

***ROBERT
W. CHAMBERS***



***THE FLAMING
JEWEL***

Robert W. Chambers

The Flaming Jewel

EAN 8596547334538

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Titlepage](#)

[Text](#)

I

During the last two years, Fate, Chance, and Destiny had been too busy to attend to Mike Clinch. But now his turn was coming in the Eternal Sequence of things. The stars in their courses indicated the beginning of the undoing of Mike Clinch.

From Esthonia a refugee Countess wrote to James Darragh in New York: "— After two years we have discovered that it was Jose Quintana's band of international thieves that robbed Ricca. Quintana has disappeared. "A Levantine diamond broker in New York, named Emanuel Sard, may be in communication with him. "Ricca and I are going to America as soon as possible. "Valentine."

The day Darragh received the letter he started to look up Sard.

But that very morning Sard had received a curious letter from Rotterdam.

This was the letter:

"Sardius — Tourmaline — Aragonite — Rhodonite *
Porphyry — Obsidian
— Nugget Gold — Diaspore * Novaculite * Yu * Nugget Silver
— Amber —
Matrix Turquoise — Elaeolite * Ivory — Sardonyx *
Moonstone — Iceland
Spar — Kalpa Zircon — Eye Agate * Celonite — Lapis — Iolite
—
Nephrite — Chalcedony — Hydrolite * Hegolite — Amethyst
— Selenite *
Fire Opal — Labradorite — Garnet * Jade — Emerald — Wood

Opal —

Esstonite — Lazuli * Epidote — Ruby — Onyx — Sapphire —
Indicolite

— Topaz — Euclase * Indian Diamond * Star Sapphire —
African Diamond

— Iceland Spar — Lapis Crucifer * Abalone — Turkish
Turquoise * Old

Mine Stone — Natrolite — Cats Eye — Electrum * * * 1/5 a
a."

That afternoon young Darragh located Sard's office and presented himself as a customer. The weasel-faced clerk behind the wicket laid a pistol handy and informed Darragh that Sard was away on a business trip.

Darragh looked cautiously around the small office: "Can anybody hear us?"

"Nobody. Why?"

"I have important news concerning Jose Quintana," whispered Darragh;

"Where is Sard?"

"Why, he had a letter from Quintana this very morning," replied the clerk in a low, uneasy voice. "Mr. Sard left for Albany on the one o'clock train. Is there any trouble?"

"Plenty," replied Darragh coolly; "do you know Quintana?"

"No. But Mr. Sard expects him here any day now."

Darragh leaned closer against the grille: "Listen very carefully; if a man comes here who calls himself Jose Quintana, turn him over to the police until Mr. Sard returns. No matter what he tells you, turn him over to the police. Do you understand?"

"Who are you?" demanded the worried clerk. "Are you one of Quintana's people?"

"Young man," said Darragh, "I'm close enough to Quintana to give *you* orders. And give Sard orders. ... And Quintana, too!"

A great light dawned on the scared clerk: "*You* are Jose Quintana!" he said hoarsely.

Darragh bored him through with his dark stare: "Mind your business," he said.

* * * * *

That night in Albany Darragh picked up Sard's trail. It led to a dealer in automobiles. Sard had bought a Comet Six, paying cash, and had started north.

Through Schenectady, Fonda, and Mayfield, the following day, Darragh traced a brand new Comet Six containing one short, dark Levantine with a parrot nose. In Northville Darragh hired a Ford.

At Lake Pleasant Sard's car went wrong. Darragh missed him by ten minutes; but he learned that Sard had inquired the way to Ghost Lake Inn.

That was sufficient. Darragh bought an axe, drove as far as Harrod's Corners, dismissed the Ford, and walked into a forest entirely familiar to him.

He emerged in half an hour on a wood road two miles farther on. Here he felled a tree across the road and sat down in the bushes to await events.

Toward sunset, hearing a car coming, he tied his handkerchief over his face below the eyes, and took an automatic from his pocket.

Sard's car stopped and Sard got out to inspect the obstruction. Darragh sauntered out of the bushes, poked his pistol against Mr. Sard's fat abdomen, and leisurely and thoroughly robbed him.

