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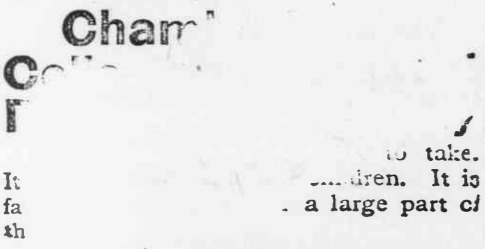
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THE MYSTERY

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE
And SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

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CHAPTER XXXIII.
AS they had gathered to hear
Ralph Slade's tale, so now the
depleted mess of the Wolven-
line grouped themselves for
Percy Darrow's sequel. Slade himself
sat directly across from the doctor's
assistant. Before him lay a paper cov-
ered with jotted notes. Tredon
slouched low in the chair on Slade's
right. Captain Parkinson had the other
side. Convenient to Darrow's hand
lay the material for cigarettes. As he
talked he rolled cylinder after cylinder
and between sentences consumed them
in long, satisfying puffs.
"First you will want to learn of the
fate of your friends and shipmates,"
he began. "They are dead. One of
them, Mr. Edwards, fell to my hands
to bury, as you know. He lies beside
Handy Solomon. The others we shall
probably not see. Any one of a score
of ocean currents may have swept
them far away. The last great glow
that you saw was the signal of their
destruction. So the work of a great
scientist, a potent benefactor of the
race, a gentle and kindly old heart, has
brought about the death of your friends
and of my enemies. The innocent
and the guilty, the murderer with his
plunder, the officer following his duty,
one and the same end—a patry thing
our vaunted science is in the face of
such tangled fates." He spoke low
and bitterly. Then he squared his
shoulders, and his manner became
businesslike.
"Interrupt me when any point needs
clearing up," he said. "It's a blind
trail at best. You've the right to see it
as plain as I can make it—with Slade's
help. Cut right in with your questions.
There'll be plenty to answer, and some
never will be answered. Now, let me
get this thing laid out clearly in my
own mind. You first saw the glow—
let me see?"
"Night of June 2," said Barnett.
"June 2," agreed Darrow. "That was
the end of Solomon, Thrackles & Co.
A very surprising end to them if they
had time to think," he added grimly.
"Surprising enough from the survivors'
viewpoint," said Slade.
"Doubtless. They've had that story
from you. I needn't go over it. This
ship picked up the Laughing Lass, de-
serted, and put your first crew aboard.
That night, was it not, you saw the
second pillar of fire?"
Barnett nodded.
"So your men met their death. Then
came the second finding of the empty
schooner. Captain Parkinson, they

