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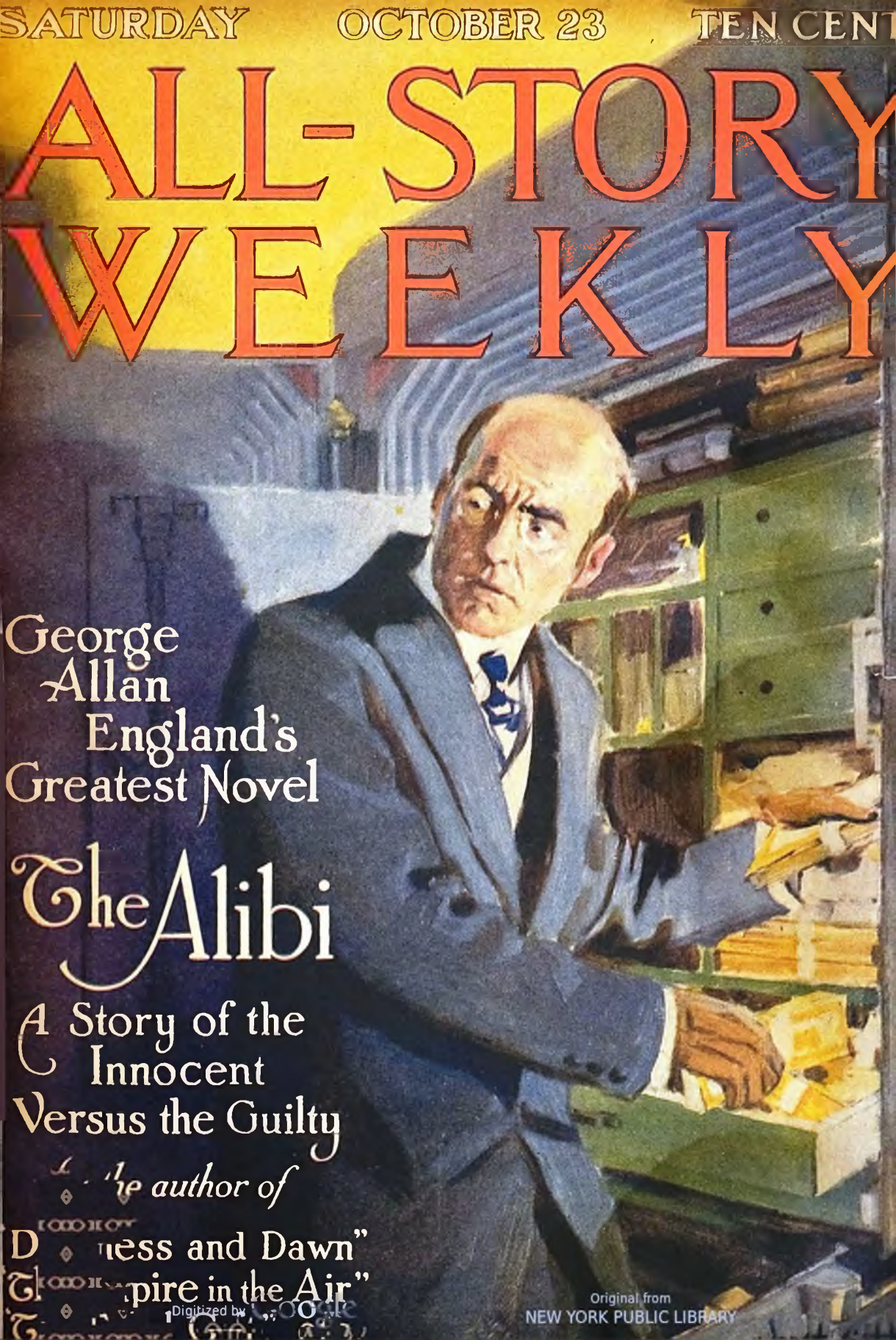

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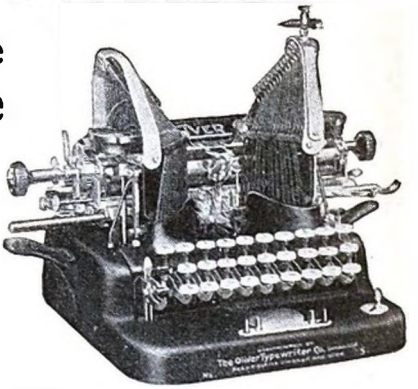

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME EL — NUMBER 4

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FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

EIGHT SHORT STORIES

VERSE

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FRANK A. MUNSEY, President — RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary — CHRISTOPHER H. PAPE, Treasurer

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY
VOLUME L | SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23, 1915 | NUMBER 4

The Alibi

by George Allan England

Author of "Darkness and Dawn," "Beyond the Great Oblivion," "The Empire in the Air," "The Golden Blight," "The After-Glow," "The Crime-Detector," etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Balance of Disaster.

BACK and forth, back and forth a man was pacing the floor, caught in the toils of the inexorable catastrophe that now impended close. Lashed by fear, hounded by fate, up and down the room he turned, hemmed by walls of disaster. His feet, now impacting on the polished floor, now noiseless over the rugs, kept time to the mechanical repetition of the thought: "Ruin, ruin, ruin!" that ebbed and flowed in his racked brain.

Haggard and wan he paced with rumpled hair and eyes whose bloodshot glance bespoke long vigils. Save for his footfall and the busy impertinence of the clock that would soon toll midnight, the house—the house of Walter Haynes Slayton, cashier, was still. A numbing silence gripped it—a silence that could almost be heard, so deep it was. Outside hardly a sound disturbed the frosty November night, now moonlit, now cloudy, that brooded over the suburban solitude of Oakwood Heights.

Stillness without, silence within. The night seemed waiting, big with wo. Yet through all the man's stress and torment passed a flicker of relief that his wife had not yet returned. In view of the approaching disaster, her absence on a visit was a signal blessing. His one wish now was that she might remain away till *something* could be done to stem the tides of ruin.

Back and forth—up and down—Then suddenly the man stopped, livid, and dashed his fist against his brow and groaned. Chill though the house had become he felt no cold. He burned with inward fires. A fever parched his lips and ravaged his blood. For to-morrow—to-morrow was his last day of grace.

"Liabilities, a hundred and eight thousand," he huskily articulated. "Assets—"

He snapped his trembling fingers.

"Not worth *that!* And Jarboe—confound him, I wish I had him here to-night! Jarboe's note—"

Walter Slayton cast a despairing look about his library, a look that minded one of the hunted glare of a trapped, prisoned animal.

"Jarboe!" he muttered. "He's

reached his limit at last. He's surely going to put me through this time!"

With a curse he turned toward his desk, all covered with neatly arranged papers. One of the supreme rules of life for the cashier of the Powhatan National Bank was perfect order in all things. Not even this crisis could disturb his method, the habit of a lifetime.

Now even in the arrangement of the very papers that spelled complete annihilation, irreparable disaster and in all probability a frightful term in Sing Sing, his orderly arrangement of the data in chronological sequence was perfect. Month by month and year by year the horrible liabilities were sorted and tabulated, forming a trap, a web, a network of catastrophe.

He knew them all by heart, every smallest one. How long he had lived with them ever in his thoughts, seen them in his dreams, found them obtruding between his vision and every other thing — even between him and his wife's face! Yes, right well did he know those papers on that desk. And best of all, he knew the Jarboe letter, keystone of the infamous arch. Once that arch should break no power on earth could avert a hideous collapse of the whole structure, burying him forever beneath the ruins.

In fingers that shook as with ague, under the glow of the electric lamp Slayton picked up the trial balance he had struck, the reckoning of his terrible involvement, the sum-total of disaster.

"This is the end," said he in a dull, flat tone. "The end of eleven years of torment! The note I owe Jarboe will be the bomb that will blow the whole structure into the air. This thing mustn't happen! It can't—it *shall* not!"

Again he fell to pacing with the monotonous regularity of a prisoner in a cell. His tortured mind reverted to the first mistake, years and years ago, the first miscalculation, then swiftly ran along the well-remembered ways of progressive disaster, covered by deeper and still deeper involvement in the mire. Every struggle to free himself had only sunk him farther and more hopelessly. At times there had been hope; then fresh misfortunes had swamped him.

And all those weary years the hideous farce of respectability, of outward calm and prosperity, of impeccable rectitude had had to be lived through. Worst of all, he had been obliged to face his wife with a smile when the heart had long since died in him.

Again the man groaned in anguish. Better anything now, even the ultimate catastrophe, than such a life!

Better anything? Even the prison cell, the striped garb of infamy? The living death of the penitentiary? No, no, not that! Never that! He felt that come what might, he would battle on and on forever if he could before he would submit to that!

Yet the Jarboe note was due to-morrow. It must be met in the morning. Eighty-four thousand dollars in cash must be paid. The last stand-off had been exhausted. No extension was possible. Cash was needed now—hard, cold, actual cash.

A shudder gripped him. His lean and rather clerical-looking face — a pious-seeming face that had long been of sovereign value to him in his peculations—twitched nervously. Its pallor bore a ghastly tinge in the greenish light that seeped through the electric-light shade. He blinked ominously. The glint in his eyes spoke volumes of evil.

This, he realized, was the crucial moment, the end of everything unless some bold play were made. In a kind of daze he stared at the merciless figures. He struck them with his fist. Nothing of all this must be known! The lie must still be lived!

His reputation, he knew, still stood intact. Nobody even suspected him as yet. As long as he could keep his hands on the books of the bank he might still be able to juggle the accounts.

The one absolutely essential thing was to stave off the impending calamity of the morrow. It involved taking a long chance, but nothing else now remained to do. He still knew that a good fight remained in him. Before everything should collapse and they should drag him "up the River" they should yet find how good a fight he could give them!

He shivered suddenly and drew back, glancing furtively about him as if the very walls had eyes. Close-drawn though the shades were, he feared lest somebody might be spying on him. Going to the windows he pulled the curtains down a little more. Then he returned again to his desk.

His thoughts were beginning to clarify themselves a little. He realized that he would go to any length to pay that Jarboe note. The Shylock should have his pound of flesh. The last step should be taken and the last card played. Then if he lost, the crash he would make in going down would prove him at least no petty thief.

Slayton flung down the balance again, and with a steadier hand unlocked and opened a little drawer at the right of the line of pigeonholes that topped his desk. From this drawer he took an envelope, and from the envelope a paper with a few figures in carbon-copied typewriting.

This paper he studied a moment under the light. It was one of two copies which alone existed in all the world. Chamberlain, president of the Powhatan, had the other one. Doubtless, thought Slayton, Chamberlain felt entirely safe. The cashier nodded satirically, and for the first time that night smiled. A wan, thin-lipped smile it was, saturnine and terrible to match his thoughts, as he studied the Open Sesame that would smooth his path.

"Now we're getting down to business," he murmured. "It's a long shot, but there's a chance at least. I'll have a chance to run; I sha'n't be trapped and done to death like a caged rat. A chance—that's all I want!"

He smote the table with decision.

If he could only tide things over for a month or two all might yet be well. Hope revived in his face. A bolder look came into his eyes. He glanced round again, holding his breath to listen. Out on the front walk he seemed to have heard a sound. Keenly he gave ear. Nothing.

