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# THE RED BOOK

M A G A Z I N E



*Beginning a Novel of* **Greenwich Village and Conventions** *Also* James Branch Cabell, Gerald Beaumont, Rupert Hughes, Wallace Irwin & others  
*thrown to the winds by* **Samuel Merwin**





# What Saraïde

By James Branch

**M**ANY years ago there came to the desk of the editor of this magazine a short story of such originality, power and charm that the prophecy was then made of its author that if all went well, the day would come when he would be acclaimed one of the most distinguished writers in America. The young man who wrote that story was James Branch Cabell; and today, not only in America, but in Europe as well, no writer of fiction is better known than he. Here is his latest short story—in the manner of his famous "Singers."

**T**O Kerin of Nointel it seemed that he could understand his third wife no better than he had understood the others. But for that perhaps unavoidable drawback to matrimony, he lived comfortably enough with this Saraïde, whom many called a witch, in her ill-spoken-of, eight-sided home beside the Well of Ogdé. This home was gray, with a thatched roof upon which grew abundant mosses and many small wild plants; a pair of storks nested on the gable; and elder trees shaded all.

Now, of the origin of Saraïde there is nothing which can be told with profit and decorum: it is enough to say that an ambiguous parentage had



# Wanted Cabell

Illustrated by  
Arthur E. Becher

provided this Saraïde with a talisman by which you might know the truth when truth was found. And one of the many things about Kerin's wife which Kerin could not quite understand, was her constant complaining that she had not found out assuredly the truth about anything, and, in particular, the truth as to Saraïde.

"I exist," she would observe to her husband, "and I am in the main as other women. Therefore, this Saraïde is very certainly a natural phenomenon. And in Nature everything appears to be intended for this or the other purpose. Indeed, after however hasty consideration of the young woman known as Saraïde, one inevitably deduces that so much of loveliness and wit and aspiration, of color and perfume and tenderness, was not put

together haphazardly; and that the compound was painstakingly designed to serve some purpose or another purpose. It is about that purpose I want knowledge."

And Kerin would reply, "As you like, my dear." So this young Saraïde, whom many called a witch, had sought, night after night, for the desired knowledge, in widely various surroundings, from the clergy, from men of business, from poets, and from friends; and had wakened in her talisman every color save only that golden shining which would proclaim her capture of the truth. This clear soft yellow ray, as she explained to Kerin, would have to be evoked, if ever, in the night season, because by day its radiance might pass unnoticed and her perception of the truth be lost.

Kerin could understand the common-sense of this, at any rate. And so young Saraïde was unfailingly heartened in all such nocturnal experiments by the encouragement of her fond husband.

"And do not be discouraged, wife," he would exhort her, as he was now exhorting, upon this fine spring evening: "for women and their belongings are, beyond doubt, of some use or another, which





by and by will be discovered. Meanwhile, my darling, what were you saying there is for supper? For that at least is a matter of real importance—"

But Saraïde said only, in that quick, inconsequential childish way of hers: "O Kerin of my heart, I do so want to know the truth about this and about all other matters!"

"Come, come, Saraïde! Let us not despair about the truth, either; for they tell me that truth lies somewhere at the bottom of a well, and at virtually the door of our home is a most notable well. Our location is thus quite favorable, if we but keep patience. And sooner or later the truth comes to light, they tell me also,—out of, it may be, the darkness of this same Well of Ogde,—because truth is mighty and will prevail."

"No doubt," said Saraïde: "but throughout all the long while between now and then, my Kerin, you will be voicing just such sentiments!"

"—For truth is stranger than fiction. Yes, and truth will sometimes come even out of the devil's mouth."

Saraïde fidgeted. And what now came out of her own angelic mouth was a yawn.

"Truth is not easily found," Sir Kerin continued. "The truth is extremely hard to come to: roses and truth have thorns about them."

"Perhaps," said Saraïde. "But against banalities a married woman has no protection whatever."