In an agreeable spot near a brook Darragh lighted his pipe and sat him down to examine the booty in detail. Two pistols, a stiletto, and a blackjack composed the arsenal of Mr. Sard. A large wallet disclosed more than four thousand dollars in Treasury notes — something to reimburse Ricca when she arrived, he thought.

Among Sard's papers he discovered a cipher letter from Rotterdam — probably from Quintana. Cipher was rather in Darragh's line. All ciphers are solved by similar methods, unless the key is contained in a code book known only to sender and receiver.

But Quintana's cipher proved to be only an easy acrostic — the very simplest of secret messages. Within an hour Darragh had it pencilled out:

Cipher

"Take notice: "Star Pond, N.Y. ... Name is Mike Clinch. ...
Has Flaming
Jewel. ... Erosite. ... I sail at once. "Quintana."

Having served in Russia as an officer in the Military Intelligence Department attached to the American Expeditionary Forces, Darragh had little trouble with Quintana's letter. Even the signature was not difficult, the fraction $1/5$ was easily translated Quint; and the familiar prescription symbol a spelled ana; which gave Quintana's name in full.

He had heard of Erosite as the rarest and most magnificent of all gems. Only three were known. The young Duchess Theodorica of Esthonia had possessed one.

* * * * *

Darragh was immensely amused to find that the chase after Emanuel Sard should have led him to the very borders of the great Harrod estate in the Adirondacks.

He gathered up his loot and walked on through the splendid forest which once had belonged to Henry Harrod of Boston, and which now was the property of Harrod's nephew, James Darragh.

When he came to the first trespass notice he stood a moment to read it. Then, slowly, he turned and looked toward Clinch's. An autumn sunset flared like a conflagration through the pines. There was a glimmer of water, too, where Star Pond lay.

* * * * *

Fate, Chance, and Destiny were becoming very busy with Mike Clinch. They had started Quintana, Sard, and Darragh on his trail. Now they stirred up the sovereign State of New York.

That lank wolf, Justice, was afoot and sniffing uncomfortably close to the heels of Mike Clinch.

* * * * *



Two State Troopers drew bridles in the yellowing October forest. Their smart drab uniforms touched with purple blended harmoniously with the autumn woods. They were as inconspicuous as two deer in the dappled shadow. There

was a sunny clearing just ahead. The wood road they had been travelling entered it. Beyond lay Star Pond.

Trooper Lannis said to Trooper Stormont: "That's Mike Clinch's clearing.

Our man may be there. Now we'll see if anybody tips him off this time."

Forest and clearing were very still in the sunshine. Nothing stirred save gold leaves drifting down, and a hawk high in the deep blue sky turning in narrow circles.

Lannis was instructing Stormont, who had been transferred from the Long Island Troop, and who was unacquainted with local matters.

Lannis said: "Clinch's dump stands on the other edge of the clearing.

Clinch owns five hundred acres in here. He's a rat."

"Bad?"

"Well, he's mean. I don't know how bad he is. But he runs a rotten dump. The forest has its slums as well as the city. This is the Hell's Kitchen of the North Woods."

Stormont nodded.

"All the scum of the wilderness gathers here," went on Lannis. "Here's where half the trouble in the North Woods hatches. We'll eat dinner at Clinch's. His stepdaughter is a peach."

The sturdy, sun-browned trooper glanced at his wrist watch, stretched his legs in his stirrups.

"Jack," he said, "I want you to get Clinch right, and I'm going to tell you about his outfit while we watch this road. It's like a movie. Clinch plays the lead. I'll dope out the scenario for you——"

He turned sideways in his saddle, freeing both spurred heels and lolled so, constructing a cigarette while he talked:

"Way back around 1900 Mike Clinch was a guide — a decent young fellow they say. He guided fishing parties in summer, hunters in fall and winter. He made money and built the house. The people he guided were wealthy. He made a lot of money and bought land. I understand he was square and that everybody liked him.

"About that time there came to Clinch's `hotel' a Mr. and Mrs. Strayer. They were `lungers.' Strayer seemed to be a gentleman; his wife was good looking and rather common. Both were very young. He had the conump bad — the galloping variety. He didn't last long. A month after he died his young wife had a baby. Clinch married her. She also died the same year. The baby's name was Eve. Clinch became quite crazy about her and started to make a lady of her. That was his mania."