He sneered savagely at himself. Could it be that he was getting nervous? With a strong effort he collected his forces. He folded the precious slip of paper and tucked it into his pocketbook. Then, turning to a little cupboard in the corner by the fireplace, he took down a bottle and a glass.

But he poured no liquor. His wiser judgment, infallibly sane, had quickly reasserted itself.

"Absolutely *no!*" he exclaimed.

A clear brain and a steady hand would be needed to-night if ever in his life.

"Eh? What's that?"

Swiftly he faced round. This time he felt positive he had heard a step on the walk. It seemed hesitant and timid; but a human footstep had unmistakably fallen on the concrete.

"What the—?"

Flash-quick, Slayton sprang to the desk, jerked open the big top drawer and swept all the damning papers into it. Just as he shut and locked it the electric bell *b-r-r-r-r-r-r-d* stridently in the hallway, making an astonishing racket in the tomblike stillness of the house.

Savagely he faced the door with a "Plague take you!" on his lips.

Again the bell burst into violent alarm. With an oath more than half of fear—for Slayton's nerves, despite all he could do, were jumpy as a colt's—he stepped into the hall, listened acutely for a moment, and then approached the door.

Outside he could hear an irregular tattoo of feet on the porch, sure sign of nervousness. Whoever it might be, the visitor lacked in calm self-possession.

Slayton's fear lessened. If the other man was nervous that was all the more reason why he should not be. After all, nobody in the world had anything on him. He had always managed to cover his tracks perfectly. Boldness and assurance were now invaluable assets for him. A grim smile curved his lips as he shot back the bolt and loosed the chain.

He pressed a button. The porch-light flooded down a sudden radiance. Then he swung wide the door.

At sight of the man standing there before him a sickening apprehension seized him. His mouth sagged open. Staring, he fell back a pace, his hand still gripping the big brass door-knob.

"You, Mansfield?" he stammered. "What—what is it? What on earth do *you* want here at this time of night?"

CHAPTER II.

"As a Bird Into the Net."

THE newcomer, obviously agitated in the very highest degree, made no answer, but stood in the doorway returning the other's stare.

"Thank Heaven, you — you're home!" he cried thickly. "Oh, thank Heaven!"

Under the downpour of light from above they formed a singular picture as they stood there, eye looking into eye, while the frosty vapors of their breath idled upward toward the light. A striking picture—the middle-aged cashier, wrinkled and disheveled, in his smoking-jacket and slippers; the young bank-clerk, immaculate and trim, in balmacaan and olive-green felt hat. Different types in every way; yet the community of some unusual emotion drew them both into the same category.

Slayton, a nerve-seasoned and ruseful man, pulled himself together immediately. He thrust out a hand of welcome.

"Come in, Mansfield!" he ejaculated, cloaking his alarm behind a very natural astonishment. "You certainly did surprise me. What's the row? Anything gone wrong?"

The young man nodded, gulped and tried to speak. Words would not come. He seized Slayton's hand in a grip that, though trembling, still had good beef behind it. Slayton winced.

"Here, here, Arthur!" he protested, trying to force a laugh that rang wholly false. "Don't take my arm off! What's up, anyhow?"

"I—I want to see you; want to talk to you a—a few minutes!" Mansfield succeeded in articulating. "I beg your pardon for intruding at this — this ghastly hour and all that, but—but—"

"Don't mention it, my dear fellow," Slayton returned with something of his usual suavity.

Every second now he was recovering his aplomb.

"Anything I can do to oblige you, at any hour of the day or night, I'll be glad to do," he continued. "But say, it's cold out here. Come in, Arthur; come in. We'll go into the library, and—"

"By George! That's mighty good of you!" the young fellow interrupted. The sincerity of his gratitude was pitiable.

He followed Slayton into the hall. The cashier's discerning eye appraised him as wholly unstrung; as clinging to the ragged edge of desperation.

"You're mighty good!" the youngster cried. "Fact is, Mr. Slayton, I—I've come to see you on—important business. It's—"

"You're in trouble? In some kind of a scrape? Is that it?"

The cashier's voice tried to convey deep apprehension; but in it vibrated a strange, malicious joy.

Mansfield gulped and peered about him nervously as the outer door closed.

"We're all alone here?" he whispered in trepidation.

"Absolutely, my dear fellow. Now tell me; what's the row? Speak frankly and—"

"It goes no further?"

"Not an inch!"

"I'm just a junior clerk at the bank, I know, and you're the cashier. You're—"

"Never you mind about that, Arthur! It's man to man here now!"

The crafty glitter in Slayton's eye seemed to have intensified. A subtly sly look crept into his face. Did he so soon foresee some dim eventualities, some nebulous possibilities turning to his behoof? Who should say?

His masklike expression of pietism grew dangerous and hard. On his pale lips the clerical smile widened.

"Speak out, Arthur, my boy," he bade. "Speak plainly as man to man!"

"I will! I must!"

Mansfield passed a hand across his eyes.

"Great Heavens, Mr. Slayton, there's not another soul—I could go to—for help!"

"Help? You need help?"

"Terribly!"

"Why, what's wrong?"

"Well, the fact is, I—I'm in a fix. A mighty bad fix, I guess. And I don't see any way out of it except—"

"To get my help?"

"That's just it! Will you help me?"

"I surely will, Arthur! Freely and gladly as if you were my own son. That's the greatest pleasure I have in life, lending a hand wherever I can!"

A semblance of real sincerity made the dross of it seem almost real gold. Mansfield, in his intense agitation, accepted the base metal as pure, and looked at the cashier with eyes of unspeakable gratitude. Slayton meanwhile was thinking fast.

That singularly acute instinct that for so many years had helped guide him through many a shallow, through many a perilous way, now told him that all his advantage lay parallel with this trouble of the junior clerk's.

Could he but probe the matter to the bottom, learn its every ramification and fully win the young chap's confidence, great things might yet befall. A strong conviction rose in the cashier that he must lend a hand, or seem to, for in this way, as in no other now, might lie safety for himself.

His relief was boundless at realization that Mansfield's coming—at first glance so inopportune—might after all veer to his success. When he had first caught sight of the young fellow from the bank standing there on the front porch a poignant dismay had assailed Slayton. Not even the appearance of a police officer, warrant in hand, would have startled him so profoundly. Through having already anticipated such a scene he had resolved to discount its emotions and had schooled himself to calmness. But to be confronted at precisely this juncture by a man from the bank itself had very badly shaken him.

Second thought told Slayton that the boy could, of course, know nothing of the vast, intricate, and skilful system of theft in which he had become involved. But the mere sight of him had startled the cashier immeasurably.

And now, hearing the young fellow's plea and beholding his obvious distress, a tremendous sense of ease swept across Slayton's soul. His fears vanished like fog before the rising sun.

"Then you *will* help me?" questioned Mansfield again with terrible eagerness. "You will, you will?"

"By all means, my dear fellow! That is, if I can."

Slayton smiled affably with a glint of white teeth. Something feline, something ominous lurked in that smile; but Mansfield, standing there pale and distraught before him, beheld only friendliness and benevolence in the cashier's face.

"Thank Heaven for a friend like you!" the boy exclaimed.

His blue eyes brimmed up with tears of reaction after long stress. Once more he gripped the elder man's hand. Slayton clapped him on the shoulder—a broad shoulder, and capable-looking.

"Unload," said he. "Let's have it. What's wrong, Arthur? Give me the whole story."

"I will!"

Arthur released his grip on the cashier's hand, took off his hat and flung it on the table, then paced a few steps up and down much as Slayton had been pacing. The cashier's smile betrayed amusement now. To see another on the rack, was it not rare sport?

His eye caught a reflection of himself in the broad mirror over the mantel. With satisfaction he noted that he showed few signs of perturbation.

"Even the little success I've had in amateur theatricals," thought he, "is helping me now."

He felt a sense of gratitude for that experience. It might yet stand him in good stead.

Arthur stopped on the rug beside the table, confronted Slayton and squared himself for the confession that the cashier now foresensed.

Mansfield's face showed strong lines, even though they were immature and not yet wholly formed—lines of nascent character that bade fair to be one day powerful and dominant. His head poised itself well; the chin was firm and good, the nose broad at the parting of the brows, the eyes steady. A thatch of rather rebellious hair—yellow hair that contrasted well with the blue eyes, hair that inclined to curl despite every effort to make it lie flat—crowned intelligent brows.

This man, on the whole, stood well above the dead-level of humanity. And as Slayton appraised him now more critically than ever before—for till now the cashier had noticed him as only one of three or four young clerks at the bank—and as he sensed the innate honesty and ingenuous frankness of the boy, a thrill of exultation warmed his cold heart.

"Clay to my hand," thought he. "Clay that will harden to adamant in time. Fate knew I needed him. Fate sent him. Fate is good!"

Suddenly Arthur spoke.

"I—I am a thief!" he blurted.

"A—?"

And Slayton, with well-feigned surprise, gripped the table-edge.

"A—*what?*"

"A thief! There! Now you know the worst. You know all there is to know—except why I did it. When I say that I say everything—the whole business. I've stolen—stolen money from the bank. It isn't much, but that's no excuse. To me it's a lot—a terrible lot!

"It's more than I can pay for a year or two. But I'm going to pay it, every cent. Principal and interest! All I need is time—time, that's all. And so I come to you. You can help me through this. You can pull me out o' the mud and give me chance to make good. To make good and be a man again — honest — square. For Heaven's sake, help me—help me!"

His words, which had been rushing in a stream, grew choked and incoherent. They broke; they ceased. Mansfield suddenly covered his face with both hands, dropped his head and stood there racked with anguish. His pallor, the tremors that shook him, the wordless groan that issued from his lips all told the story of his crucifixion.

Unmoved, Slayton studied the young fellow with a cynical coolness, much as if he had been a peculiar biological specimen empaled on a pin. Then the cashier nodded again, and once more the pale-lipped smile disclosed his teeth.

"As a bird into the net of the fowler," thought he, "so art thou delivered unto my hand!"

CHAPTER III.

Greek Gifts.

"COME, come, my boy," said he, his voice seeming to speak volumes of friendly comfort. "Brace up! Things can't be half so bad as you try to make out. You're

unnerved, half-hysterical, far from yourself. You're exaggerating the trouble, whatever it is. There'll be a way out—there must be. If there isn't I'll make one for you!"

Overcome, Arthur clung to the other's arm.

"I—I knew you would!" he managed to articulate. "If you ever succeed in getting me out of this I'll owe you a debt of—"

"Nonsense, my boy! My natural liking for you, as well as my duty toward my fellow man, dictates that I should lend a hand wherever possible. That's my code of conduct, Arthur, to do whatever good I can in life—that and the Golden Rule. So you see I'm only following my natural bent in helping you. Don't thank me, please!"

"But I do, I do!"

"You mustn't. Tell me the whole thing; that'll be more profitable. Let's have the story in as few words as possible. It's getting late. Why, bless my soul, it's nearly midnight! What's the trouble, Arthur? Out with it!"