"Yet truth," Sir Kerin went on with his kindly encouragement, "may languish, but can never perish. Though malice may darken truth, it cannot put it out."

"Husband of mine," said Saraïde, "sometimes I find your wisdom such that I wonder how I ever came to marry you!"

But Kerin waved aside her tribute modestly. "It is merely that I too admire the truth. For truth is the best buckler. Truth never grows old. Truth seeks no corners. Truth makes the devil blush."

"Good Lord!" said Saraïde. And for no reason at all she stamped her foot.

"—So everybody, in whatsoever surroundings, ought to be as truthful as I am now, my pet, in observing that this hour is considerably past our usual hour for supper, and that I have had rather a hard day of it—"

But Saraïde had gone away from him, as if in meditation, toward the curbing about the great and bottomless Well of Ogde. "Among these general observations, about devils and bucklers and supper time, I find only one which may perhaps be helpful. Truth lies, you tell me, at the bottom of a well just such as this well?"

"That is the contention alike of Cleanthes and of Democritus the derider."

"May the truth not lie indeed, then, just as you suggested, at the bottom of this identical well? For the Zhar Ptitza alone knows the truth about all things, and I recall an old legend that the bird who has the true wisdom used to nest in this part of Poictesme."

Kerin looked over the stone ledge about the great and bottomless Well of Ogde, peering downward as far as might be. "I consider it improbable, dear wife, that the Zhar Ptitza, who is every-



where known to be the most wise and most ancient of birds and of all living creatures, would select such a cheerless-looking hole to live in. Still, you never can tell; the wise affect profundity: and this well is known to be deep beyond the knowledge of man. Now Nature, as Cicero informs us, *in profundo veritatem penitus abstruserit*—"

"Good Lord!" said Saraïde again, but with more emphasis. "Do you slip down there, then, like a dear fellow, and find the truth for me."

Saying this, she pushed her husband into the great and bottomless Well of Ogde.

AND the unexpectedness of it all, alike of Saraïde's assault and of the astonishing discovery that you could fall for hundreds after hundreds of feet, full upon your head, without getting even a bruise, a little bewildered Kerin when he first sat up at the bottom of the well. He shouted cheerily, "Wife, wife, I am not hurt a bit!" because the fact seemed so remarkably fortunate and unaccountable.

But at once large stones began to fall everywhere about him, as though Saraïde upon hearing again his voice had begun desperately to heave these stones into the well. Kerin thought this an inordinate manner of spurring him onward in the quest of knowledge and truth, because the habitual impetuosity of Saraïde, when thus expressed with cobblestones, would infallibly have been his death had he not sought refuge in the opening he very luckily found to the southwest side. There was really no understanding these women who married you, Kerin reflected, as after crawling

for a while upon hands and feet, he came to a yet larger opening in which he could stand erect.

But this passage led Kerin presently to an underground lake, which filled all that part of the cavern, so that he could venture no farther. Instead, he sat down upon the border of these gloomy and endless-looking waters. He could see these waters because of the many *ignes fatui*, such as are called corpse candles, which flickered and danced above the dark lake's surface everywhere.

Kerin in such dismal circumstances began to pray. He loyally gave precedence to his own faith, and said, first, all the prayers of his church that he could remember: when no response was vouchsafed, Kerin inferred that he had, no doubt, in falling so far descended into heretical regions and into the nefarious control of unchristian deities. So he prayed fervently to all the accursed gods of the heathen that he could remember. Still, nothing happened.

Kerin nevertheless well knew, as a loyal son of the church, the efficacy of prayer: and he now began, in consequence, to pray to the corpse candles, because these might, he reflected, rank as deities in this peculiarly depressing place. And his comfort was considerable when, after an *ave* or two, some of these dancing lights came flitting toward him: but his surprise was greater when he saw that each of the *ignes fatui* was a living creature like a tiny phosphorescent maiden in everything except that each had the head of a lizard.