Lannis leaned from his saddle and carefully dropped his cigarette end into a puddle of rain water. Then he swung one leg over and sat side saddle.

"Clinch had plenty of money in those days," he went on. "He could afford to educate the child. The kid had a governess. Then he sent her to a fancy boarding school. She had everything a young girl could want.

"She developed into a pretty young thing at fifteen. ... She's eighteen now — and I don't know what to call her. She pulled a gun on me in July."

"What!"

"Sure. There was a row at Clinch's dump. A rum-runner called Jake Kloon got shot up. I came up to get Clinch. He

was sick-drunk in his bunk. When I broke in the door Eve Strayer pulled a gun on me."

"What happened?" inquired Stormont.

"Nothing. I took Clinch. ... But he got off as usual."

"Acquitted?"

Lannis nodded, rolling another cigarette:

"Now, I'll tell you how Clinch happened to go wrong," he said. "You see he'd always made his living by guiding. Well, some years ago Henry Harrod, of Boston, came here and bought thousands and thousands of acres of forest all around Clinch's——" Lannis half rose on one stirrup and, with a comprehensive sweep of his muscular arm, ending in a flourish: "— He bought everything for miles and miles. And that started Clinch down hill. Harrod tried to force Clinch to sell. The millionaire tactics you know. He was determined to oust him. Clinch got mad and wouldn't sell at any price. Harrod kept on buying all around Clinch and posted trespass notices. That meant ruin to Clinch. He was walled in. No hunters care to be restricted. Clinch's little property was no good. Business stopped. His step-daughter's education became expensive. He as in a bad way. Harrod offered him a high price. But Clinch turned ugly and wouldn't budge. And that's how Clinch began to go wrong."

"Poor devil," said Stormont.

"Devil, all right. Poor, too. But he needed money. He was crazy to make a lady of Eve Strayer. And there are ways of finding money, you know."

Stormont nodded.

"Well, Clinch found money in those ways. The Conservation Commissioner in Albany began to hear about

game law violations. The Revenue people heard of rum-running. Clinch lost his guide's license. But nobody could get the goods on him.

"There was a rough backwoods bunch always drifting around Clinch's place in those days. There were fights. And not so many miles from Clinch's there was highway robbery and a murder or two.

"Then the war came. The draft caught Clinch. Malone exempted him, he being the sole support of his stepchild.

"But the girl volunteered. She got to France, somehow — scrubbed in a hospital, I believe — anyway, Clinch wanted to be on the same side of the world she was on, and he went with a Forestry Regiment and cut trees for railroad ties in southern France until the war ended and they sent him home.

"Eve Strayer came back too. She's there now. You'll see her at dinner time. She sticks to Clinch. He's a rat. He's up against the dry laws and the game laws. Government enforcement agents, game protectors, State Constabulary, all keep an eye on Clinch. Harrod's trespass signs fence him in. He's like a rat in a trap. Yet Clinch makes money at law breaking and nobody can catch him red-handed.

"He kills Harrod's deer. That's certain. I mean Harrod's nephew's deer. Harrod's dead. Darragh's the young nephew's name. He's never been here — he was in the army — in Russia — I don't know what became of him — but he keeps up the Harrod preserve — game-wardens, patrols, watchers, trespass signs and all."

Lannis finished his second cigarette, got back into his stirrups and, gathering bridle, began leisurely to divide curb

and snaffle.

"That's the layout, Jack," he said. "Yonder lies the Red Light district of the North Woods. Mike Clinch is the brains of all the dirty work that goes on. A floating population of crooks and bums — game violators, boot-leggers, market hunters, pelt `collectors,' rum-runners, hootch makers, do his dirty work — and I guess there are some who'll stick you up by starlight for a quarter and others who'll knock your block off for a dollar. ... And there's the girl, Eve Strayer. I don't get her at all, except that she's loyal to Clinch. ... And now you know what you ought to know about this movie called `Hell in the woods.' And it's up to us to keep a calm, impartial eye on the picture and try to follow the plot they're acting out — if there is any."

Stormont said: "Thanks, Bill; I'm posted. ... And I'm getting hungry, too."

"I believe, said Lannis, "that you want to see that girl."

"I do," returned the other, laughing.

"Well, you'll see her. She's good to look at. But I don't get her at all."

"Why?"

