"I did not ask you to bring her out. I will go to her. That is, of course, if you—you still wish to part with her?"

There was a note of eagerness in the soft voice which pleased North even while it roused the fight in him. Unconsciously she wore the air of one accustomed to command. That subtle command which a woman wields in the flicker of an eyelash, the scent of hair and garments, the serene knowledge of her right to supremacy. It was long since North had been handled by such delicate weapons, and their power was the greater in consequence.

"I—can't say just now what I mean to do," he said, with hesitation. "If you'd like to see her to-night, I'm going home now. There's no one but a Chinaman up at the humpy, though."

"Thank you," she said, again with the unconscious manner of one who had expected obedience. And then she dismissed the subject as they walked up the beach together. But already something in North's blood was warning him that a battle of their two wills was to come before long.

Clouds of scarlet were banking in the west now. The sea had turned to molten

copper, and every ragged frond of the Bangalo palms, every loop of the mangrove roots stood livid and distinct in the angry yellow light that swept the foreshore. The prickling sense of coming storm was in the motionless air where sea-birds were flying low and the tide made little uneasy moans. By the split-rail fence confining the larger elements of Flannigan's dust-heap, North stopped suddenly.

"You'd best wait till to-morrow," he said. "There is every sign of a bad storm."

"I can be back in half an hour." She glanced at the sky. "We won't get it earlier. I want to know to-night."

North went on in silence. These fine ladies were unused to being denied their slightest whim. This one would know denial presently. But already he began to wish that he had denied her in the shed. The baby was his—his very own—and he had never known it so poignantly until the threat of this calm, gracious woman rose between them.

Men were quarreling in Flannigan's bar, and the stale smell of beer and spirits and heated bodies surged out to her as she climbed the slope of the unmade street at North's side. The man knew the uncouth core, the squalor and the sin, of this far-removed handful of struggling humanity, where the derelicts of all the islands wash in and wash out, and the graces of life are elbowed aside by ignorance, and rain comes seldom, and the heat is an iron hand. He had come to accept this existence as the shock-headed children playing in the gutter accepted it; as the loafing men who smoked and spat on the sidewalks accepted it; as the bleached women arguing shrilly at the corner of Mullins's store, which sold everything from cottons to hardware, accepted it. Now, quite suddenly, he saw with new eyes—with the eyes of the woman beside him—the woman of the world which once had been his own. The littered street seemed suddenly shameful as the unpainted weather-board houses which even the merciful dusk left stark in ugliness; the boys, half naked in the heat, who yelled slang and curses across the roadway; the flaunting, handsome girl who swung round a corner cried out familiarly to

North, and stopped with a giggle and a stare. There was good stuff in all this raw, uncomplaining life, and in normal hours North knew it. Now his heart said to him in words which the woman's lips would surely presently use: "Are you condemning your child to this? What chance has she where Flannigan's Meg and Wild Honey had none?"

At the top of the street, where light pushed from a low window across a section smelling of young blue-gums and nutmeg-trees, North turned sharply down a pebble path and pulled up the latch of a narrow door. "Mind the step," he said, in his level tones. "It's broken."

He passed before her into the little desolate room and lit a second candle. A kind of helpless fury and defiance boiled in him now. Years had beaten down his ramparts of refinement, but the places where they had been ached as an old wound aches when struck again.

She glanced around. "But where is the baby?" she cried, eagerly, and North looked at her in surprise. Older than he had thought her at first, she still was young—vitally young in this moment, and quickened into a glow, a womanly beauty which stirred his blood. She did not seem to see the bare table with its burns from dropped pipes and matches, the crumpled newspapers in the corner, any of the grim discomfort and dirt of a bachelor house in a tropic land. She did not seem to see him and that keen look of his, watching her, appraising her.

"I expect Ah Wong has put her to bed. I'll ask him," he said, and went into the lean-to behind where some one was clattering pots.

She stood still with hands shut together, looking at nothing. The man scarcely touched the surface of her thoughts. He was merely here to sell her something which all the motherhood in her desired to have—had been determined to have ever since Birkett showed her that baby face in the photograph and told her that he guessed North would part with for a few pounds. "She's keepin' him tied, and he's a fellow who likes slingin' loose, y' know." Her position here, in the dark of this stranger's

hut, did not trouble her. The thought of the child, the uncared-for girl-child filled her soul up.

"She's asleep in the next room," said North at her elbow. "I'll bring her."