wanted to harness them. Once he got
to the point of practical experiment.
You can see the ruins yet—a hole in
southern New Jersey. Nobody ever
understood how he escaped. But there
he was on his feet across a ten foot
fence in a plowed field—yes, he flew
the fence—and running, running, fur-
iously in the opposite direction when
the dust cleared away. Some one stop-
ped him finally. Told him the danger
was over. 'Yet I will not return,' he
said firmly and faintly away. That
disgusted him with high explosives.
What secrets he discovered he gave to
the government. They were not with-
out value, I believe."
"They were not, indeed," corroborat-
ed Barnett.
"Next his interest turned to the nat-
ural phenomena of high energy. He
studied lightning in an open steel net-
work laboratory, with few results save
a succession of rheumatic attacks and
an improved electric interrupter, since
adopted by one of the great telegraph
companies. The former obliged him
to stop these experiments, and the in-
vention he considered trivial. Probab-
ly the great problem of getting at the
secret of energy led him into his at-
tempts to study the mysterious elec-
trical waves radiated by lightning
flashes. At any rate, he was soon as
deep into the subject of electrical sci-
ence as his countryman, Hertz, had
ever been. He used to tell me that he
often wondered why he hadn't taken
up this line before—the world of en-
ergy he now set out to explore, waves in
that tremendous range between those
we hear and those we see. It was nat-
ural that he should then come to the
most prominent radio-active elements,
uranium, thorium and radium. But,
though his knowledge surpassed that
of the much exploited authorities, he
was never satisfied with any of his re-
sults.
"Pitchblende, no," he would ex-
claim. "It has not the great power.
The mines are not deep enough yet."
"Then suddenly the great idea that
was to bring him success and cost him
his life came to him. The bowels of
the earth must hold the secret. He
took up volcanoes. Does all this sound
foolish? It was not if you knew the
man. He was a mighty enthusiast, a
born martyr. Not cold blooded, like the
rest of us. The fire was in his veins.
A light, please. Thank you.
"We chased volcanoes. There was
a theory under it all. He believed
that volcanic emanations are caused
by a mighty and uncomprehended en-
ergy, something that achieves results
ascribable neither to explosions nor
heat, some eternal, inner source. Ra-
dium, if you choose, only he didn't call
it that. Radium, as known to our
modern scientists, he regarded as the
harmless plaything of people with time
hanging heavy on their hands. He
wasn't after force in pin point quanti-
ties—he wanted results. Yet I believe
that, after all, what he sought was a
sort of higher power of radium. The
phenomena were related. And he had
some of that concentrated essence of
pitchblende in the chest when we start-
ed. Oh, not much, say about \$20,000
worth. Maybe thirty. For use? No.
Rather for comparison, I judge.
"Yet, we chased volcanoes. I be-
came used to camping between sam-
ple hells of all known varieties. I got
so that the fumes of a sulphur match
seemed like a draft of pure, fresh
air. Wherever any of the earth's pim-
ples showed signs of coming to a head
there were we, taking part in the
trouble. By and by the doctor got so
thoroughly poisoned that he had to
lay off. Back to Philadelphia we came.
There an aged seafaring person, tem-
porarily stranded, mulcted the profes-
sor of a dollar—an undertaking that re-
quired no art—and in the course of his
recital touched upon yonder little ces-
s-pool of infernal iniquities. An un-
charted volcanic island—one that he
could have all for his own. You may
guess whether Dr. Schermerhorn was
interested.
" 'That iss for which we haf so long
in vain sought, Percy,' he said to me
in his quaint, link chain style of
speech. 'A leedle private volcano labo-
ratory to ourselves to have. Totally
unknown, undescribed, not on the
chart to be found. Tomorrow we start.
I make a list of the things to get.'
" 'He began his list, as I remember,
with three dozen undershirts, a gallon
of pennycroyal for insect bites, a box
of assorted fishhooks, thirty pounds of
tea and a case of carpet tacks. When
I hadn't anything else to worry over, I
used to lie awake at night and specu-
late on the purpose of those carpet
tacks. He had something in mind, if
there was anything on which he prided
himself, it was his practical bent.
But the list never got any further. It
ceased short of one page in the ledger,
as you may have noticed. I outfitted
by telegraph on the way across the
continent.
"The doctor didn't ask me whether
I'd go. He took it for granted. That's
probably why I didn't back out. Nor
did I tell him that the three life insur-
ance companies which had foolishly
and trustingly accepted me as a risk
merely on the strength of a good con-
stitution were making frantic efforts
to compromise on the policies. They
felt hurt, those companies. My
healthy condition had ceased to ap-
pear to them. What's a good constitu-
tion between earthquakes? No, there
was no use telling the doctor. It
would only have worried him. Be-
sides, I didn't believe that the island
was there. I thought it was a myth
of that stranded ancient mariner's im-
agination. When it rose to sight at the
proper spot, none were more astound-
ed than the bad risk who now address-
es you.
" 'Yet I must say for the island that
it came handsomely up to specifica-
tions. Down where you were, Slade,
you didn't get a real insight into its
disposition. But in back of us there
was any kind of action for your mon-