"Because she *looks* right. And yet she lives at Clinch's with him and his bunch of bums. Would you think a straight girl could stand it?"

"No man can tell what a straight girl can stand."

"Straight or crooked she stands for Mike Clinch," said Lannis, "and he's a ratty customer."

"Maybe the girl is fond of him. It's natural."

"I guess it's that. But I don't see how any young girl can stomach the life at Clinch's."

"It's a wonder what a decent woman will stand," observed Stormont.

"Ninety-nine per cent, of all wives ought to receive the D.S.O."

"Do you think we're so rotten?" inquired Lannis, smiling.

"Not so rotten. No. But any man knows what men are. And it's a wonder women stick to us when they learn."

They laughed. Lannis glanced at his watch again.

"Well," he said, "I don't believe anybody has tipped off our man. It's noon. Come on to dinner, Jack."

They cantered forward into the sunlit clearing. Star Pond lay ahead.

On its edge stood Clinch's.

* * * * *



Clinch, in his shirt sleeves, came out on the veranda. He had little light grey eyes, close-clipped grey hair, and was clean shaven.

"How are you, Clinch," inquired Lannis affably.

"All right," replied Clinch; "you're the same, I hope."

"Trooper Stormont, Mr. Clinch," said Lannis in his genial way.

"Pleased to know you," said Clinch, level-eyed, unstirring.

The troopers dismounted. Both shook hands with Clinch. Then Lannis led the way to the barn.

"We'll eat well," he remarked to his comrade. "Clinch cooks."

From the care of their horses they went to a pump to wash. One or two rough looking men slouched out of the

house and glanced at them.

"Hallo, Jake," said Lannis cheerily.

Jake Kloon grunted acknowledgment.

Lannis said in Stormont's ear: "Here she comes with towels. She's pretty, isn't she?"

A young girl in pink gingham advanced toward them across the patch of grass.

Lannis was very polite and presented Stormont. The girl handed them two rough towels, glanced at Stormont again after the introductions, smiled slightly.

"Dinner is ready," she said.

They dried their faces and followed her back to the house.

It was an unpainted building, partly of log. In the dining room half a dozen men waited silently for food. Lannis saluted all, named his comrade, and seated himself.

A delicious odour of johnny-cake pervaded the room. Presently Eve

Strayer appeared with the dinner.

There was dew on her pale forehead — the heat of the kitchen, no doubt. The girl's thick, lustrous hair was brownish gold, and so twisted up that it revealed her ears and a very white neck.

When she brought Stormont his dinner he caught her eyes a moment — experienced a slight shock of pleasure at their intense blue — the gentian-blue of the summer zenith at midday.

Lannis remained affable, even became jocose at moments: "No hootch for dinner, Mike? How's that, now?"

"The Boot-leg Express is a day late," replied Clinch, with cold humour.

Around the table ran an odd sound — a company of catamounts feeding might have made such a noise — if catamounts ever laugh.

"How's the fur market, Jake?" inquired Lannis, pouring gravy over his mashed potato.

Kloon quoted prices with an oath.

A mean-visaged young man named Leverett complained of the price of traps.

"What do you care?" inquired Lannis genially. "The other man pays. What are you kicking about, anyway? It wasn't so long ago that muskrats were ten cents."

The trooper's good-humoured intimation that Earl Leverett took fur in other men's traps was not lost on the company. Leverett's fox visage reddened; Jake Kloon, who had only one eye, glared at the State Trooper but said nothing.

Clinch's pale gaze met the trooper's smiling one: "The jays and squirrels talk too," he said slowly. "It don't mean anything. Only the show-down counts."

"You're quite right, Clinch. The show-down is what we pay to see. But talk is the tune the orchestra plays before the curtain rises."

Stormont had finished dinner. He heard a low, charming voice from behind his chair:

"Apple pie, lemon pie, maple cake, berry roll."

He looked up into two gentian-blue eyes.

"Lemon pie, please," he said, blushing.

* * * * *

When dinner was over and the bare little dining room empty except for Clinch and the two State Troopers, the former folded his heavy, powerful hands on the table's edge and turned his square face and pale-eyed gaze on Lannis.

"Spit it out," he said in a passionless voice.

Lannis crossed one knee over the other, lighted a cigarette:

"Is there a young fellow working for you named Hal Smith?"