"What is your nature," Kerin asked, "and what are you doing in this cold dark place?"

(Continued on page 138)



WHAT SARAÏDE WANTED

(Continued from page 41)

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"Should we answer either of those questions," one of the small monsters said, in a shrill little voice, as though a cricket were talking, "it would be the worse for you."

"Then, by all means, do not answer! Instead, do you tell me if knowledge and truth are to be found hereabouts, for it is of them that I go in search."

"How should we know? It was not in pursuit of these luxuries that we came hither, very unwillingly."

"Then, how does one get out of this place?"

Now they all twittered together, and they flitted around Kerin with small squeakings. "One does not get out of this place."

Kerin did not cry pettishly, as Saraïde would have done: "Good Lord!" Instead, he said: "Dear me!"

"Nor have we any wish to leave this place," said the small lizard-women. "These waters hold us here with the dark loveliness of doom; we have fallen into an abiding hatred of these waters; we may not leave them because of our fear. It is not possible for any man to imagine the cruelty of these waters. Therefore we dance above them; and all the while that we dance we think about warmth and food instead of about these waters."

"And have you no food here, nor any warmth, not even brimstone? For I remember that, up yonder in Poictesme, our priests were used to threaten—"

"We do not bother about priests any longer. But a sort of god provides our appointed food."

"Come, come, now, that is much better. For, as I was just saying to my wife, supper is a matter of vital importance, after a rather hard day of it— But who is this sort of god?"

"We do not know. We only know that he has nineteen names."

"My very dear little ladies," said Kerin, "your information appears so limited, and your brightness so entirely physical, that I now hesitate to ask if you know for what reason somebody is sounding that far-off gong which I can hear."

"That gong means, sir, that our appointed food is ready."

"Alas, my friends, but it is quite unbearable," declared Kerin, "that food should be upon that side of the dark water, and I, who have had rather a hard day of it, should be upon this side!"

"No, no!" they reassured him. "It is not unbearable, for we do not mind it in the least."

Then the squeaking little creatures all went away from Kerin, flitting and skimming and twinkling over broad waters which seemed repellently cold and very dreadfully deep. Nevertheless, Kerin, in his desperation,—now that no god answered his prayer, and even the *ignes fatui* had deserted him, and only a great hungering remained with Kerin in the darkness,—Kerin now arose and went as a diver speeds into those most unfriendly-looking waters.

THE result was astounding and rather painful: for, as Kerin thus discovered, these waters were not more than two feet in depth. He stood up a bit sheepishly, dripping wet and rubbing his head. Then Kerin waded onward in a broad shallow puddle about which there was no conceivable need to bother any god. Kerin thus came without any hindrance to dry land, and to a place where the shining concourse of lizard-women had already begun to nibble and tug and gulp. But Kerin, after having perceived the nature of their appointed food, and after having shivered, walked on beyond this place, toward the light he detected a little above him.

"For supper," he observed, "is a matter of vital importance; and it really is necessary to draw the line somewhere."

Now Kerin seemed in the dark to be mounting a flight of nineteen stairs. He came thus into a vast gray corridor, inset upon the left side with nineteen alcoves: each alcove was full of books, and beside each alcove stood a lighted, very large candle as thick about as a horse's body. And Kerin's surprise was great to find, near the first alcove, that very Sclaug with whom Kerin pleasurable remembered having had so much chivalrous trouble and such fine combats before, some years ago, this Sclaug had been killed and painstakingly burned. Nevertheless, here was the old yellow gentleman intact and seated at a lectern: but he at once arose and, rubbing together the long thin hands which were webbed between the fingers like the feet of a frog, Sclaug asked whatever could have brought Kerin so far down in the world.

KERIN frankly told his tale. Then Sclaug embraced Kerin, and bade him welcome, and Sclaug laughed with the thin, easy, neighing laughter of the aged.