ey-geysers, hell spouts, fuming nu-
sures, cunning little craterlets with
half portions of molten lava ready to
serve hot, more gases than you could
create in all the world's chemical labo-
ratories—in fact, everything to make
the place a paradise for Old Nick and
Dr. Schermerhorn. He brought along
in his precious chest besides the ra-
dium some sort of raw material; also
as near as I could make out a sort of
cage or guardianship scheme for his
concentrated essence of cussedness
when he should get it out of the vol-
cano.
" 'In the first seven months he put-
tered around the little fumers, with an
occasional excursion up to the main
crater. It was my duty to follow on
and drag him away when he fell un-
conscious. Sometimes I would try to
get him before he was quite gone.
Then he would become indignant and
fight me. Perhaps that helped to lose
me his confidence. More and more he
withdrew into himself. There were
days when he spoke no word to me.
It was lonely. Do you know why I used
to visit you at the beach, Slade? I
suppose you thought I was keeping
watch on you. It wasn't that; it was
loneliness. In a way it hurt me, too,
for one couldn't help but be fond of
the old boy, and at times it seemed
as if he weren't quite himself. Pardon
me if I may trouble you for the mat-
ches. Thanks.
" 'Matters went very wrong at times.
The doctor fumed like his little craters,
growled out long winded, exhaustive
German imprecations; wouldn't even
eat. Then, again, the demon of work
would drive him with thong and spur.
He would rush to his craters, to his
laboratories, to his ledger, for the
purpose of entering unintelligible com-
mentaries. He had some peculiar con-
trivance, like a misspoken retort, with
which he collected gases from the cra-
terlets. Whenever I'd hear one of
those smash I knew it was a bad day.
Meantime the volcano also became—
well, what you might call tempera-
mental.
" 'It got to be a year and a quarter—
a year and a half. I wondered whether
we should ever get away. My tobacco
was running short, and the bearing of
the men was becoming fidgety. My
visits to the beach became quite inter-
esting to me. One day the doctor
came running out of his laboratory
with so bright a face that I ventured
to ask him about departure.
" 'Not so long now, Percy,' he said in
his old, kind manner. 'Not so long.
The first real success. It iss made. We
have yet under entire control to bring
it, but it iss made.'
" 'And about time, sir,' said I. 'If
we don't do something soon we may
have trouble with the men.'
" 'So?' said he in surprise. 'But they
could do nothing—nothing.' He wag-
ged his great head confidently. 'We are
armed.'
" 'Oh, yes, armed. So are they.'
" 'We are armed,' he repeated ob-
stinately. 'Such as no man was ever
armed are we armed.'
" 'He checked himself abruptly and
walked away. Well, I've since won-
dered what would have happened had
the men attacked us. It would have
been worth seeing and—surprising.
Yes; I'm quite certain it would have
been surprising. Perhaps, too, I might
have learned more of the great secret,
and yet I don't know. It's all dark—a
hint here, theory, mere glints of light.
Where did I put— Ah, thank you!'"

calmed down and took it out in enter-
ing it in his daily record. He was
quite proud of that daily record and
remembered to write in it on an aver-
age of once a week.
"Then the chest went wrong. Whether
it had rusted a bit or whether the
chemicals had got in their work on the
hinges I don't know, but one day the
professor, of his own initiative, recog-
nized my existence by lugging his box
out in the open and asking me to fix
it. Previously he had emptied it. It
was rather a complicated thing, with
an inner compartment over which was
a hollow cover, opening along one rim.
That I conjectured was designed to
hold some chemical compound or salt.
There were many minor openings, too,
each guarded by a similar hollow door.
My business was with the heavy top
cover.
" 'It should shut and open softly,
gently,' explained the professor. 'So
Not with-a-grating-sound-to-be-accom-
panied,' he added, with his curious ef-
fect of linked phraseology.
"Half a day's work fixed it. The lid
would stand open of itself until tipped
at a considerable angle, when it would
fall and lock. Only on the outer shell
was there a lock. That one was a good
bit of craftsmanship.
" 'So, Percy, my boy,' said the doc-
tor kindly, 'that will with sufficient
safety guard our treasure. When we
obtain it, Percy. When it entirely
finished and completed shall be.'
" 'And when will that be?' I asked.
" 'God knows,' he said cheerfully. 'It
progresses.'
" 'Whenever I went strolling at night
he would produce his curious lights.