He looked at the boy with as good a simulation of cordiality as he could muster, though inwardly he was cursing this young bungler who at an hour so very inopportune had dropped into the midst of all his plans. This interruption would surely delay and might perhaps wreck his arrangements. Something must be done, and at once.

His mind alternated between rejoicing at the possible uses to which he could turn this incident and the certain loss of valuable time it involved. A returning sense of the imperativeness of immediate action forced upon him the realization that unless he could speedily rid himself of Mansfield the few remaining hours of night would be forever lost. With the morning, should it find his plan unaccomplished, ruin would dawn.

A thrill of nervous anxiety, of sudden fear, shot through him. Now that the diversion of his ideas by Mansfield's abrupt entrance into the scene had somewhat abated, a burning eagerness began once more to possess him. He must be at work! Every moment now was golden. But he held his grip upon his nerves. Biting his lip, steadying his voice, forcing a calm that belied his racing pulses, he once more exclaimed:

"Let's have it all, my boy! All, and immediately. The sooner you get this thing off your heart and conscience the sooner we can begin repairing the damage. Now sit down in that big chair and—"

"No, no; not there! I couldn't sit down, Mr. Slayton; indeed I couldn't. I—I guess I'm too nervous to keep still. You see, it all started by—by—"

"Well?"

Mansfield floundered, flushed, paled, and remained speechless. The cashier shoved a box of cigarettes across the table.

"Maybe a little nicotin might help?" he ventured.

"No, no. I've cut that all out, along with—everything. No more. I'm done!"

"So?"

And Slayton reached for the box. He lighted one of the cigarettes, inhaled deeply and gusted thin vapor toward the ceiling.

"That's good," he commented. "Glad to hear it. Do I infer that—er—a tendency to dissipation has got you into this—h-m—this difficulty?"

"No, not that. Oh, I haven't been an angel, or anything of that sort! But since I—well, got to going with Enid—with Miss Chamberlain, you know—"

"Ah, yes; of course! You *have* been paying some attention to Miss Chamberlain. I forgot about that. Naturally that factor makes your position all the more difficult. It hasn't any direct bearing on the case, I hope? I mean in order to keep up appearances, you haven't—"

"No, no; nothing of that sort!"

And Arthur seemed to repel the idea by swiftly thrusting out his hand.

"Much as I—love—Miss Chamber-

lain I'd give her up a thousand times over, before I'd be a—thief to win her!"

"Very well said; very well indeed! It *would* be an odd situation—wouldn't it?—for a bank-clerk to woo the daughter of the bank-president with money stolen from the bank itself. That certainly would complicate matters.

"And by the way, Arthur," Slayton added with an attempt at merely casual interest, "just what are your prospects with the young lady? Pardon my asking. I do so only because it may—well, may possibly have rather an important bearing on the case."

"My prospects?" queried Mansfield.

He passed trembling fingers through his hair.

"Well, I don't just know for certain. Pretty good, I guess. I've been entertained at their house five or six times. And then I've been their guest at the Edgemere Country Club, and once I went yachting with them, last summer, as far as Mount Desert. They've been just bully to me! I—I guess they kind of look on me as—as—"

"As a future member of the family? Is that it?"

"That's it. Enid does anyhow; I know *that* much. That's what makes all this so terrible. If it ever gets out just think of what'll happen! It won't be only a case of about killing my father and mother, but Enid will have to suffer. I don't care what happens to *me!* It's—"

"Of course; of course! But enough of this, Arthur. Let's get down to specific facts. You've misappropriated funds; is that it?"

"Stolen, you mean!"

The boy's head came up sharply. He faced the older man eye to eye. Slayton's glance was first to fall.

"Stolen!" Mansfield repeated. "I'm a thief!"

His look belied him. Not shame now, but a kind of strange, wild pride burned in his face. At sound of the words Slayton changed color. Then, stammering and abashed despite his every effort, he demanded:

"What amount? How much did you—steal? And how did you take it? And when?"

"How much? Twelve hundred and fifty dollars. I stole it last week on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning. I can show you just how I got away with it, to-morrow. I'll give you the falsified accounts. It was only a matter of a cipher or two, a decimal point or two. You know, it's not very hard to do that sort of thing sometimes. Such things can be put through for a while."

"Of course, of course," assented the cashier nervously. "Well, well, Arthur! The facts are out at last. Twelve hundred and fifty, eh? H-m! Not a vital matter after all. Not irreparable by a long shot."

"You'll give me a lift?"

"Gladly! On one condition."

"What's that?"

The boy turned a shade paler than before.

"What condition?" he asked.

"Tell me what you took the money for."

"No, no, Mr. Slayton! Not that! I can't tell you that!"

"Why not?"

And Slayton's eyes narrowed as he blew another lungful of smoke across the room.

"Why can't you? It can't be any more disgraceful than the fact of the theft itself! Come, come, Arthur! Make a clean breast of it!

"Playing the races, eh? Nothing to the ponies, my boy; nothing to them! Or was it the little ivory ball on the spinning red wheel, or the pasteboards, or the bubbles in the tall glass, or the—"

"No, no no! Nothing like that! Not a thing like that, so help me!"

Arthur's fist struck the table a smashing blow.

"Nothing at all like that! It's a

clean reason anyhow. Absolutely clean. Yet I can't tell you. I simply can't!"

"But you must, Arthur. You must. Otherwise—"

"I can't! And you'll help me just the same; won't you? My Heaven! You've *got* to help me! If you don't, if you refuse to lend me enough to cover the deficit before the examiners call to-morrow—"

"The examiners?" ejaculated Slayton, startled out of his masklike pretense of calm. "To-morrow? I—I forgot about that! Let me think, Arthur! Let me think!"

He felt a sudden, deadly pang of terror. How could he have overlooked that vital fact? To-morrow was November 15. And the Federal examiners would be there!

The thought of this new contingency lashed him like a *nagaika*. Money! He must have money to straighten out his accounts! If any theft were to be discovered it must not be laid to *him!* That note must not go to protest; no question must be raised as to his solvency.

Money! He must get his hands on it at once! He must have cash—hard white and yellow cash from the canvas bags or yellow-backs from the sealed packets. More than a hundred thousand he must have by morning from the farthest recesses of the vaults!

That meant only one thing: He must get to work at once. A fine sweat began prickling on his brow. Unseeing, he stared at Mansfield. Past him and through him the cashier stared, seeming to see striped clothing, rows of cells, high-barred windows; to hear the clank and jangle of huge keys; to scent the foul, carbolic-acid stench of the Pen.

To-morrow! To-morrow morning he must have more than a hundred thousand dollars!

The urgency of the situation dawned on him with fresh, full, terrible insistence. No longer could he cherish at the back of his brain any hope that perhaps the job could still be postponed another day or two. Even were Jarboe's note not due, this other contingency would force him to act at once.

And so, now suddenly struck by the instant necessity of the crisis, he stood there staring, making no answer to the agonized young man before him.

Mansfield's cry of despair hardly reached his consciousness—the cry of:

"So, then—you won't let me have it?"

"What?" asked the cashier, confused.

"I can't tell you why I stole it—I can't, *can't!*" the boy cried in anguish. "It wasn't for myself anyhow. It was for—for— No, no! I can't tell!"

Dazed for a moment and unable to collect himself, Slayton shook his head in vague negation. A glint of lamplight on steel caught his eye.

"Here! Drop that! Drop it, you young fool!" he shouted, leaping.

"Stand back!" cried Mansfield in a choking voice. "Look out now! If you won't give it to me I've got nothing to live for! I'll lose Enid and disgrace her and everybody; I'll go to Sing Sing, and—"

Swiftly the cashier struck with surprising strength. The pistol spun through the air, clattered across the table and thumped to the floor.

"You young idiot!"

And Slayton caught it up.

"None o' that now; you understand? None o' that here! No cheap melodrama in my house!"

He flung the weapon into the desk-drawer and slammed it shut. Mansfield stood there staring at him, white to the lips.

"I tell you," he quavered, "if I don't get that money I'll surely do it one way or another. There's plenty of deep water between here and New York, and—"

"Drop your nonsense!"

Slayton's voice had gone rasping and harsh.

"Suppose you did do it, you lunatic? What possible good would that do? It's stupid, to begin with, and the worst possible kind of welshing. No thoroughbred quits that way. And talk about wrecking Enid's life! What could possibly shatter her worse than that?

"Would it accomplish anything? Would it put back the twelve hundred? Would it clear your name, or—"

"Do I get it or don't I?" demanded Arthur, livid.

"You don't deserve to; but—"

"I'm going to get it? You'll give it to me?"

"Confound you, yes!"

"Thank Heaven!"

"Better thank *me*, you fool! Come to my desk at nine in the morning, and take the envelope I hand you. You're saved temporarily. In a day or two I'll arrange—"

"Oh, how can I ever—?"

"Come now; come, come! Cut that! This is no philanthropy. I'm simply doing my duty, my Christian duty; that's all. I'll lend you the money. You can pay me in monthly instalments. As I was going to say, we'll arrange suitable terms."

"I'll be your—your slave as long as—"

"Don't talk rot! I'm tired now. Here it is almost midnight. A nice time you've given me, I must say. Get out! I've seen enough of you. Go on—go home! And mind now, no nonsense! And be at my desk at nine, sharp.

"Not a word! Not a word! Get out—and plague take you!"

CHAPTER IV.

The Dawning of an Evil Plan.

MOTIONLESS, Slayton stood listening a moment to make quite sure Mansfield was on his way. The outer door thudded shut, reëchoing through the silent house. Steps crossed the porch and made off along the walk with diminishing sound. These faded into silence. Mansfield was gone.

"Good!" ejaculated the cashier, nodding with contentment. "*He's* out of the way at all events. Nearly spoiled everything, confound him! But as it is things are turning my way again."

The prospect was indeed encouraging. This accident of fate might after all prove a blessing in disguise. Slayton was not slow to understand that the boy might prove wonderfully useful to him after all.

"If my brains haven't turned to ivory and my heart to water," thought the cashier, "I can use him on a pinch, and use him hard! Twelve hundred, eh? And all ready to blow his foolish head off for that trifle? And wouldn't tell why he stole it?"

Slayton rubbed his sleek hands together with satisfaction. He began to catch glimpses of some deep motive in the boy's actions — something far deeper than wine, women, song; than cards, roulette, the ponies. What that something was he could not even guess as yet; but he felt certain it existed.

And once he could discover that something he believed, he hoped—yes, already he definitely calculated that he could—mold young Mansfield to his purposes as a potter molds his clay.

The clock, striking midnight, started him from his reflections. The time had come for action if anything were to be done to avert impending disaster. He produced a bunch of keys from his trousers' pocket, unlocked a lower drawer in his desk and took out a neatly-wrapped parcel. The very care with which this had been done up typified the man. Methodical, cold, precise, and neat in all his ways, suave and outwardly impeccable, he stood for all that may be summed in the one word: "Respectability."

Slayton opened the parcel, took out a gray wig, a false beard and mustache and a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. These properties, saved from the ama-

teur theatricals of the previous winter, now bade fair to assume a rôle of great import.