"Don't wake her." She was enraged at his thoughtlessness. "I will go in."

"She will have to be waked if you want to see her." Again that curious, intent look of his brushed across her, and again she did not notice it. "But you can go in if you like."

He took the candle along to the inner room, halting by the rough cot beyond the stretcher-bed, and shading the light with his hand as he looked down. At his side he heard her dress rustle, heard her catch her breath. Beneath the thin mosquito-netting the baby limbs were almost bare, and the soft skin showed burning patches of heat. The fingers curled like rose-petals, and the small, oval face was a rose, overpale for health in this fierce land which burns out youth too soon. North put aside the netting and stooped, sliding his long hand under the little body.

"Rouse up, baby," he said. "Rouse up, my girl. Here's a lady to see you."

The big eyes opened, dark as North's own, and the woman gave a quick cry of delight.

"They'll do some damage when she's older," said North, lifting her. "That's one reason why—" He stopped, pulling the one little garment straight with a practised hand. "Would you like to hold her a minute? She's quite clean."

"Clean!" The scorn and anger in the word brought a flickering smile to his face. Then he saw her gather the child close, crooning over it, forgetful of him utterly, until in the next minute she looked up with indignation bringing color to her pale skin and warmth to her calm eyes. "See these red patches on her arms and in the creases of her neck! Oh, *why* don't you have some one to look after her properly? Some woman—"

"Prickly heat," said North, quietly. "All the children get it up here. I dose her with magnesia, and give her soda in her bath. There's a basin and sponge somewhere about—"

He rattled things and splashed water at a half-seen wash-stand. Then he came back.



"Put the basin on the bed," said the woman, imperiously. "I will bathe her. And bring me a towel, please."

North brought it. Then he walked away to the window, looking out on the dark where gusty wind was already clashing the gum-branches together. Behind him he heard little murmurs and stirs and rustlings. The baby cooed once, and a sudden unexpected pang shot through him. There was an indefinable fragrance in the air, a curious sense as though that soft, strong personality of the woman's was taking possession of more than his child's body.

"What is her name?"

This new, soft, tender voice made him start. Then he shrugged. "Oh, anything. She isn't christened. We don't bother too much about that kind of thing up here. Ah Wong calls her Petly."

There was silence so long and so complete that North knew he had angered her again. He came back, standing in the light, with hands in pockets and face inscrutable; and she, looking up from the child in her arms, realized him for the first time.

"Do you let her suck her thumb?" he asked. "I never do."

A ringed, white hand went quickly up; dropped again. Then she countered, as he had expected her to. "Did you mean to keep her here—in *this* place—for always?" she demanded.

"It isn't in the past tense yet, so far as I know," he said, coolly. "Why shouldn't I keep her? She is all I have."

"But I want her. You knew I would. And surely, if I am prepared to give her all that my class—our class—can offer—"

"Our class?"

He spoke low, but a vibration somewhere drew her look again. He had strange eyes, this man—clearest brown, with the upper lid cut straight across the iris—very intent eyes, like those of one who has known much, judged much, without undue comment or mercy. And the rather pointed chin, reproduced in the delicate oval of the baby's face, did not stand for weakness, as she had once thought. There was refinement here, a sensitiveness which the eyes denied. He was one of her own class who had

voluntarily gone out of it; and what such men did or felt she, in her strait innocence, could not even guess at. But instinctively she held the baby closer, and the touch of the warm body against her breast steadied her courage.

"Our class," she repeated, defiantly. "You know the difference between your own nursery and—this baby's."

"That parallel doesn't help much." His lips twitched slightly. "See what I've come to."

"A man chooses his own life. A woman usually has hers chosen for her. This baby's mother would have wished—"