About his waist flickered a sort of aura
of radiance.

Some times they were fairly startling.
One fact I made out by accident look-
ing down from a high place. They did
not project from the laboratory. He
always worked in the open when the
light was to be produced. Once the ex-
periment took a serious turn. The
lights had flickered and gone. Dr.
Schermerhorn had returned to his labo-
ratory. I came up the arroyo as he
flung the door open and rushed out.
He was a grotesque figure, clad in an
undershirt and a worn pair of trou-
sers fastened with an old bit of tarred
rope in lieu of his suspenders, which I
had been repairing. About his waist
flickered a sort of aura of radiance
which was extinguished as he flung
himself headforemost into the cold
spring. I headed him out. He seemed
dazed. To my questions he replied only
by mumbblings, the burden of which
was:
" 'I do not understand. It is a not to
be comprehended accident.' It appears

Her hand this man could not get,
His health was not as it should be,
He had not used the "best as yet,"
Hollister's Rocky Mountain Tea.
—Allison's Drug Store.

that he didn't quite know why he had
taken to the water, or if he did he
didn't want to tell.
"Next day he was as good as new,
just as silent as before, but it was as
smiling, satisfied silence. So it went
for weeks, for months, with the ac-
cesses of depression and anger always
rarer. Then came an afternoon when
returning from a stalk after sheep I
heard strange and shocking noises
from the laboratory. Strict as was the
embargo which kept me outside the
door, I burst in, only to be seized in a
suffocating grip. Of a sudden I realized
that I was being embraced. The
doctor flourished a hand above my head
and jiggled with ponderous steps. The
dismal noises continued to emanate
from his mouth. He was singing. I
wish I could give you a notion of the
amazement, the paralyzing wonder with
which—No, you did not know Dr.
Schermerhorn. You would not under-
stand.
" 'We polkaed into the open. There
he cast me loose. He stopped singing
and burst into a rhapsody of disjoint-
ed words. Mostly German, it was a
wondrous jumble of the scientific and
poetic. 'Eureka' occurred at intervals.
Then he would leap in the air. It was
weird; it was distressing. Crazy? Oh,
quite! For the time, you understand.
If any of us should suddenly become
the most potent individual in the
world, wouldn't he be apt to lose bal-
ance temporarily? One must make al-
lowances. There was excuse for the
doctor. He had reached the goal.
" 'Percy, you shall be rewarded,' he
said. 'You haf like a trump card
stuck by me. You shall haf riches,
gold, what you will. You are young;
your blood runs red. With such riches
nothing is beyond you. You could the
ancient tombs of Egypt explore. It is
open to you such collections as have
never been gathered to make. What
shall it be—scrabs, missals, pre-
historic implements? Amuse yourself,
mein kind. We shall be able the bills
with usurious interest to pay. What
will you haf?'
" 'I said I'd like a vacation if con-
venient.
" 'Presently,' he replied. 'There yet
remains the guardianship to be per-
fected. Then to a world astonished
and respectful we return. Tonight we
celebrate. I play you a rubber of pin-
ochle.'
" 'We played. With the greatest se-
cret of science resting at our elbows
we played. The doctor won. My
mind was not strictly on the game.
In the morning the doctor sang once
more. I shall never hear its like again.
Was it a week or a month after that?
I cannot remember. I fancy I was ex-
cited. Then, too, there was something
in the atmosphere about the laboratory.
I don't know; imagination possibly.
Continued on page 6

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