In five minutes the metamorphosis was complete. With intense satisfaction Slayton surveyed himself in the glass. He had become wholly unrecognizable. Nothing now remained of the personality that had been. In place of the gentleman of forty-one, an elderly man of broken-down and seedy appearance stood there on the rug before the fireplace.

"Grand!" ejaculated Slayton. "Why, I might pass for my own father!"

He felt a sudden sense of security. Nobody could ever be able to assert that he had been out of his own house that night. He knew that if ever he were suspected of the crime he had now definitely planned to commit Mansfield's testimony would give him an alibi.

Mansfield could be made to swear that he had left Slayton at home close to midnight. He could be made to swear that Slayton had not taken the 12.17 train to St. George and the ferry; and this, Slayton knew, was the last train till morning.

Exultant, the cashier continued his preparations. He was just beginning to realize what a stupendous piece of bull-luck it had been all around that had driven Mansfield to see him. If the thing had all been planned in advance it could not have worked out more beautifully.

Slayton threw the string of the parcel into the fire, then carefully put back into the desk-drawer the paper that had enwrapped his disguise. One might have thought so slight a matter as a sheet of brown paper could possess no possible importance; but Slayton believed otherwise. Now that his mind had been fully made up to the deed he meant to do he intended no step to fail, no link of the chain to show the slightest flaw.

His intelligence, logical and incisive to almost a superhuman degree, weighed every chance and analyzed every contingency. One possibility in ten thousand existed, perhaps, that the disguise might be called into question. By wrapping up the things again in the original paper that still bore the name of the dealer from whom he had bought them he could strengthen his case. He could establish a claim that the disguise had never been out of the parcel since the time of the theatricals. Ninety-nine persons out of a hundred in opening a package will throw away the paper. Slayton was the hundredth. He saw possibilities even in a sheet of manila.

Having locked up the paper for further use, he put on his boots and discarded his smoking-jacket. Then he went out into the hall, and from the closet under the stairs took a disreputable old coat and overcoat, also a battered felt hat—clothing he sometimes used for working round the garden, in rainy weather. He slid an electric flash-light into one of the pockets, and made sure he had a pair of gloves.

"No finger-print evidence for me!" he muttered. "That little detail is worth looking out for. Well, now"—surveying himself in the mirror of the hat-rack—"I think I'll do!"

As an elderly, rather shabby but still respectable citizen he stood there smiling at himself. Then he returned to the library, took the memorandum of the safe-combination that was written on the little slip of paper, and pocketed his keys and a bottle of machine-oil which he found in the drawer of his wife's sewing-machine.

Lastly he put on a pair of old, well-worn rubbers, and buttoned the shabby overcoat tightly up about his throat. One last look in the mirror convinced him that all was perfect. He was about to extinguish the electric lights when an idea struck him. Hesitant, he debated in his mind; then once more returned to the library. He opened the drawer into which he had thrown Mansfield's pistol, and took out the blunt-nosed, brutal weapon. Critic-

ally he weighed it in his hand a moment.

It was, he saw, of large caliber—forty-something at least. Had Mansfield carried out his intention with such a gun he must inevitably have mutilated himself in a shocking manner. Cool as Slayton was he shuddered at the thought of what might have happened there in the library; and a sense of fear assailed him as the new idea flashed to his mind that under those circumstances he might easily have been convicted of murder.

In any event, Mansfield's suicide would have forever destroyed all hopes of his clearing himself from the financial web that now enmeshed him. It would have fatally delayed him and have banished every hope. Slayton realized how closely he had verged ruin, and cursed the boy under his breath.

An ugly set of the jaw betrayed Slayton's inner character.

"He'll pay for this later, confound him!" the cashier muttered. "He'll pay. But now— Enough of this. Time's up. I must be going."

Swiftly he extinguished all lights, left the house, made certain the door was locked, and then struck into a brisk walk toward the station, a quarter-mile distant. Already off to southward he could hear the piping whistle of the locomotive. Everything had been figured to a nicety. He would arrive exactly on time. There would be no delay, no lurking in the roadside bushes to wait for the train; no enervating suspense on the station platform, should he venture there. Slayton smiled again.

"It's all fitting together like a Chinese puzzle, bit by bit," said he. "A few hours more and this burden, the intolerable horror of this menace, will be lifted from my shoulders forever."

Exultant, he strode along, breathing deeply the frosty air of late November. A magnificent night that was to be abroad—a night that should have turned his thoughts to better things; to wonder at the beauty and majesty of nature; to thoughts of uprightness and honor; a night after the like of which only a few each year brood over earth and sky.

No snow as yet had powdered the world with fairy jewels. The light from a convexed moon, now and then obscured by vagrant clouds through which it seemed swiftly to stoop, limned with surprising clarity each house and wall and tree. The tang of approaching winter vivified the air. Never had Slayton sensed a greater fulness of life, of power. He pulsed with a plenitude of energy, with purpose, with keen and conscienceless strength.

To him the night seemed one fitting to witness his act of liberation. He felt that freedom now lay close ahead. It seemed inevitable. His will, his purpose would make it so.

Scornfully he thought that only weaklings bow before threats of disaster. Real men, strong men with capable hands and brains, he reflected, know how to meet each peril and weather every storm.

Inflated with a sense of his own power, the cashier strode on and on. Of a sudden the train slid into view, a long checker of bright spots running swiftly through a patch of oak forest. Far across the night were flung raucous echoes from the screaming locomotive as it signaled the next stop. Slayton quickened his pace a trifle.

As the train ground to a stop, with brake-shoes spouting cascades of fireworks, he mounted the steps of the platform. A figure in a balmacaan and an olive-green felt hat was moving toward the smoker, directly toward Slayton.

Firm as a rock the cashier stood there. Mansfield, he clearly saw, was suffering from an extreme attack of nerves. The boy's sidelong glance was furtive. Ordinarily his blue eyes held steady, clear, and unafraid. Now they shuttled uncertainly. The clamp of his teeth on the pipe he had forgot-

ten to light supplemented the shiver that racked his body. Plainly Arthur was about "all in."

For a second or two Mansfield's look rested full on the cashier's face there under the gleaming lamps of the station. But no sign of recognition appeared. Slayton knew that his disguise was absolutely perfect. He had not been detected, and he would not be.

"Bo-*ard! All* a-board!" chanted a brakeman, swinging his lantern.

Slayton smiled very grimly to himself.

"Perfect alibi," thought he as he entered the train. "He and I are the only passengers to get on here. He'll swear if need be that I was at home when he started for the city, and that nobody got on to the train here except a nondescript old man. Perfect!"

Mansfield went into the dim-lit smoker. Slayton followed, and sat down two seats behind him to watch his actions. The boy's nervousness did not decrease. It seemed rather to grow more and more acute. Half a dozen times he lighted his pipe before they reached the municipal ferry, and half a dozen times it went out. He shifted in his seat, picked up a discarded paper, tried in vain to read, threw it down, took off his hat, and replaced it.

The cashier, almost alone with Mansfield in the car—for only one other passenger sat there, drowsing at the extreme rear—buried his chin deep in the upturned collar of his old coat, pulled down his formless hat, and feigned sleep. But under the hat-brim his slit-closed eyes kept gleaming watch. And hidden in the big false beard his lips were smiling ominously.

Mansfield ventured a glance behind him, saw only a gold-spectacled man asleep, and felt relieved. Presently, as the train swayed racketing through Stapleton, the cashier saw him take a photograph from his pocket, gaze at it with rapt intentness and passionate feryor, then press it to his lips.

"The young fool!" thought Slayton.

All that he could see in Mansfield's love was that it bound shackles on the young chap's wrists. An impediment such folly was—a giving of vast hostage into Fortune's keeping.

On and on clashed the almost empty train, over switches, through sleeping suburban towns, past red-eyed lights that glowered in swift trajectories, away, away! Finally a long skreel of the whistle blared its announcement that the terminal was near, at the ferry.

Mansfield slid the photograph of Enid Chamberlain back into his pocket and buttoned his coat tight. Again he glanced around. Slayton saw that the boy's eyes were gleaming—wet with tears.

A sneer rose to the cashier's lips.

"Idiot!" he muttered.

And of a sudden deeper and more ominous thoughts began to cluster—birds of evil omen—in his brain.

"Perhaps it might be done," he whispered, fixing his hard eyes on the boy. "Perhaps it might be done, after all. Who knows?"

CHAPTER V.

Discovered?

NOISELESSLY the flat key, which Slayton had carefully oiled so that it should not squeak, turned in the lock. Silently the grillework door of steel, likewise treated to a few drops of oil, swung inward. And in the silence Slayton entered the enclosure, listened a tense moment, holding his breath, then soundlessly closed the door behind him.

Temptation whispered:

"Leave it open! In case of trouble you'll need to have it open for a quick getaway!"

But with superior intelligence he resisted. It was essential, he knew, that he should leave everything in normal condition as he passed. An open

grille, if discovered, would precipitate disaster.

He listened eagerly, there in the gloom of the bank office, lighted only by the glaring incandescent that hung before the door of the huge safe, fifty-eight feet to his left. Slayton knew it was just fifty-eight feet. There was no major measurement of the building he had not familiarized himself with. Not that any very definite idea of robbing the vaults had ever been borne in on him till that night; but rather on general principles. His methodical mind, coldly impersonal, had a passion for information of every sort. No telling when it might come useful!

So there he stood and listened. Not a sound. Already he had penetrated close to his goal without a sign or signal of discovery. A few minutes more without interruption and success — golden success—would fall to his lot.

Just a few minutes more — a few terrible, nerve-racking minutes — each an eternity of possibilities! How precious every second was! Yet Slayton did not hurry. Calmly, deliberately, with perfect self-control and careful thought, he was executing each move precisely as he had planned it.

In this supreme moment, as in all the moments of his life, system and calculation ruled him. Through all his nervous tension he realized the prime necessity of coolness. One false step now would mean— What would it *not* mean? Everything in life now summed itself in just this: Ten minutes more of undetected work.

"Ten minutes!" thought the cashier, harkening with terrible intentness. "Just give me ten minutes without that old fool of a Mackenzie butting in and I'm safe!"

So far everything had gone with perfect success. Slayton had watched Mansfield descend into the subway entrance at South Ferry; then, sure that the young fellow was safely on his homeward way, had briskly walked up Broadway to Cedar, down which he had turned.

A few minutes later, quite positive that no patrolman had observed him and that old man Mackenzie was down in the safe-deposit vaults, he had let himself in at the side door of the bank.

This door he had noiselessly closed after him. Quickly he had removed his disguise and had thrust the glasses, wig, beard, and mustache into his overcoat-pocket. In his own likeness now he stood there within the enclosure. Nobody in the world had seen him, *as Walter Slayton,* in the city. His plan was working to perfection.

Once the job should be done, he knew, two or three minutes would suffice to put the disguise back again. He would return to Staten Island as he had come, an old man. And meantime, if Mackenzie should just happen to discover him, what could be simpler than to make him believe — believe—

An uncomfortable doubt assailed the cashier. Right well he knew how hard-headed, shrewd, and suspicious the old Scot was, with all the canny wisdom of his nationality. Here, had Slayton been willing to face the fact, lay the weak link in the chain — the possibility of Mackenzie's inopportune arrival on the scene.