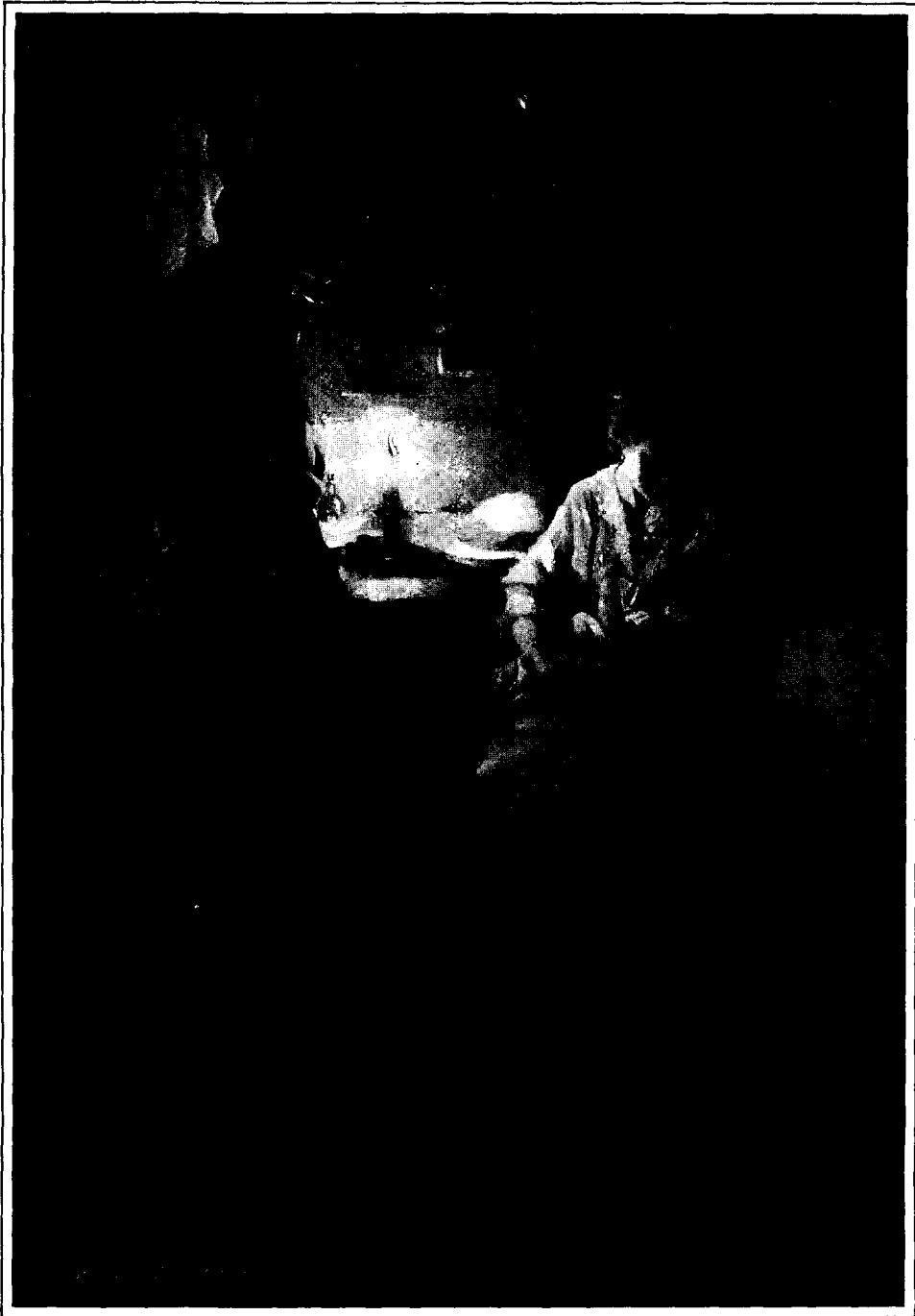
Her words broke before the sudden flicker on his face. It was now cynical and repellent to her.

"Ah, yes," he said, quietly; "the baby's mother. How do you know what she would have wished? You never thought about her before, did you? How impulsive and—inadequate you rich women are. The child pleases you. She'll do to play with for a year or two. Then, if unpleasant tendencies develop, you can get rid of her somehow. You haven't bothered to inquire concerning her antecedents, have you? They don't matter—when it's only for a year or two."

She was looking straight at him now, and the calm in her eyes was gone before a proud fire which North liked better. Strictly beautiful she was not, but her very presence had brought into the place a rare, delicate atmosphere which he could not escape. She had flung her hat aside, and above the long, white throat and fair face the little curling ends of hair caught gleams where they escaped from the heavy plaits and coils. In this dim light she might have been some virgin Madonna with the sleeping Babe at her breast. But that haughty temper of hers was purely human—human as the soft red of her mouth and the polish of her pretty finger-nails.

"You don't believe what you are saying," she told him. "You know that I want the baby for herself. Do you mean to let me have her?"

"I won't tell you what I mean until I know what you mean. I am not going to have her flung back at me after you know—more of her than you do now."