"As for what occurred at Lorcha, dear Kerin, do not think of it any more than I do. It was, in some features, unpleasant at the time: but, after all, you burned my body without first driving a stake through my rebellious and inventive heart, and so since then I have not lacked amusements. And as for this knowledge and truth of which you go in search, here is all knowledge, in the books that I keep watch over in this Naraka,—during the intervals between my little amusements,—for a sort of god."

Kerin scratched among the wiry-looking black curls of Kerin's hair, and he again glanced up and down the corridor. "There are certainly a great many of them. But Saraïde desired, I think, all knowledge, so near as I could understand her."

"Let us take things in the order of their difficulty," replied Sclaug. "Do you acquire all knowledge first, and hope for understanding later."

The courteous old gentleman then provided Kerin with white wine and with food very gratefully unlike that of the *ignes fatui*, and Sclaug placed before Kerin one of the books.

"Let us eat first," said Kerin, "for supper, in any event, is a matter of vital importance, where knowledge and truth may turn out to be only a womanish whim."

He ate. Then Kerin began comfortably to read, after, as he informed Sclaug, rather a hard day of it. Now, the book which Kerin had was written by the patriarch Abraham: and by and by Kerin looked up from it, and said: "Already I have learned from this book one thing which is wholly true."

"You progress speedily!" answered Sclaug. "That is very nice."

"Well," Kerin admitted, "such is one way of describing the matter. But no doubt other things are equally true: and optimism, anyhow, costs nothing."

So began a snug life for Kerin. The nineteen candles remained always as he had first seen them, tranquilly lighting the vast windless corridor, burning, but not ever burning down, nor guttering, nor even needing to be snuffed: and Kerin worked his way from one candle to another, as Kerin read each book in every alcove. When Kerin was tired he slept: all the while that he waked he gave to acquiring knowledge: he had no method nor any necessity of distinguishing between his daily and his nocturnal studies. Sclaug went out and came back intermittently, bringing food for Kerin, and returning as a rule with blood upon his



lips and chin. And when Sclaug was away, Kerin had to make the best—a poor best—of the company of the garrulous large gander which lived in the brown cage.

Then, also, unusual creatures, many of them not unlike men and women, would come sometimes, during these absences of Sclaug,—whom, for some reason or another, they seemed to dislike,—and they invoked the gander, and paid his price, and ceremonies would ensue: but busy Kerin could not, of course, spare from his reading much time to notice these foolish and probably pagan rites. Yet he endured such interruptions philosophically; because at worst, he reflected, they put an end for that while to the gander's perilously sweet and most distracting singing.

And several years thus passed; and Kerin had no worries in any manner to interrupt him except the gander. That inconsiderate bird insisted upon singing, with a foolish, damnable sort of charm, and so was continually checking Kerin's pursuit of knowledge, with anserine rhapsodies about beauty and mystery and holiness and heroism and immortality, and about a variety of other unscientific matters.

"For life is very marvelous," said the gander, "and to the wonders of earth there is no end appointed."

"Well, I would not say that, precisely," Kerin would reply, good-temperedly looking up for the while from his book, "because geology has made great progress of late. And so, Messire Gander, I would not say quite that. Rather, I would say that Earth is a planet infested with the fauna best suited to survive in this particular stage of the planet's existence. In any case, I finished long ago with earth, and with all ordinary terrestrial phenomena, such as earthquakes, and the formation of continents, and elevation of islands, and with stars and meteorics and with cosmography in general."

"—And of all creatures man is the most miraculous—"

"The study of anthropology is of course important. So I have learned too about man, his birth and organization, his invention and practice of the arts, his politics at large, and about the sidereal influences which control the horoscope and actions of each person as an individual."

"—A child of God, a brother to the beast—"

"Well, now, I question too the scientific value of zoömorphism: yet the facts about beasts, I admit, are interesting. For example, there are two kinds of camels; the age of the stag can be told by inspection of his horns; the period of gestation among sheep is one hundred and fifty days; and in the tail of the wolf is a small lock of hair which is a supreme love charm."