Still the cashier lulled his anxiety to sleep with the belief that on a pinch he could convince the old man that all was well. And really what was there to fear? Not one chance in a thousand existed that Mackenzie would discover him.

The old man, he well knew, was down-stairs in the safe-deposit vaults, where he had a comfortable chair with a well-padded cushion to ease his aching bones. From long years of studying Mackenzie's habits Slayton possessed absolutely unimpeachable data on them. Mackenzie acted with the fixed precision of an automaton.

With the oncoming of age he had fallen, like many old men, into precise, mechanical ways. Now Slayton could have taken an oath as to the

watchman's location. The fact that the hour was 1.37 vouched for his presence in the vault. From 1.15 to 1.30 A.M. it was his invariable custom to make a round of the offices, the big barred enclosure guarding the safe-doors, the rear rooms — those of the bank-directors, officers, and one or two others — and then finally to descend the steel stairs to the subterranean chambers.

Here, his duty done and all the recording-clocks duly punched, he was wont to sit and read for an hour or more. He rather leaned to theology and mathematics in his reading. Once he had dreamed of being a clergyman or a professor with letters after his name, but Fate had been unkind and had amused herself by making a night-watchman of him — an exemplary night-watchman, be it said; a paragon of a night-watchman. A harmless old man withal, though sternly devoted to duty with incorruptible zeal. Sturdy, too; rude of fist if need were, and keen of eye, with an accurate trigger-finger. No man, this Caledonian, to play trickery upon.

Slayton, however, still felt perfectly secure. He knew he possessed the old fellow's great good-will. The gift of many a second-hand book had long since won his heart. And, furthermore, Slayton felt positive that at this precise moment Mackenzie was absorbed below-stairs in his beloved reading.

"He won't be up for half an hour at the inside," muttered the cashier, advancing with extreme and noiseless caution through the passageway between grilles, toward the door of bars guarding the safe. And half an hour would far more than suffice. Fifteen minutes, even ten, would bring success.

Slayton paused again to listen, then again crept forward, crouching, furtive, ominous. Making a slight détour to the right along a side passageway past the bookkeepers' cage, he pulled down the shades in front of two windows through which the safe-door could be seen from the street in the glare of the sixty-four candle-power incandescent dangling before it.

A certain risk, by no means small, was involved in this act, but it had to be done. Only the patrolman on the beat would ever notice that the shades were down, if he should chance to pass; and Slayton knew he was not due yet for more than thirty minutes. With the shades up, however, any chance pedestrian might see him at work and raise the alarm. By all means those shades must be lowered.

This, too, was part of his elaborate plan. Though Slayton's definite decision to carry out this coup had been formed only a couple of hours previously, the major outlines of it had long been taking shape in his brain. All he had had to do was fill in those outlines. And this his keen intelligence had readily accomplished, even in the limited time at his disposal.

He smiled again shrewdly. Another step had been accomplished. All that the job needed was system, a level head, and steady nerves. Once more he advanced to the attack of the safe, his rubber-shod feet perfectly soundless on the tiling. Through the bars of the enclosure that guarded the vault of concrete and steel, with its massive laminated door that carried an intricate machinery of wheels, levers, spindles, and pinions, he could now clearly see the goal of his salvation.

He chose a key from the bunch he carried. A moment, and he had unlocked and swung wide the door of massy bars. This he passed through and closed again, but left unlatched, so that at an instant's notice the way of retreat would be open.

And now, tense with excitement in spite of all that he could do to hold his aplomb, with narrowed eyes and gloved hands that trembled a little, with uncertain breath and hammering pulses, he stood close before the safe itself.

Not all his coolness and skill of planning, not all his steeling of the nerves, nor yet the dispassionate coldness of his blood, could keep the cashier from sensing a violent emotion at this, the moment of his first "break."

His previous crimes had all been subtle thefts, the juggling of figures in massive ledgers, the falsification of totals and balances. Now, however, all was different. Here he stood before the safe, a burglar, brother to the yegg, differing from him only in the adventitious fact that he possessed the combination, in place of "soup," to open the huge doors.

Slayton began to shiver annoyingly. Under his breath he cursed himself. At this stage of the game was he going to stand there and get stage-struck? An attack of nerves just now would surely be the climax of misfortune. With a strong effort he tried to pull together. He was finding out that for an inexperienced man—no matter how conscienceless—to plan a robbery is one thing; to execute it another.

Despite the fact that he had already lived this scene in imagination, now the reality of it gripped and shook him. Impatiently he tried to thrust introspection aside. Forcing himself to action, he reached up and snapped off the incandescent. The drenching glare of its illumination, flooding down in a cone upon him, would make him a shining mark, a target of targets, should the old man happen upstairs from the vaults.

Then in complete darkness he drew from his pocket the little electric flash-lamp. His pocketbook yielded up the slip of paper bearing the precious carbon-copied figures—the cipher to the combination recently changed; a cipher whereof only two records existed, one in the hands of President Chamberlain, the other now held in Slayton's gloved fingers under the light-pencil of the electric ray.

A week later Slayton could have accomplished nothing. The bank was on the point of installing a time-lock, before which nothing save nitroglycerin or thermit will avail. But now only a combination faced the cashier. And, armed with the little piece of paper, it possessed no more difficulty than A B C. He read:

R 5 to 40; L 4 to 50; R 3 to 25; L 2 to 91; R to stop.

Deftly he turned the knob, sensing with satisfaction the play of the fine mechanism. Through his mind passed a grim amusement at thought of the way in which he would circumvent all evidence against him. His gloved digits were leaving no telltale marks. And in the morning the slip of paper with the combination would be found locked in his desk. He could prove it had never left the bank. He could prove he had never quitted his home that night. No possible chance existed of attaching the crime to him.

Nodding with greater confidence, his nerves now steadying, he worked. And now again he glanced at the paper.

With a slight, an almost imperceptible click the tumblers fell into position. Slayton's eyes gleamed as he turned the brush of light from the dial to the wheel of polished metal at his right hand.

He rotated the wheel, drawing back all bolts. Then he seized the handle and pulled. At the familiar action—the very same thing he had already done some thousands of times—the door swung easily and gently outward. And yet how different now the feeling of it was!

Slayton snicked off the current that operated the little flash, and for a moment stood in complete darkness, seeing nothing save some vague gray patches far across the bank-windows giving on the street. He seemed to glimpse bars across those windows. Bars! A vague shiver of prescient foreboding insinuated itself into his consciousness, but with impatience he shook it off. Still a glimpse of barred windows *was* disquieting.

"Confound my nerves!" he growled to himself. "Going back on me, are they?"

Another moment he remained there, listening with terrible intentness. Was there anything to hint at trouble?

Nothing.

A heavy and oppressive stillness brooded over the darkened bank at that eery morning hour—an hour of the ebb-tide and dregs of human life. Through the hushed black of the rooms the *click* of the electric timepiece jumping forward a minute sounded with startling loudness. Slayton's muscles tensed. Even that slight disturbance, that little impingement of energy on the muted inertia of the place, seemed of ill omen.

Outside, a dull, vague murmur bespoke the city's lethargy. A distant tram-gong seemed an impertinence in face of the vast sleep, the entire paralysis of life that marks the Wall Street section after midnight. From the East River one or two drowsy, booming whistles drifted up. The hoot of a motor siren over on Broadway mocked the inertia of the sleep-numbed city.

Convinced that he still remained quite undiscovered and that no danger menaced, Slayton now once more switched on the beam of his search-light. Quickly he threw back the bolts of the inner door of the safe. Then, hesitating not a second longer, he stepped boldly into the strong-room of steel, the goal of all his thought and toil and peril.

Money, hard cash, specie in huge masses exerts a peculiar, almost a maddening, effect on the average man. When confronted with the chance to dig both arms to the elbows in real currency he is apt to lose his better judgment, to run amuck, to do hasty, ill-considered, incriminating things. If he steals he will often steal in stupid and unscientific ways that not only limit the amount he can get away with, but also lay open the way to his subsequent detection.

Not so Slayton. He stood far off from the beaten paths of averages.

For long years and years he had daily and hourly handled money as the commonest of all commodities. He knew money as he knew nothing else. He understood money, thought money, lived money.

To count, handle, appraise, estimate, check, weigh, pay out, and take in money had for many years constituted his life. Now, confronted by all those bales, stacks, rolls, and bundles of the familiar stuff, he found his emotions subsiding.

Well, was he not at home there in that vault in face of all this currency? The cash soothed and calmed him. At sight and touch of it his cold-bloodedness returned; his pulses ran normally; the fever left his blood. Again he smiled, but this time confidently, masterfully, the smile of a connoisseur who sets his hand to something that he dominates and knows and loves.

Methodically now, without a single false move and without the loss of a second's time, he began his work. To a "T" he knew exactly the place of each denomination, each medium, each kind of specie, bills and other assets in the vault. Leaving aside the compartments devoted to commercial paper and securities, and likewise shunning the canvas sacks of metal, he thrust his hand into a certain pigeonhole where reposed two hundred and fifty one-thousand-dollar bills in neatly sealed packages of fifty bills each.

Well did he know that the number of each of those bills was recorded in a certain ledger. Even as he abstracted three of the packages and slid them into his inner pocket, he was preparing for the next step in his procedure. He might have taken more, but that might have increased the subsequent peril; and his idea was not to make a haul, but merely to clear himself from his complications with a generous margin to turn round on. No; he would take only one hundred and fifty thousand

dollars. That would do very well indeed. And the next step would effectively block all tracing of the bills.

To this end he took down the ledger containing the entries of the bank-note numbers, turned to the pages thumb-indexed "1000," and ripped them clean out.

These pages he folded and stuffed into his inside coat-pocket, thereafter replacing the ledger in its proper position on the shelf.

He reflected a moment, then nodded with assurance. An important step toward a perfect alibi had now been taken. The theft would assuredly be fastened on somebody in the employ of the bank. No outsider would ever have thought to tear out those pages. Slayton neither knew nor cared about where the blame would fall; but at the back of his mind that nascent idea kept glimmering out again — the idea that if it should become known that one of the junior clerks was in financial trouble suspicion could not help pointing its finger that way.

"Well, anyhow, it's no affair of mine," said he, preparing to retreat, now that his work was done. "Let them figure it out for themselves."

For a moment he scrutinized the interior of the vault by the rays of his search-light. He paid particular attention to the floor. Nothing had been dropped, he assured himself—nothing that could in any possible way incriminate him. He had left no finger-prints. Should any tracks of his rubbers be detected that would amount to nothing. The rubbers were of a style and pattern sold by the million; moreover, they were worn quite smooth.

Cautiously he returned to the door of the vault, flashing his little antenna of light ahead of him. A few minutes more of non-interference would liberate him, would put him back on the sidewalk again, disguised and safe. Only a few minutes more! Already he seemed to breathe the outer air again—the frosty, life-inspiring air of liberty!

When—hark! What was that?

Recoiling, Slayton gave ear. Back into the shelter of the vault he shrank, peering out tensely into the black.

A step?

Could that be a step out there somewhere in the corridor leading from the safety-deposit vaults below stairs to the bank office?

All Slayton's blood seemed to coagulate round his heart and clot there and stifle him.