*Drawn by C. E. Chambers*

HE SAW HER SMILE AND THOUGHT AGAIN OF THE MADONNA

He saw her eyes fall and her arms tighten around the child.

"Tell me," she commanded, and he laughed, walking away to the window.

"After all, there's not much to tell. I was married to her mother. That's the saving grace with such women as you, I know. She was cook and bottle-washer at a little shanty pub in a bush township near the Gulf. I was pearling round that way then. She had never been away from the place, and she could barely sign her name. But she was rather pretty—pretty as girls go in those parts. We learn not to be too particular."

"Is that how you men talk of the women you have loved?"

North's laugh was not pleasant to hear. "I never said I loved her, did I? But I wanted something to tie up to. I wanted a humpy of my own and a wife of my own to come back to when we made port. Most men do, some time or other. And she was better than many. She was quite a good girl, and I was content while it lasted. It didn't last long. She died in about a year."

"What are you expecting me to think of you?" The tone was stifled.

North bit his lips. He was walking the floor as he had been used to walk the decks of a pearling-lugger, and in the half-light his lean, quiet-moving body showed no sign of the wild tempers warring in him. "I made her happy. She often said so. She had married a gentleman, you see, even if he was an out-at-elbows beach-comber."

"Oh, don't! Don't be so cruel—to yourself!"

North went back to her quickly. Something subtle, unexplained, had broken down her pride, and the tears were on her cheeks. He saw her beauty then—beauty of face and soul—and his tongue was silenced, and his eyes dropped before it.

"Bring the baby back to—to the life you used to live. *Bring her*," she said.

"No. There's not enough incentive now. I've got accustomed to this. But—"

"You will send her, then? With me?"

"I suppose I knew that I would as soon as I saw you, if you wanted her." He did not raise his eyes. "She's a

fastidious little lady—like me, though you mightn't think it."

"I am not blind." In the dimness he saw her smile, and thought again of the Madonna. "We all hurt ourselves at times. But—I don't want this baby to be hurt."

"She will have to be. Even you can't prevent that."

"No, she won't." Her laugh now was saucy, delicious. "Wait till you come to see her."

"I shall never do that."

"And why, please?"

North's intent gaze plunged into hers—probing, merciless. And in that moment intuition told her that there was more to be saved here than a baby's happiness.

"Do you want me to come?" he said; and with a quick gathering of her forces she answered him:

"Yes, I do. I wouldn't like your child to forget you."

There was lightning from the coming storm beyond the window now. It ran along the wall. But that which she saw in his eyes came from within, and it startled her. And then, with a sudden clap, the swing window drove back against the hinge, and wind and rain roared in like the onset of a full tide. With the hiss of the dying candle dark shut down, and the child awoke, screaming. It was but a minute before the window was slammed tight again, and North's voice was at her ear—low, unbelievably gentle.

"Give her to me, please. Here, baby; stop that row. Steady, my girl. Steady."

She did not know that he winced when his groping hands touched hers. She did not see the blood run to his forehead as he took up his walk again, soothing with strange sea-words and man-caresses. In the livid light that came and went she saw him pass, with head stooped to the downy head that pushed against his neck; and suddenly she knew that her arms ached and her heart ached; that her very flesh was jealous for possession of that soft, warm fragment of sweet life again. And the man was about to lose it, and how much with it he alone knew. She shivered, feeling a poignancy in the air such as she had never known before: and in that mo-



ment North stepped by her, laying the child back in the cot and drawing the curtains.

"She'll sleep now, little monkey," he said. "She ought to be accustomed to a racket. Ah Wong sings most nights. Will you come into the other room and he shall make you some tea? I'm afraid you'll have to wait an hour or so till the storm clears off. I—I hope there's no one to be anxious about you?"

"No. I am alone," she said, and saw the quick intentness in his eyes as they came under the light.

It was the strangest meal she had ever known, this which Ah Wong brought them from the lean-to, but to the man it was something very near to a sacrament. There were silences now and again in their talk, and in the uncertain light of the little smoky oil-lamp they could scarcely see each other's faces. And yet her very presence was like some sweet savor on the lips, some glorified delight in the air. North felt as a man may who walks with held breath and careful feet through the glowing tissues of a dream which a blundering movement may tear into ruin on the instant, as an animal tears a spider-web. It could not come again, this new buoyancy and eager life which she had given him for the hour. It could not come again that she should sit opposite to him, breaking his bread with white, slim fingers; sipping from his least-cracked cup; meeting his halting talk with her sensitive quickness, and—more than once—with a little burst of laughter such as tingled his veins with a something unknown before.