"You catalogue, poor Kerin," said the gander; "you collect your bits of knowledge as a magpie gathers shining pebbles; you toil through one book to another book, as methodically as a worm gnaws out the same advance: but you learn nothing in the wasted while that your youth goes."

"To the contrary, I am at this very moment learning," replied Kerin. "I am learning about the various kinds of stone and marble, including lime and sand and gypsum. I am learning that the artists who excelled in sculpture were Phidias, Scopas and Praxiteles. The last-named, I have just learned also, left a son called Cephisodotus, who inherited much of his father's talent, and made a notably fine Group of Wrestlers."

"You and your wrestlers," said the gander, "are profoundly absurd! But time is the king of wrestlers; and he already prepares to try a fall with you."

"Now, indeed, those Wrestlers were not absurd," replied Kerin. "And the proof of it is that they were for a long while the particular glory of Pergamos."

At that the gander seemed to give him up, saying, after a little hissing: "Very well, then, do you catalogue your facts about Pergamos and stag-horns and planets! But I shall sing."

"Yet I catalogue verities which are well proven and assured. But you, who live in a brown cage that is buried deep in this gray and lonely corridor, you can have no first-hand information as to beauty and mystery and holiness and heroism and immortality; you encourage people in a business of which you are ignorant, and you sing about ardors and raptures and, above all, about a future, of which you can know nothing."

"That may very well be just why I sing of these things so movingly. And in any event, I do not seek to copy nature. I, on the contrary, create here to divert me such faith and dreams as living among men would tend to destroy. But as it is, my worshippers depart from me drunk with my very potent music; they tread high-heartedly in this gray corridor, and they are devoid of fear and parvanimity: for the effect of my singing, like that of all great singing, is to fill my hearers with a sentiment of their importance as moral beings and of the greatness of their destinies."

"Oh, but," said Kerin, "but I finished long ago with the various schools of morals, and I am now, as I told you, well forward in petrology. Nor shall I desist from learning until I have come by all knowledge and all truth which can content my Saraide. And she, Messire Gander, is a remarkably clear-sighted young woman, to whom the romantic illusions which you provide could be of no least importance."

"Nothing," said the gander, "nothing in the universe is of importance, or is authentic to any serious sense, except the illusions of romance. That truth—poor, deaf and blinded spendthrift!—is none the less valuable for being quoted."

"Nor is it, I suspect," replied Kerin, "any the less generally quoted for being bosh."

With that he returned to his books: and the gander resumed its singing. And many more years thus passed: and except for the gander's perilously sweet and most distracting singing, Kerin had no worries in any manner to interrupt him, and no bothers whatever, save only the increasing infirmities of his age.

WHEN old Sclaug said to Kerin, who now seemed so much older than Sclaug seemed: "It is time for you and me to cry quits with studying; for you have worked your way as a worm goes through every alcove in this place, you have read every book that was ever written; and I have seen that vigor which destroyed me destroyed. I go into another Naraka; and you must now return, omniscient Kerin, into the world of men."

"That is well," said Kerin, "because, after all, I have been away from home for a long while. Yes, that is well enough, although I shall regret to leave the books of that god of whom you told me, and whom, by the way, I have not yet seen."

"I said, of a sort of god. He is not worshiped, I must tell you, by the very learned nor by the dull. However," Sclaug said, after a tiny silence, "however, I was wondering if you have found in these books the knowledge you were looking for?"

"I suppose so," Kerin answered, "because I have acquired all knowledge."

"And have you found out also the truth?"

"Oh, yes!" said Kerin, speaking now without hesitancy. And Kerin took down from its place the very first book which Sclaug had given him to read, when Kerin was yet young, the book which had been written—upon leaves of tree bark, with the assistance of a divine collaborator—by the patriarch Abraham when an horror of great



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**THE RED BOOK MAGAZINE**

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darkness fell upon him in the plain of Mamre. This book explained the wisdom of the temple, the various master-words of chance, the seven ways of thwarting destiny, and one thing which is wholly true. And Kerin half opened this book, at the picture of an old naked eunuch who with a scythe was hacking off the feet of a naked youth gashed everywhere with many small wounds; then turned to a picture of a serpent crucified; and, shrugging, put by the book.