A step!

A step indeed—the old man's step! Mackenzie's!

CHAPTER VI.

Fate Mocks and Tempts.

LOUDER now it sounded, louder and nearer still. It paused a moment as with nascent suspicion; then came on and on again, shuffling a trifle, yet alert.

Livid, Slayton switched off the light of his electric beam and crouched there breathless in the dark. Terrible curses rose to his lips, blasting imprecations, furious maledictions against the old meddler who now for the first time in weeks, perhaps, had just taken it into his head to break his schedule, to mount the circular stairs, to make an extra turn about the bank.

On came the step, and on.

In a few seconds, Slayton knew, Mackenzie would reach the office door, would see that the incandescent before the safe had been extinguished, would start investigating.

The end—the end of everything in life for Slayton—now all at once on the ultimate verge of success, had hurled itself to smite him down. Failure mocked at him — ruin, destruction.

And a sudden tigerish hate leaped into the cashier's heart as he crouched there in the blackness of the big safe, watching. He felt no personal hate against the simple-minded, honest, faithful old Scot, but hate of him as

a tool, a means, an instrument of wreckage in his path.

For the first time in his life Slayton felt a thrill of the lust for blood. He comprehended, as with a lightning flash of apperception, how man can raise his hand to strike his brother down. But *he* would not kill, whatever might befall. Of that he felt entirely positive. Subconsciously he knew he would not kill. Let come what might, he would not stain his hands with murder.

Yet a strange, persistent shudder quivered through his body. He felt a fever that singularly seemed a chill. Only by clamping his jaw could he stop the castaneting of his teeth. And in the dark his lips parted in a snarl of hate and malice.

Now all at once a little wavering will-o'-the-wisp of light became visible in the bank office, a spot of white illumination that wandered vagrantly over desks and grilles, along the walls, across the windows.

"Mackenzie's flash-light!" thought Slayton.

His heart sank. In a second now the old man himself would appear. Everything would be lost. Ruin would smite him down.

Slayton heard a grumbling voice. Obviously old Mackenzie's suspicions had been aroused by something. The watchman was talking to himself as he advanced. Then, just as a vaguely dark form moved in the darkness through the far doorway, Slayton understood.

The watchman's light had found and was resting on one of the lowered window-shades. Like an inquiring eye, it held its gaze a moment there. And again Slayton heard the burring accents of the old Scotchman in self-communion.

Mackenzie moved forward. The light jumped sharply. Slayton knew the old man had noticed that the incandescent before the safe had been extinguished. A sound of breath, quickly inspired, told Mackenzie's surprise. Then the dark form pushed forward with determination.

Swiftly the cashier thought. Was there any means of escape? Could he still retreat around the vault, gain the corridor, reach a door, a window?

Even as his fevered mind leaped for the hope of safety he knew it was futile. Every window was barred with steel. The only door he could hope to reach was in plain sight of Mackenzie's sharp eye. And in that stillness any slightest move might now betray his presence. Nothing remained to do save crouch down and wait and hope —hope against every possibility that in some way or other he might yet escape detection.

But now already Mackenzie was advancing.

The watchman had at last become convinced something was amiss. The incandescent might have burned out; but the window-shades could not have lowered themselves. Mackenzie knew trouble was afoot. And with the bulldog courage of his race, with an admirable and self-immolating sense of duty, the Scotchman hesitated not, but advanced to ferret out this mystery.

Even through his welter of hate and venom Slayton felt a stab of admiration for the simple directness of the old man's courage. He rang in no alarm, summoned no help, waited not to reconnoiter or to estimate the peril; but as if going his usual rounds pressed forward down the grilled passageway toward the safe.

As he came on and on, grumbling to himself, telling himself that something was "surely wrang the noo," he sprinkled the floor with light from his flash. Suddenly the flash stopped short, resting on some object that lay upon the floor.

"Whut—whut—is *this?*" Slayton heard the Scot exclaim.

Tensed in panic-stricken observation as the cashier cringed there peering round the edge of the safe-door, he saw the vague form bend as though to pick up something. Then the little

silvery beam of light played over an object held in Mackenzie's hand. Hand and object stood out with startling vividness by contrast with the dense curtains of the surrounding gloom.

Slayton, peering, felt a sudden weakness turning his bones to water.

The thing that old man Mackenzie was staring at in mute amaze was—*Slayton's wig!*

With some strange cynicism of mockery Fate had ordered that this cursed object should drop from the cashier's pocket and that it should now have fallen into the hands of the enemy. Probably at the moment when Slayton had drawn the search-light from his pocket he had also pulled out the wig and let it fall.

Now there it was, an absolutely damning bit of evidence against him.

Without it some slight chance of escape by clever ruse and dodging might still have existed. With it no hope whatever could possibly be conceived. Slayton's whole salvation depended on the alibi that Mansfield could be forced to give him. But with that wig in evidence the entire defensive case would drop apart like a rotten fabric.

Slayton felt suddenly very sick. He could imagine the impending scene, the investigation, the disgrace, the anguish of his wife, the horrible penalties already surely hanging over him. He seemed as if meshed in the hideous complications of a nightmare; and yet he knew that this thing was only too terribly, too inescapably real.

Even at this minute if he could get out of the bank and away unseen that accursed wig of his would damn him. Not only would it start a train of thought in Mansfield's active brain—a train that would be fatal to him—but it would inevitably start investigations that could only have one ending. The wig could not fail to be identified as his property. So long as that damnable wig were not recovered the future could mean absolutely nothing for Slayton except prison stripes, barred windows, utter ruin, endless and infamous years of torment.

Another and a different passion all at once was born in the cashier's chilled heart—the primal instinct, deepest-rooted of any in the universe—self-preservation.

Now all at once, a staggering choice had been flung up at Slayton—the choice of certain punishment or of some possibility in risking far, far more that he might win complete freedom.

And like cloud-wrack before the breath of tempest all the cashier's antipathy against murder vanished. He knew in a flash that Mackenzie must die.

Must die if he, Walter Slayton, were to live!

Once more his hand sought his pocket. It closed there on the corrugated butt of Mansfield's automatic. Eagerly his fingers clutched this harbinger of quick salvation.

He realized that the shot would be easy. The distance was not over twenty-five feet at the outside. He could fire through the big steel bars with perfect ease. He could not miss.

Steadily now with nerves of ice and nerves of iron, steadily, silently, rigid with purpose, he withdrew the weapon. He poised it, ready, waiting, eager; and as his flexed forefinger tightened on the trigger he smiled again. This time the smile was of joy.

Never had Slayton felt so great a thrill of happiness. The touch of that gun to his hand was a benediction. Down came the grim snout of the pistol—down, down, along the edge of the safe-door. Steady it held, and true, perfectly aimed against that massive rest. The barrel, as it found its mark, froze to accurate position there.

Slayton's heart, which had been thrashing rather wildly, now once more was beating with normal pulsation. An extraordinary calm, poised and highly efficient, had succeeded the cashier's earlier emotion. With busi-

nesslike precision he drew a careful bead on the dark blot of the old man's form, vaguely outlined by the reflection of the search-light's little beam.

His gloved finger tightened, tightened still more.

All at once Mackenzie made up his mind to act. He turned, ready to go.

The crash of the report, though loud, seemed less so than Slayton had expected. Quick echoes snapped back at him. Then all grew still again.

Silent, eager, perfectly self-possessed, he waited, giving ear for any sound of danger. He heard none. Old man Mackenzie's form had vanished. No groan arose, no cry, no murmur. All was silent as the grave.

Ice-cold, calm, watchful, the cashier stood there, the pistol still in hand. Was Mackenzie merely shamming? Had the shot really taken effect? Or was some ruse in preparation? Slayton could not tell. But with wily astuteness he waited.

If no policeman had happened to be in the vicinity he knew that a good chance existed that the single shot might have passed unnoticed. There was more than a good chance. The detonation could not have carried far, hemmed in, as it had been, by those thick walls of masonry.

A minute he remained there—two minutes—three; and each was an eternity.

Nothing.

No sound. Not a breath. Absolute silence still reigned, interrupted only by the nervous *click!* of the electric chronometer.

Then Slayton advanced. Through the door of the great steel cage he passed, and entered the grilled runway where Mackenzie had stood.

Suddenly he stopped.

"Got him!" he ejaculated.

The electric light, falling from Mackenzie's hand, had rolled to one side and stopped there. Now its single eye of radiance was fixed on a terrible something, motionless and grim. A something that, half-glimpsed, set the hair bristling along Slayton's nape, stopped his breath and racked him again with sudden chills.

A something of his making; a something that silently cried out against him with a terrible, still voice, never again to be put away or forgotten, never again to be shut out from him, any more.

A something that he trembled to approach; that he dared not see; yet which, with resistless force, grappled him toward itself.

A something—

Death!

Right in the light-circle of the lamp the dead face lay, appealing in its supreme helplessness, with glazing eyes uprolled, with gray hair blood-drabbled.

Slayton shoved the pistol back into his pocket. He felt a certain pride through it all that his shot had been so extremely effective. Yet horror overbore all other sensations. He moved mechanically. His staring eyes blinked strangely as he stood there peering in the dark.

Dazed, he drew nearer.

"Mackenzie! Oh, Mackenzie!" he whispered loudly.

He almost expected the inert clay to answer. He had known the old man so long, had talked with him so often and so often had brought him books—No, no! Mackenzie could not be dead!

Stooping, he shook the old Scot by the shoulder, now terribly limp.

Pale and scared, he stood up again. For a moment he remained there peering down at the body. Then he turned and kicked the search-light away. The sight of those dead eyes passed all human endurance.

The light went out. Now all things lay folded in curtains of velvet gloom. This was far worse than anything the rays could show. He produced his own light and cast its rays here and there, seeking the wig.

There it lay, still clutched in the old man's fingers. Slayton snatched it up and crammed it into his pocket.

He was safe now, at any rate—safe from the charge of robbery. Yes, but—the other, the vastly more terrifying charge?

All at once his teeth began to chatter violently. Full realization had just been borne in to him that he had killed a human being—that he was a murderer.

He had meant only to steal, not to take human life. He had not meant to kill. He, Walter Slayton, was not that kind of man. And yet he *had* killed! And there before him lay the body of Mackenzie!

He shrank away from it. Before him seemed to rise a vision of the death-house, the narrow door, the pitiless cement chamber under its glaring reflectors; and, in the midst of all, a terrible thing, black, ominous, waiting—the Chair.

Cowering, striking the horrid apparition away from before his eyes, he retreated. Back he recoiled from that corridor of death. Haggard, he peered about him. What now?

With a kind of desperation he realized that something must be done at once to lay the guilt of this, as of the other crime, onto other shoulders than his own. At once or it would be eternally too late. He must get back to Oakwood Heights, change his clothes, conceal the money and be ready—fresh, shaven, alert—to return to New York on his usual train.

Not one iota of variation must be observed in his conduct. He must prepare himself for an ordeal of acting such as would tax the abilities of a consummate artist. And time was growing now so terribly short!

With a violent effort the miserable man pulled his nerves together. He went over to the water-cooler, drank two brimming glasses of ice-water and felt a trifle relieved. Then he stood there, pondering.