It was over soon enough, that wonderful hour. Ah Wong thrust his head past the lean-to door and bleated: "Storm gone. Stars come again."

And then, with a little smile, she stood up. "Thank you so very much," she said. "Tell Ah Wong I have enjoyed his tea immensely. Now I must ask you to take me back to the hotel. And to-morrow—"

"To-morrow afternoon I will bring Baby to the boat," said North. "It will take Ah Wong a little time to get her things washed up, you know."

"Oh, of course." Tears and laughter were near her eyes again at remembrance

of the coarse, yellowed calico on the little limbs. "He is laundry-man, is he? In the afternoon, then? Shall I—shall I send for her?"

"I will bring her," said North, and said no more of that parting until he left her at the door of the musty parlor in Flannigan's hotel. Then he hesitated, looking away. "I must thank you," he said, abruptly. "I could never have hoped for anything so good for—for her."

"You don't know much about me, you know," she suggested, with a faint laugh.

"Don't I? I think I've learned a bit about women and men in my time. You are—" He stopped. "Good night," he said.

"Good night." She held her hand out, and his sudden grip left her tingling and startled as his hasty feet rang down the passage and the outer door slammed.

North went fast up the dark, wet street and home again; and that electricity which the storm had left in the air found its answer in the new storm in his blood, the quickening life in all his tired fibers. There was no sense as of the breathless holding back of time in that little room now when he came into it; no hushed acceptance of a wonder, an almost painful delight such as each of those little past minutes had dealt out to him while they fled. The stark place of bare walls and tables was no longer desolate. She was alive in it, this lady who was as the fair and gracious ladies of the old time. Every dusty corner was vital with her, new-charged, quickened into desires, hopes such as called the long-stagnant elements in him up to meet them. There she had sat; there, with the round, slim marvel of her throat, and the grave laughter of her eyes, and the tremor of her bosom below the lace.

He lifted her chair, setting it back against the wall. There was an impulse in him which could have knelt to it as to a shrine. She had raised him up to her through that short hour, and he was on the pinnacle still, dizzy, exultant, greatly daring with half-born desire. He went quickly into the other room. A faint fragrance still hung upon the air. It was as though she had left a benedic-

tion behind her. Shading the candle, he put away the basin and towel which she had used, moving them with reverent fingers. Then he went over and looked down on the child. There had been hungry motherhood in her every touch of it. Each broken word to it had been a caress. North, standing still, considered the other days—days when red, coarse hands had fumbled over the baby; when she potted, down-at-heel, about the room, his little wife of the shanty pub, with her vacant face of faded prettiness and her shrill voice and shriller laughter. He glanced around with a swift dread, as though he felt her there. And then, at sight of the chair beyond the open door, he knew that sordid atmosphere gone forever.

She filled the place now; swept it clean with the healing glory of her being; gave it a sacredness that would not go with time.

"She's such a dainty thing," he said, aloud. "So dainty I—I wouldn't dare to touch her. And yet—perhaps some day . . . when I go to see her . . . She said that I could come to see her."

He looked out into the dawn with new eyes. A shaft of light fell through the window across the child, and North stooped and kissed the soft flesh that was still the sweeter for her kisses.

"Don't let her forget me, my girl," he said. "Keep her remembering until I have so taught her that she'll never forget." Then his own heart abased him. "I'm mad—mad!" he said. "But—oh, God—let me be mad like this for a little while!"

With Ah Wong carrying the old gladstone filled with painfully ironed and mended garments North brought his child to the steamer a short twenty minutes before she sailed. He had not dared to come earlier, and he scarcely dared look at her now, where she sat among the cushions of her deck-chair and twisted the yellow baby-curly about her fingers.

"I feel very cruel," she said, half wistfully, "almost wicked, you know. I have taken so much from you, and—you have given so generously."

"You said I could come and see you—her," reminded North.

"Oh yes. Come often. We shall be

so very glad to see you, my husband and I." North did not speak. She bent her face down among the curls. "I don't often talk of him," she said, very low. "He is an invalid—a hopeless invalid, and he is a young man still. All the joy went out of our lives so early. But she will bring it back—your baby. And we won't let our sorrow shadow her. She will help banish that. Oh, you don't know . . . you will never know how much you've done for me by giving me your baby."