"No," said Clinch.

"Sure?"

"Sure."

"Clinch," continued Lannis, have you heard about a stick-up on this wood-road out of Ghost Lake?"

"No."

"Well, a wealthy tourist from New York — a Mr. Sard, stopping at Ghost Lake Inn — was held up and robbed last Saturday toward sundown."

"Never heard of him," said Clinch, calmly.

"The robber took four thousand dollars in bills and some private papers from him."

"It's no skin off my shins," remarked Clinch.

"He's laid a complaint."

"Yes?"

"Have any strangers been here since Saturday evening?"

"No."

There was a pause.

"We heard you had a new man named Hal Smith working around your place."

"No."

"He came here Saturday night."

"Who says so?"

"A guide from Ghost Lake."

"He's a liar."

"You know," said Lannis, "it won't do you any good if hold-up men can hide here and make a getaway."

"G'wan and search," said Clinch, calmly.

* * * * *

They searched the "hotel" from garret to cellar. They searched the barn, boat-shed, out-houses.

While this was going on, Clinch went into the kitchen.

"Eve," he said coolly, "the State Troopers are after that fellow, Hal

Smith, who came here Saturday night. Where is he?"

"He went into Harrod's to get us a deer," she replied in a low voice.

"What has he done?"

"Stuck up a man on the Ghost Lake road. He ought to have told me. Do you think you could meet up with him and tip him off?"

"He's hunting on Owl Marsh. I'll try."

"All right. Change your clothes and slip out the back-door. And look out for Harrod's patrols, too."

"All right, dad," she said. "If I have to be out to-night, don't worry.

I'll get word to Smith somehow."

Half an hour later Lannis and Stormont returned from a prowl around the clearing. Lannis paid the reckoning; his comrade led out the horses. He said again to Lannis:

"I'm sure it was the girl. She wore men's clothes and she went into the woods on a run."

As they started to ride away, Lannis said to Clinch, who stood on the veranda:

"It's still the blue-jay and the squirrel talk between us, Mike, but the show-down is sure to come. Better go straight while the going's good."

"I go straight enough to suit me," said Clinch.

"But it's the Government that is to be suited, Mike. And if it gets you right you'll be in dutch."

"Don't let that worry you," said Clinch.

* * * * *

About three o'clock the two State Troopers, riding at a walk, came to the forks of the Ghost Lake road.

"Now," said Lannis to Stormont, "if you really believe you saw the girl beat it out of the back door and take to the woods, she's probably somewhere in there——" he pointed into the western forest. "But" he added, "what's your idea in following her?"

"She wore men's clothes; she was in a hurry and trying to keep out of sight. I wondered whether Clinch might have sent her to warn this hold-up fellow."

"That's rather a long shot, isn't it?"

"Very long. I could go in and look about a bit, if you'll lead my horse."

"All right. Take your bearings. This road runs west to Ghost Lake. We sleep at the Inn there — if you mean to cross the woods on foot."

Stormont nodded, consulted his map and compass, pocketed both, unbuckled his spurs.

When he was ready he gave his bridle to Lannis.

"I'd just like to see what she's up to," he remarked.

"All right. If you miss me come to the Inn," said Lannis, starting on with the led horse.

* * * * *

The forest was open amid a big stand of white pine and hemlock, and Stormont traveled easily and swiftly. He had struck a line by compass that must cross the direction taken by Eve Strayer when she left Clinch's. But it was a wild chance that he would ever run across her.

And probably he never would have if the man that she was looking for had not fired a shot on the edge of that vast maze of stream, morass and dead timber called Owl Marsh.

Far away in the open forest Stormont heard the shot and turned in that direction.

But Eve already was very near when the young man who called himself Hal Smith fired at one of Harrod's deer — a three-prong buck on the edge of the dead water.

* * * * *

Smith had drawn and dressed the buck by the time the girl found him.

He was cleaning up when she arrived, squatting by the water's edge when he heard her voice across the swale:

"Smith! The State Troopers are looking for you!"

He stood up, dried his hands on his breeches. The girl picked her way across the bog, jumping from one tussock to the next.

When she told him what had happened he began to laugh.

"Did you really stick up this man?" she asked incredulously.