"—For it appears," said Kerin, "that, after all, only one thing is wholly true. I have found nowhere any other truth: and this one truth, revealed to us here, is a truth which nobody will blame the patriarch for omitting from his more widely circulated works. Nevertheless, I have copied out every word of it, upon this bit of paper, to show to and make glad the dear bright eyes of my young wife."

But Sclaug replied, without looking at the proffered paper: "The truth does not matter to the dead, who have done with all endeavor, and who can change nothing."

Then he told Kerin good-by: and Kerin opened the door out of which Sclaug was used to go in search of Sclaug's little amusements. When Kerin had passed through this door he drew it to behind him: and in that instant the door vanished, and Kerin stood alone in a dim winter-wasted field, fingering no longer a door-knob but only the chill air. Leafless elder trees rose about him; not twenty paces before Kerin was the Well of Ogde: and beyond its dilapidated curbing, a good half of which somebody had heaved down into the well, he saw, through wintry twilight, the gray eight-sided house in which he had been used to live with the young Saraïde whom many called a witch.

**T**HEN Kerin went forward, beneath naked elder boughs, toward his dear home: and he saw coming out of the door of the gray house the appearance of a man who vaguely passed out of Kerin's sight in the twilight. But a woman's figure waited at the door: and Kerin, still going onward, came thus, in the November twilight, again to Saraïde.

"Who is that man?" said Kerin, first of all. "And what is he doing here?"

"Does that matter?" Saraïde answered him, without any outcry or other sign of surprise.

"Yes, I think it matters that a man with a red shining about his body should be seen leaving here at this hour, in the dead of winter, for it is a thing to provoke great scandal."

"But nobody has seen him, Kerin, except my husband. And certainly my own husband would not stir up any scandal about me."

Kerin scratched his white head. "Yes, that," said Kerin, "that seems reasonable, according to the best of my knowledge. And the word 'knowledge' reminds me, Saraïde, that you sent me in search of knowledge as to why life is given to human beings, so that you might in the light of this knowledge appropriately dispose of your youth. Well, I have solved your problem, and the answer is: Nobody knows. For I have acquired all knowledge. All that any man has ever known, I am now familiar with, from the medicinal properties of the bark aabec to the habits of the dragonfly called zyxomma: but no man, I find, has ever known for what purpose life was given him, nor what ends he may either help or hinder in any of his flounderings about earth and water."

"I remember," Saraïde said now, as if in a faint wonder. "I wanted, once, when I was young and when the eye of no man went over me without lingering, then I wanted to know the truth about everything. Yet the truth does not really matter



to the young, who are happy; and who in any case have not the shrewdness nor the power to change anything; and it all seems a great while ago. For you have been a long time gone, my Kerin, and I have lived through nearly thirty years while you were getting knowledge down yonder from the bird that has the true wisdom."

"Of whatever bird can you be talking?" said Kerin, puzzled. "Oh, yes, now I also remember. But, no, there is nothing in that old story, my darling, and there is no Zhar Ptitzza in the Well of Ogde. Instead, there is a particularly fine historical and scientific library: and from it I have acquired all knowledge, and have thus happily solved your problem. Nor is that the end of the tale: for you wanted not merely knowledge but truth also, and in consequence I have found out for you the one thing which—according to Abraham's divine collaborator, in a moment of remarkable and, I suppose, praiseworthy candor—is wholly true. And that truth I have neatly copied out for you, upon this bit of paper—"

BUT there was really no understanding of these women who dispatched you upon hazardous and quite lengthy quests. For Saraïde had interrupted him, without the least sign of such delight and satisfaction, or even of pride in her husband's exploits, as would have seemed only natural. And Saraïde said:

"The truth does not matter to the aged. Of what good is the truth to you or to me either, now that thirty years are gone, and nothing in our living can be changed?"