Obviously there could be no use in locking up the safe again. Now that the old man was murdered there could be no delay in the discovery of the theft. Nor would there be any advantage in putting back the money. That would only bring about his bankruptcy and help fix suspicion on him. No; as he had begun, so he must go through to the end—to the very end, whatever that might be.

He shuddered, and for a moment leaned against the steel bars of the vault-cage to steady himself.

Once more he took thought. His only way, he decided, would be to prove a perfect alibi. He had left no tracks, not even a finger-print; nothing. Let them suspect him all they pleased, they could prove nothing. He must remove every possibility of proof. He must fasten the crime on somebody else. Some other man must take this medicine; not he!

"Somebody else!" said the cashier. "Somebody else must take this. But who?"

Pondering, he once more began to resume his disguise. As he reached into his pocket for the wig, which he had stuffed in there, his hand fell in contact with metal. It recoiled as from the touch of a viper. The automatic!

Slayton grunted wordlessly. The feel of that cold, murderous thing, which only five minutes before had flicked out a human life, sent shudders of repulsion rippling through his unnerved flesh.

But almost at once a different thought possessed him. Again his hand sought the weapon.

"Well!" said he. "It's his, isn't it? It's Mansfield's?"

Startled by the wide-flung possibilities all at once opened out before him, he stared as if petrified.

"It *is* his!" he exulted. "His! And so—and so—*why not?*"

A laugh of triumph rose to his pallid lips.

"Yes!" he gulped. "It can be done! It can—it shall!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

The Stuff in Him

by Harold Titus

MURDER doesn't always out.

Certain types of dishonesty can be covered successfully; sharp practise oftentimes passes as good business judgment; hypocrisy is exposed only now and then. But when a boy is ashamed of his mother it places upon him a stain as ineradicable though not so distinct as the spots of a leopard; others may not know the why of the stain, but they sense its presence and shun the branded one instinctively.

That was why Walker Langberth had never made a close friend: he was ashamed of his mother, because she did not come up to his and his father's conception of a lady.

Walker was an only son of a man who was to him all that his father should be, and of a woman who, in his opinion, was all that his mother should not be.

Herbert Langberth dressed to harmonize with the upholstering of his electric automobile, and, to make sure that he was a gentleman, was reservedly rude to the manicure who went over his nails every other day. He had pale eyes and the scent of an expensive toilet water.

He was always three months in advance of the mode. He never showed that he enthused over anything, in business or other affairs. Two types of fastidious reticence exist—the high-held-chin and the high-held-nose sorts; his was of the latter, and maintaining the tenor was ever of primary importance with him.

Anna Langberth was the sort of woman who refused to consider their significance to the big-S society when identifying herself with movements. She passed up the better-known charities, avoided the wrangling of the anti-tuberculosis organizations, and the thought of serving on charity-ball committees and kindred bodies never entered her mind.

She labored intensely with two neighborhood mothers' associations, fought valiantly for suffrage without once getting her name or face on the society pages, nursed Walker when he was a baby, and every Friday morning appeared in a dust-cap to help her one maid renovate certain rooms of the big house her husband had built on Jefferson Avenue as their home.

Anna had been Herbert's stenographer back in those younger days when he impotently schemed to make the little legacy which his father had passed on to him inflate itself into a fortune. In the stress of that game he had moments, hours — yes, whole weeks — when his self-consciousness disap-

peared and he became plain Herb Langberth, prosaic, blundering young manufacturer of buggy-tops.

At such times he attracted the girl.

The pursuit of the pot of gold brought them close to one another, for Anna's practical head was a splendid business machine, and Langberth unconsciously leaned upon it. Her idea opened the way to affluence, and in a moment of swelling gratitude Herbert offered her a wifely share of his fortunes; it happened to be one of those occasions when his veneer of affected gentility had been scraped away by a corner of the world which had walloped him as he squeezed through a tight place to conquest, and Anna, made open-hearted and enthusiastically optimistic by the triumph of her theory, accepted him decisively.

Later it was Anna's sharp foresight which tore him loose from certain but moderate success and made him take the long chance.

She already smelled burned gasoline and heard the purr of motors. Buggy-tops became subordinated to tops for motor-propelled vehicles, and when the automobile industry greeted Detroit one bright morning like a moist mushroom, Herbert Langberth was there, on top with his tops, and his hour of arrival at the office was set back from nine to ten-thirty.

It was, for him, attainment.

He gave no thought to the means; he did not recognize in the foundation of each upward step Anna's steady, clear thinking; he could not perceive his own fundamental weaknesses or he would have been convinced that he had risen because of his wife, and such thought would have been disconcerting to his maturing ego.

He sighed.

He was through with effort and spontaneity; he was through seeking. Thereafter he was reserved, calm, deliberate, expecting men to come to him and ask. Which they did—in business matters. He moved slower, dressed better, grew more conservative in ideas and language. He was established; he would not budge.

Walker's age was five when Anna Langberth realized the change in her husband and knew that sympathy between them was an exhausted grace. It was a blow, true, but she would not let it be crushing. She plunged into her various works even more deeply and pinned all her hope to the son.

He resembled his father physically, to be sure, but she detected in the child many of her own characteristics, which were foodstuffs for that hope.

Things might have been different had Anna had her way in educating Walker, but at the critical moment she had just refused to accept a place on the executive board of the city's most popular charity which her husband's money would have purchased; she told him that the other members were insincere, and that she had rather continue her work down among men than look upon them from a point of economic vantage.

It was a bitter disappointment to Herbert, for without his wife he could not mount the social ladder, and in the psychic depression which followed Herbert's chilly "Very well, my dear," she did not find the courage to differ again when her husband broached his plan of sending their son to a surprisingly expensive and unquestionably aristocratic private school.

"I believe in public-school education," was all she said. "This other isn't democratic."

"I understand; the fact is my reason," answered he, his pale eyes dilating the least trifle, his nostrils flaring slightly.

Anna said "Very well," in her turn; then, to assure herself: "Children with the right stuff in them are unspoilable," and in her tone was a suggestion of a confident wait-and-see spirit which nettled Herbert; he was too much his idea of a gentleman to be frank, however, and covered it.

Walker went to school, and within the fortnight was calling their lone

maid nurse — much to her Hibernian irritation—and within the year had a splendid start at developing into a little super snob. At the age of ten he judged people solely by what "they had," and when he finished the grammar school he was a walking social register.

Walker was his father's son! Anna Langberth told that to herself time after time, and yet would not be convinced. She went at her work harder than ever, for she was one of those unbeatable women; to brood would break her.

When Walker entered the high school he was at an age where he came to reallze — or thought he realized — why he was unlike other boys.

A difference did exist. They did not take to him eagerly. He was tolerated, but he never could find a vulnerable point to their inner circle. He commenced to criticise his mother, for in her he believed the fault lay.

His father was without basic shortcoming, the boy thought: wealthy, refined, well dressed, member of the best clubs. But he lacked the augmenting factor of a harmonious wife to make his social success complete. If his mother would only give up this and that for such and so! He argued with her petulantly, and Anna put him aside shortly to hide the hurt.

That was why Walker Langberth was ashamed of his mother.

She did not do those things which would rank her with the mothers of those young chaps whose companionship he coveted, and he held that that was the obstacle which kept him back. Of course he did not know that the fact that he could be ashamed of his mother for such a thing made others of his sex sense a difference, a disqualifying unwholesomeness about him.

It worked in a circle.

Father and son became warm companions; in fact, they were the only close friends, one to the other, that either possessed. They nursed a kindred grievance—the clear thinking of Anna Langberth, though they did not term it such.

They thought alike, acted alike, looked alike; Walker determined that he would be like his father, a gentleman, and in spite of the handicap of a mother who was as a millstone about his neck. When he visualized the future he saw himself dressing leisurely and faultlessly, arriving at his father's office at ten-thirty after, perhaps, a call at his tailor's, sitting pensively before a flat, mahogany desk in a darkened, subdued office.

That was all. The sitting was everything to him. No inner urge clamored for expression in works.

Anna Langberth kept on, busier than ever, taking on more work, ever scheming to get at the roots of her son, always baffled; her soul remained large and mellow just because of her work for human beings. Had she cut that off her life would have withered.

Some day, she told herself, Walker would do something real and awaken to realities; some day the stuff in him would appear, but it required all her optimism, all her faith in the boy's blood to hold up that belief in the face of his growing artificiality.

By the time he was ready for the university she had grounds for despair.

His only serious thoughts were those occasioned when he looked at the mothers of those young chaps whose companionship he held priceless. His mother would not be of that circle, consequently it was forever closed to him. And why? His father had the necessary money; it was just because she was inherently common.

The vague hope that he might, removed from the dragging home environment, find a niche in that desired coterie, led Walker to choose Ann Arbor as the locale for his higher education. He went—his father with him —and selected a suite, furnishing the rooms luxuriously.

"Of course, if they ask me to join a fraternity, I can still use these things," he explained.

But they did not ask him to join a fraternity. He could afford it; he was good to look on, being big and dark, high chested, well proportioned; his manners were outwardly faultless, his small talk of the same value as that of those for whose society he longed; his family name was good enough.

But, you see, about him was that taint, obscure, defying identification, yet there; and the subtle senses of other, healthy-minded men were attuned to detect it. He was ashamed of his mother, and the fact put him beyond a pale.

When Walker strolled into Larry's or Joe's he was seldom invited to sit in at a table.

He usually drank his glass of beer—he was very moderate—standing at the bar, and alone. Coming out of halls he often fell in beside men of his section to walk a way with them, and often had them desert him for others who were going in the same direction without so much as an attempt at excuse. They did it unthinkingly, as young men will, and because they did it unthinkingly, the fact was significant.

Peculiar truth: whenever discussion ran high and earnestly in class-rooms, those who did the quizzing seemed to do very well without young Langberth's opinions. His rooms were in a house untenanted by other students, and his visitors were limited almost exclusively to that class of youths who came for the real purpose of seeing how a rich independent lived.

No one really avoided him, no one consciously cut him, for his conservatism withheld him from positions in which he might be snubbed. He was a funny guy to the campus, and without further thought he was dismissed.

He was nice to a number of girls. He had a car at Ann Arbor some of the time, and drove them about the country impartially. He took them to the theater and sent them flowers, and was an occasional attendant at the Michigan Union dances, though he disliked the democracy of such affairs.

But somehow these same girls forgot Walker when they came to giving their sorority parties.

You see, in every sorority is what vernacular harshly terms an allotment of sad sisters, girls who are not popular in campus society; and when their sisterhoods give parties the generally approved young ladies often repay some of their obligations by inviting men who have given them attentions on behalf of some of their more retiring, lesser-known members. But not even once was Walker Langberth's name mentioned as a proposed escort for these wallflowers.

They did not reject him; merely, they did not think of him.

The difference between Walker and other men was instinctively known, registering itself on the subconscious mind of women. They accepted his favors; then forgot him. That was all. Had they analyzed themselves they might have detected just a trace of repulsion; but they never thought about him twice, so they were never prompted to analyze.

Langberth kept this solitude to himself. It was only in an increasing closeness to his father and a more pronounced coldness toward his mother that its effects appeared.