"I'm afraid I did, Eve," he replied, still laughing.

The girl's entire expression altered.

"So that's the sort you are," she said. "I thought you different. But you're all a rotten lot——"

"Hold on," he interrupted, "what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that the only men who ever come to Star Pond are crooks," she retorted bitterly. "I didn't believe you were. You look decent. But you're as crooked as the rest of them — and it seems as if I — I couldn't stand it — any longer ——"

"If you think me so rotten, why did you run all the way from Clinch's to warn me?" he asked curiously.

"I didn't do it for *you*; I did it for my father. They'll jail him if they catch him hiding you. They've got it in for him. If they put him in prison he'll die. He couldn't stand it. I *know*. And that's why I came to find you and tell you to clear out——"

The distant crack of a dry stick checked her. The next instant she picked up his rifle, seized his arm, and fairly dragged him into a spruce thicket.

"Do you want to get my father into trouble!" she said fiercely.

The rocky flank of Star Peak bordered the marsh here.

"Come on," she whispered, jerking him along the thicket and up the rocks to a cleft — a hole in the sheer rock overhung by shaggy hemlock.

"Get in there," she said breathlessly.

"Whoever comes," he protested, "will see the buck yonder, and will certainly look in here——"

"Not if I go down there and take your medicine. Creep into that cave and lie down."

"What do you intend to do?" he demanded, interested and amused.

"If it's one of Harrod's game-keepers," said the girl, drily, "it only means a summons and a fine for me. And if it's a State Trooper, who is prowling in the woods yonder hunting crooks, he'll find nobody here but a trespasser. Keep quiet. I'll stand him off."

* * * * *

IV

When State Trooper Stormont came out on the edge of Owl Marsh, the girl was kneeling by the water, washing deer blood from her slender, sun-tanned fingers.

"What are you doing here?" she enquired, looking up over her shoulder with a slight smile.

"Just having a look around," he said pleasantly. "That's a nice fat buck you have there."

"Yes, he's nice."

"You shot him?" asked Stormont.

"Who else do you suppose shot him?" she enquired, smilingly. She rinsed her fingers again and stood up, swinging her arms to dry her hands, — a lithe, grey-shirted figure in her boyish garments, straight, supple, and strong.

"I saw you hurrying into the woods," said Stormont.

"Yes, I was in a hurry. We need meat."

"I didn't notice that you carried a rifle when I saw you leave the house — by the back door."

"No; it was in the woods," she said indifferently.

"You have a hiding place for your rifle?"

"For other things, also," she said, letting her eyes of gentian-blue rest on the young man.

"You seem to be very secretive."

"Is a girl more so than a man?" she asked smilingly.

Stormont smiled too, then became grave.

"Who else was here with you?" he asked quietly.

She seemed surprised. "Did you see anybody else?"

He hesitated, flushed, pointed down at the wet sphagnum. Smith's foot-prints were there in damning contrast to her own. Worse than that, Smith's pipe lay on an embedded log, and a rubber tobacco pouch beside it.

She said with a slight catch in her breath: "It seems that somebody has been here. ... Some hunter, perhaps, — or a game warden. ..."

"Or Hal Smith," said Stormont.

A painful colour swept the girl's face and throat. The man, sorry for her, looked away.

After a silence: "I know something about you," he said gently. "And now that I've seen you — heard you speak — met your eyes — I know enough about you to form an opinion. ... So I don't ask you to turn informer. But the law won't stand for what Clinch is doing — whatever provocation he has had. And he must not aid or abet any criminal, or harbour any malefactor."

The girl's features were expressionless. The passive, sullen beauty of her troubled the trooper.

"Trouble for Clinch means sorrow for you," he said. "I don't want you to be unhappy. I bear Clinch no ill will. For this reason I ask him, and I ask you too, to stand clear of this affair.

"Hal Smith is wanted. I'm here to take him."

As she said nothing, he looked down at the foot-print in the sphagnum. Then his eyes moved to the next imprint; to the next. Then he moved slowly along the water's edge, tracking the course of the man he was following.

The girl watched him in silence until the plain trail led him to the spruce thicket.

"Don't go in there!" she said sharply, with an odd tremor in her voice.

He turned and looked at her, then stepped calmly into the thicket. And the next instant she was among the spruces, too, confronting him with her rifle.