"Well, well!" observed Kerin, comfortably, and passing over her defects in appreciation. "So it has been as long as thirty years! But how time flies, to be sure! Did you say anything, my dear?"

"I groaned," replied Saraïde, "to have you back again with all your frayed tags of speech and the desolation of your platitudes; but that does not matter either."

"No, of course not: for all is well, as they say, that ends well. So out with your talisman, and let us quicken the golden shining which will attest the truth I have fetched back to you."

She answered rather moodily: "I have not that talisman any longer. A man wanted it. And I gave it to him."

"Since generosity is a virtue, I have no doubt that you did well. But to what man, Saraïde, did you give the jewel that in youth you thought was priceless?"

"Does that matter, now? And, indeed, how should I remember? There have been so many men, my Kerin, in the tumultuous and merry years that are gone by forever. And all of them—" Here Saraïde breathed deeply. "Oh, but I loved them, my Kerin!"

"It is our christian duty to love all our neighbors. So I do not doubt that, here again, you have done well. Still, one discriminates, one is guided, even in philanthropy, by instinctive preferences. And therefore I am wondering for what especial reason, Saraïde, did you love these particular persons?"

"They were so beautiful," she said, "so young, so confident in what was to be, and so pitiable! And now some of them are gone away into the far-off parts of earth, and some of them are gone down under the earth in their black narrow coffins, and the husks of those that remain hereabouts are strange and staid and withered and do not matter any longer. Life is a pageant that passes very quickly, going hastily from one darkness to another darkness, with only *ignes fatui* to guide; and there is no sense in it. I learned that, Kerin, without moiling over books. But life is a fine ardent spectacle; and I have loved the actors in it: and I have loved their youth and their high-heartedness, and their ungrounded faiths, and their queer dreams, my Kerin, about

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their own importance and about the greatness of the destiny that awaited them, while you were piffing after, of all things, the truth!"

"Still, if you will remember, my darling, it was you yourself who said, as you no doubt recall, just as you shoved me—"

"Well! I say now that I have loved too utterly these irrational fine things to have the heart, even now, to disbelieve in them, entirely: and I am content."

"Yes, yes, my dear; you may now well be content. For we may now settle down and live quietly, without undue indulgence in philanthropy; and we two alone will know the one truth which is wholly true."

"Good Lord!" said Saraïde; and added, incoherently: "But you were always like that!"

THEY went then, silently, from the twilight into the darkness of the house which had been their shared home in youth, and in which now there was no youth and no sound and no assured light anywhere. Yet a glow of pallidly veiled embers showed where the hearth would be. And Saraïde now said:

"It is droll that we have not yet seen each other's faces! Give me that foolish paper, Kerin of my heart, so that I may put it to a sensible use and light this lamp."

Kerin, a bit disconsolately, obeyed: and Saraïde touched the low red embers with the paper which told about the one thing which is wholly true. The paper blazed. Kerin saw thus speedily wasted the fruit of Kerin's long endeavor. Saraïde had lighted her lamp. The lamp cast everywhither now a

## PROVEN PUDDING

(Continued from page 37)

"I'll do the introducing as soon as I can get rid of this jug," observed Bee. Then, "My old college chum, Lou, Delia Bradley. Lou's other name is Dibble, but you'll call her Lou. And now as for you two, you're evidently getting on beautifully but I don't know if you've told each other your names."

"Well," Wilbur began, then with a swift new thought resumed his painting. "Don't move!" he cried, as Delia stirred in her chair.

"Anyway," said Bee, stripping the brown paper off the jug, "She is Delia Bradley and you are Wilbur Sayles."