Still North did not speak, and into the silence the whistle screamed and the patter of feet came down the decks. Then he stood up. "I'll be glad if you find her a comfort," he said, and his voice held its old dry level again. "Women are easily satisfied, I think. More easily than men. Good-by, my girl." He kissed the child with hot lips, but the hand which touched the woman's for a moment was cold. "Good-by . . . and thank you. Yes, I'll come and see her some day. And I hope . . ."

This lie stuck in his throat as the other had not. He could not wish her happiness just now. He ran along the deck, and cleared the gangway as it came creaking up. And then, when the white steamer was hull down on the broad blue of the silken sea, he sought Flannigan and found him lolling in the sun at the bar-door; and Meg, with her handsome, impudent face and bold eyes, was beside him.

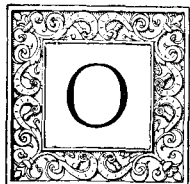
"Know any one who wants to take over my job, Flannigan?" said North, standing in the street with hands in pockets and hat pulled down over his brows. "I'm going back to the pearling with Bayne of the *Catapult*. He's always asking me."

Flannigan scratched his whisker with his pipe-stem. "There's old Joe Cohen, now," he said, ruminating. "Turned up outer wayback yes'day with never a shirt ter him. He'd jump at it. And at the humpy, too. You'd not be wantin' ter keep that?"

For a moment North stood motionless, with his dark gaze on the littered street. "No," he said, quietly. "I won't sell. I'll board up doors and windows and leave it. Perhaps I'll want it again some day."

# Edwin Booth as I Knew Him

BY EDWIN MILTON ROYLE



Of the multitudes who saw and acclaimed Booth the artist, few ever met the man, and fewer still knew him. He had stage-fright everywhere but on the stage. In fact, if he had not been practically born on the stage I doubt if he would have ever faced even this publicity. He was abnormally shy, detested social gatherings, positively suffered under scrutiny, and the few who casually met him got the impression that he was uncommonly inept. This impression he never took the slightest pains to correct.

My first two years on the stage were spent in the companies supporting Booth. One of the happiest and one of the unhappiest things about a traveling theatrical company is its enforced intimacy, and this was exceptional in the Booth company, for much of the time Booth had a private car, and many of us had berths in it, so that after a time his timidity disappeared and he was like the father of a big family.

He was fifty-three years old when I had the honor of being in his company, and he was then at the zenith of his power. Though one of fortune's favorites, he had in those fifty-three years already lived deeply and paid the price of greatness. Robbed of the birthright of childhood, at an age when most children are cared for, he became the guardian and caretaker of the erratic genius of his father; thus he began life in the shadow. His beautiful young wife died after two years of married life and left to his care a little motherless girl, and for seven months he made no attempt to resume his profession. At the height of his career, his brother assassinated Lincoln, and Booth left the stage, intending never to return. I believe he never again played in the city of Washington. Years before Henry Irving was hailed by all America as the master-

producer of Shakespeare, Booth had done the same thing in his own beautiful theater, and the public with cruel indifference left him bankrupt, utterly ruined. His second marriage proved an unhappy one. This, in brief, was his life. It is not to be wondered at that melancholy was its prevailing and characteristic note, and that he once said to me, "I love those best who let me alone." I am quite sure that what saved this sensitive soul from despair, suicide, or madness was his delightful sense of humor, a saving grace quite unsuspected except by those who were privileged to see behind the veil.

There were two distinct classes in our company—the old-timers, the so-called legitimate actors, the "palmy-day" actors, with experience and little else, and the new-comers, without even that. The palmy-daisies called us "wardrobe actors." You may be under the delusion that those of us who were young and ambitious had secured our positions through talent. I presume the possession of talent would not have excluded us, but the essential thing with the management was that we should provide a handsome wardrobe for a large repertoire—a business arrangement. My salary, for example, was thirty dollars a week—rather good, you think, for a beginner; but my wardrobe cost between seven and eight hundred dollars, so you may see that in a season of thirty weeks I was working for glory or experience.

It would seem that Booth never had "a good company." Indeed, he was constantly accused of surrounding himself with indifferent actors in order to shine by contrast. I have heard him say that he always employed the best actors he could get, and it is certain that all the well-known actors of his day appeared in his support at different times, but he never had a company that found much favor. My own explanation