"Get out of these woods!" she said.

He looked into the girl's deathly white face.

"Eve," he said, "it will go hard with you if you kill me, I don't want you to live out your life in prison."

"I can't help it. If you send my father to prison he'll die. I'd rather die myself. Let us alone, I tell you! The man you're after is nothing to us. We didn't know he had stuck up anybody!"

"If he's nothing to you, why do you point that rifle at me?"

"I tell you his is nothing to us. But my father wouldn't betray a dog. And I won't. That's all. Now get out of these woods and come back to-morrow. Nobody'll interfere with you then."

Stormont smiled: "Eve," he said, "do you really think me as yellow as that?"

Her blue eyes flashed a terrible warning, but, in the same instant, he had caught her rifle, twisting it out of her grasp as it exploded.

The detonation dazed her; then, as he flung the rifle into the water, she caught him by neck and belt and flung him bodily into the spruces.

But she fell with him; he held her twisting and struggling with all her superb and supple strength; staggered to his feet, still mastering her; and, as she struggled, sobbing, locked hot and panting in his arms, he snapped a pair of handcuffs on her wrists and flung her aside.

She fell on both knees, got up, shoulder deep in spruce, blood running from her lip over her chin.

The trooper took her by the arm. She was trembling all over. He took a thin steel chain and padlock from his pocket, passed the links around her steel-bound wrists, and fastened her to a young birch tree.

Then, drawing his pistol from its holster, he went swiftly forward through the spruces.

When he saw the cleft in the rocky flank of Star Peak, he walked straight to the black hole which confronted him.

"Come out of there," he said distinctly.

After a few seconds Smith came out.

"Good God!" said Stormont in a low voice. "What are you doing here, Darragh?"

Darragh came close and rested one hand on Stormont's shoulder:

"Don't crab my game, Stormont. I never dreamed you were in the Constabulary or I'd have let you know."

"Are *you* Hal Smith?"

"I sure am. Where's the girl?"

"Handcuffed out yonder."

"Then for God's sake go back and act as if you hadn't found me. Tell Mayor Chandler that I'm after bigger game than he is."

"Clinch?"

"Stormont, I'm here to *protect* Mike Clinch. Tell the Mayor not to touch him. The men I'm after are going to try to rob him. I don't want them to because — well, I'm going to rob him myself."

Stormont stared.

"You must stand by me," said Darragh. "So must the Mayor. He knows me through and through. Tell him to forget that hold-up. I stopped that man Sard. I frisked him. Tell the Mayor. I'll keep in touch with him."

"Of course," said Stormont, "that settles it."

"Thanks, old chap. Now go back to that girl and let her believe that you never found me."

A slight smile touched their eyes. Both instinctively saluted. Then they shook hands; Darragh, alias Hal Smith, went back into the hemlock-shaded hole in the rocks; Trooper Stormont walked slowly down through the spruces.

When Eve saw him returning empty handed, something flashed in her pallid face like sunlight across snow.

Stormont passed her, went to the water's edge, soaked a spicy handful of sphagnum moss in the icy water, came

back and wiped the blood from her face.

The girl seemed astounded; her face surged in vivid colour as he unlocked the handcuffs and pocketed them and the little steel chain.

Her lip was bleeding again. He washed it with wet moss, took a clean handkerchief from the breast of his tunic and laid it against her mouth.

"Hold it there," he said.

Mechanically she raised her hand to support the compress. Stormont went back to the shore, recovered her rifle from the shallow water, and returned with it.

As she made no motion to take it, he stood it against the tree to which he had tied her.

Then he came close to her where she stood holding his handkerchief against her mouth and looking at him out of steady eyes as deeply blue as gentian blossoms.

"Eve," he said, "you win. But you won't forgive me. ... I wish we could be friends, some day. ... We never can, now. ... Good-bye."

Neither spoke again. Then, of a sudden, the girl's eyes filled; and Trooper Stormont caught her free hand and kissed it; — kissed it again and again, — dropped it and went striding away through the underbrush which was now all rosy with the rays of the sunset.

* * * * *

After he had disappeared, the girl, Eve, went to the cleft in the rocks above.

"Come out," she said contemptuously. "It's a good thing you hid, because there was a real man after you; and God help you if he ever finds you!"