DELIA sat taking in the scene in her still way. But her thoughts were like fireflies at night, sparkling confusedly. Lou, who was now around behind Wilbur critically examining the sketch as she got out of her coat and hat, took her insignificant self quite for granted. Bee, on the other hand, exhibited no surprise over Wilbur's presence. At home, back in Worcester, there had always been a mental bustling about and not seldom a strain in preparing for guests. This was like college, altogether happy-go-lucky. She liked it. But she didn't quite know how to take it or what to do. They'd hardly let Wilbur spend the night. Yet—they might. Her lids fluttered.

Lou sat down by that glass jug, thoughtfully considering it as she lit a cigarette. She was a competent-appearing person with likable brown eyes. Bee was off in the bathroom washing up. Wilbur painted on.

"Lovely subject," remarked Lou, glancing up from the jug to the figure in the wicker chair.

"Beautiful," replied Wilbur. And Delia's lids stirred again. They might have been talking over a pet dog. Queer, casual, delightful people. Different. And here, Delia told herself, she was! In that brightly colored, that already legendary Village tucked away with its rambling streets and

golden shining: and, in its clear soft yellow radiancy, Saraïde was making tidy her hearth.

After that necessary bit of housework she turned to her husband, and they looked at each other for the first time since both were young: and Kerin saw a bent, old, dapper, not unkindly witch-woman peering up at him, with shrewd eyes, over the handle of her broom. But through the burning of that paper, as Kerin saw also, their small eight-sided home had become snug and warm and cosy-looking—it even had an air of durability: and Kerin laughed, with the thin, easy, neighing laughter of the aged.

For, after all, he reflected, it could benefit nobody ever to recognize—either in youth or in gray age or after death—that time must endlessly deface and maim, and make an end of, whatever anywhere was young and strong and beautiful, or even cosy; and that such was the one truth which had ever been revealed to any man, assuredly. Saraïde, for that matter, seemed to have found out for herself, somewhere in philanthropic fields, the one thing which was wholly true; and she seemed, also, to prefer to ignore it, in favor of life's unimportant, superficial, familiar tasks. . . . Well, and Saraïde was a wise woman! For the truth was discomposing, and without remedy, and was, moreover, too chillingly strange ever to be really faced: meanwhile, in the familiar and the superficial, and in temperate bodily pleasures, one found a certain cheerfulness. . . .

He temperately kissed his wife, and he temperately inquired: "My darling, what is there for supper?"

its little old houses and its quaintly settled customs! Louise held her cigarette like a man, and inhaled with a relish. Feeling rather self-conscious about it, Delia lit another. She wondered if Bee, who had never seen her smoke in college, would say anything. Though of course she wouldn't. Not this easy-going, sketchy, delightful Bee of the Village.

"I've gone at this thing brashly enough," said Lou, "but now that the alcohol's here I may as well confess I don't know how to make the gin. I'm afraid we'll have to send for Arthur."

"Oh, not Arthur," called Bee. She was in the bedroom now, with the door ajar.

"I know, child, but he does know how. And he's got the drops you put in. I wouldn't even know how to go about buying them. And there's no time. I'll call him up. He won't pester you, Bee, if he doesn't get too drunk. We won't let him."

"If he doesn't pester me he'll set straight at Delia. She's the newest thing around. And you know Arthur."

"Well,"—Lou appealed to the newest thing around,—"don't you suppose you could stand it, Delia? He's just an egotistical poet. It's the only way I can think of to get our gin made. Wilbur might step over to the fruit store for the oranges."

"I sha'n't mind," Delia murmured. "She's a poet herself," called Bee. "That's what it's about. . . . All I can say, Delia, is don't let him make love to you. He's a mess. Known hereabouts as the ever-ready. Arthur Rockwell."

Delia's eyes widened more than ever, and her mouth sagged open. "You didn't say Arthur Rockwell?" she breathed.

"The same. Know him?"

"Why—no. But—I've loved his poems. I—I thought he was English."

"English, my eye!" said Lou, with her engaging grin. "Minneapolis. His father's a manufacturer. He's just another of our Village refugees."