Going into Detroit week-ends, as he invariably did because there was nothing to hold him in Ann Arbor, he went at once to his father's office rather than home; the two men greeted one another with warm hand-clasps and just the right amount of graciousness. Going home at dinner-time, Walker would say, "Hello, mother," and kiss her formally because it was the thing to do.

Sunday night his father would drive him to the train; Mrs. Langberth was never asked to go along.

The only evidence of a reaction on Anna Langberth was that she joined another neighborhood association, and that in those moments when she was

least occupied an ache would have shown in her eyes had it not been for the firmness of her mouth. The situation had come to a point now where spoken words were necessary to assure her optimism that it still lived. Each night the last thought in her mind was:

"O God, bring out the stuff in him!"

And in the morning, after becoming fully awake, she repeated aloud the single-sentence prayer.

So for three years. Never a virile emulation, never a dynamic mention of the future. A fop—with only one unsatiated desire. That: a trifling bauble which he held more dear than his mother.

Walker returned to the university for his senior year, and during the first day turned in to the Athletic Association's office to register. Phil Bartelme, the athletic director, was alone in the place.

"Langberth, you're a good, big fellow," he said, looking the boy over with a half serious smile. "Why don't you get out for the team? Ever play football?"

"A little—back in prep."

"Up in your studies?"

"Surely."

"The coach 's short of men this fall; you'd better think it over."

Walker did. The idea had never come to him before, but here might be a wedge. Athletes were invariably popular; he had seen some frightful roughnecks win honors through their gridiron activities; he knew he was physically fit, and of course he was up to them mentally. If he—

He arose from the leather chair in which he had lounged to ponder, and stared down onto State Street.

If he should make an athletic success—what? Well, might it not be an asset that would admit him to that desired crowd? Once in, might he not carry his advantage back to the city with him? Might he not be rated as something socially after all, in spite of his mother?

Those were the questions he asked himself, and the color mounted in his cheeks as he visioned possibilities.

Yost looked curiously at Langberth when he came on the field to report. The youth appeared well in his togs, clean-limbed, competent. He handled the ball effectively, too, with an easy grace that seemed natural.

"Run in tackle on these formations," the coach told him and watched closely, walking along with his plowed-ground stride as the eleven ran through the simple tactics.

"That tall fellow, he looks good, y' know," the coach told an assistant.

His eyes lighted at the prospect, for men were scarce that season. They were needed in all divisions of the varsity, and this new chap moved like a real one.

A week. The light in the coach's eyes became troubled when he looked on Walker. He tried him in the back field, on the ends, at center. In all places he appeared to be equally efficient.

He flung himself at the tackling dummy with unquestionable assurance. He caught on to the fine points of football's rudiments easily and remembered when to use them. He had poise, strength, adaptability, and intelligence. And yet the coach chewed his stogy indecisively.

"Something, y' know, something wrong," he would say, and shake his head and kick casually at the turf.

Perhaps the man was yellow, though he did not show it in scrimmage; perhaps he did not have the staying powers, though he seemed to round into fine fettle easily. It was the lurking, clinging thing that the coach detected.

The boy was ashamed of his mother. Yost didn't know; yet he could not trust Langberth, and when a coach cannot trust a player, that player stands small chance of being used.

The attitude of the other players was that of all men toward Langberth. They were neutral; when his name was

mentioned the comments which followed were always negative. He might stand between two men in the shower-bath, both of whom knew him as well as they did each other, and still they would talk *past* him, unthinkingly exclude him.

None of the squad ever asked for his opinions, no one ever argued with him, none but the coaches commented to him on his development.

The season advanced; Walker remained with the varsity squad, but always in the second string. Twice he had a few minutes of it in minor games; but when the serious end of the schedule was approached, Langberth established title to a place on the bench.

He saw his hopes of attacking his vexing problem from this athletic angle falter.

For half the season Yost had watched and worked and tried to tell himself what was against this player, what the subtle imputation was which precluded his trust, and then he let it go as an unsolvable mystery, for he had more serious troubles. A back broke a collar-bone; another developed rheumatism, and the line was always questionable.

He must make an eleven out of tag-ends, but when the time for decision came he relegated Langberth to the lowest level of the first squad. He was to be used only in case of disaster, and the boy realized it.

Herbert Langberth took a mild, gentlemanly interest in his son's athletic venture. He did not care for football himself; once he had said it was atavistic. Still, he held a different outlook now; his boy was indulging himself in the sport, so the father smiled conservatively and hoped that Walker derived good from it.

Anna Langberth read the sporting pages secretly, and once when Walker's picture appeared in a group her eyes became misted and she prayed aloud:

"O God, bring out the stuff in him!"

October sped to its conclusion, and the first weeks of November went down. On the fifteenth Herbert Langberth said to his wife:

"I have engaged a box for the big football game at Ann Arbor, Saturday. I think it would be the thing for us to go. Walker may play."

His wife said that she would go; not because it was the thing to do, did she consent, but because her heart yearned. Athletics were to her vague trivialities, yet she knew that they demanded a certain assertiveness, and she hoped—she hoped—

About a big football game is something that goes straight down to the deepest seats of emotion in all humans who fall within range. It takes hold of the players and lifts them high above ordinary levels; it grips the spectators and sets them wild without understanding. You have seen a man who was the veriest dullard of his class demonstrate lightning logic on the gridiron that would shame a Phi Beta Kappa; you have seen bonneted old ladies who did not know a forward pass from the referee's whistle, dance and clap their hands and chatter volubly as the evolutions on the sward below them brought the contest to a pitch of shrill tensity; all because the tone of the game had worked into their blood.

This was one of those games. The bark of the banked thousands as the squads ran out onto the green gridiron heralded that keen enthusiasm; the pung of boot against ball as it spun on the first kick-off rendered affirmation, for in that drummy sound seemed to be a vigorous resolution, a distilled spirit to do that was most eloquent.

With a snap the two machines settled, head to head, and hung, and tried one another's strength, like battling bulls.

Tentatively, cautiously, cunningly, all the time as though he were withholding a surprise, the Michigan quarter felt out the defense of the opposing eleven, gaining slowly, conservatively,

as at the cost of great effort. Then, flash! and the ball spiraled through the air deliberately, lightly, sailing in a lazy arc to meet the scudding player who darted out from a flank to be under it.

A split second was consumed in completing that curve, and in that interval the human cliffs caught their breath sharply, held, and then loosened it as the runner gathered the oval close to his heart and stumbled forward a dozen yards ere the flinging, clinging arms brought him down.

And then the other team came back, steadying itself on spread legs, like the bested bull, prying, bending slowly to seek the most effective angle, sure of itself, infuriated, yet suppressing wrath before reason.

Again the feeling-out—a more puzzling process this time, with fewer results; once more the attempt to switch from close formation to the wide-open play, and back upon itself the blue eleven crumpled before the onslaught of the other. It had worked before, only to give itself away; and while they relaxed the instant to gather strength for this second spectacular move, they were rushed backward and down and demoralized, swept from footing, drubbed to their knees and, following the figure, gored, as a red-legged player, worming under the tangle of limbs, clawed the ball to his breast.

Repetition.

That other eleven, alert, compact, like a metallic thing in its precision, felt out the tackles, the ends, buckling back upon itself as the power it combated heaved forward a forbidding force. Then a mysterious delay, a breathless, bewildering interval, and a runner had come from nowhere and was skirting wide toward the side-lines. With a yelp the cheering sections sighted him, and with thundering feet the component units of that tangled, swirling mass of men out there separated and charged, bringing him down with a bounce and a skid, while the linesmen ran forward with their chain.

Now the north sections demanded that Michigan hold, while across the way white-faced rooters swayed forward from their hips as they insisted on more gains. From that conflicting crash of sound the ball rose, slowly and easily; the man who had kicked, poised, straining to see the result. The ball went up and on, steadily, not turning, nose pointed truly, and floated down between the goal-posts, just dusting the cross-bar.

A goal from placement had been scored against Michigan.

Such was the beginning. Out of the screaming tumult which arose above the former levels of cheering as that inflated oval fell was born desperation; the dogged will of one faction to hold its margin, the violent mechanics of the other to overcome the handicap.

From their box on the side-lines Herbert Langberth and his wife watched and caught the infecting strain that went taut from bleacher-top to bleacher-top, singing and humming before the shifting fortunes like telephone wires which swing across waste places.

The man sat forward, and his voice, as he commented on the unfamiliar play, was the least bit raised. His gray neck-scarf was not arranged with its usual precision.

Anna Langberth's mouth was set as she watched the straining and charging and gaining and losing of those determined fellows out before her. She did not understand the technique of the contest, but she knew they had something to gain, something to lose, and that the final fibers of their beings were consecrated to definite ends.

She could hear it in the whistlings of their breath; in the drumming of their feet as they charged up and down before her; in their grunts as body met body; in the sharp, rasping rattle of signals, and the lift and heave and breathless hold which came before the collapse as one line or the other

gave — or as, by the force of their pitted stress, they both wilted into a tired tangle.

To her right sat the Michigan reserve forces.

She could see her son, back straight, blanket about his shoulders, arms folded proudly, as though it made no difference, as though the game mattered not at all. Alone in those thousands he was unroused. The man on his right sat far forward, knees wide apart, and between them he swung an arm back and forth from its elbows, back and forth; and with every swing she could see that his thumb snapped, as a man who throws dice and begs of the tumbling cubes. On Walker's left, the boy was constantly up and down; standing erect and flinging his fists; on his knees, straining, trembling, as though the very force of his will would carry the play out yonder.

"Oh, God," she whispered in a silence that fell, "bring out the stuff in him! Make him like those others!"

They carried a player from the field, and a fresh man sprang nervously from the bench, pausing beside Yost an attentive moment as the coach talked earnestly. Then the game went on, up and down, back and forth, shifting, gliding, sliding from edge to edge; rush, scud, pass, punt!

Over and over again, while the first half sped by.

When they had played out five minutes of the third period, the most unlearned in the crowd could see that a reaction was setting in. During that killing first half the home eleven had outplayed its strength. It had checked a superior force, and now the effects were showing.

The fighting did not stop; the show of determination was as great as ever, but in the little details weakness cropped out. Men slipped or stumbled or misjudged, and were late by inches; and those minute defects and neglects counted heavily against them.

Man after man went out from the side-lines, and man after man dragged his weary limbs in toward the zone of rest. It was a maw; Yost stuffed his sound timber in to hold that tide, but each fresh unit meant a slight disorganization, a drawing out of adjustment a trifle. For a moment it would seem to be an improvement; then the losing would go on, steadily, relentlessly.

It was a gasp of relief from the thousands when the long, lean back punted, for those effective kicks meant a staying of what seemed the inevitable: more scoring against them. But the booting was no relief for those on the side-lines. Keeping their goal safe would not bring scores. And to win Michigan must count—a touch-down.

The last quarter opened, with fresh cries from across the way, where the visiting eleven's rooters defied hoarseness; they were to the good, and their team had only a weakened opponent to hold.

Yost's strides as he paced along the turf became longer, more eager. He talked to the substitutes as he passed them; they were fewer now; the bench was heavy with grimed men who had battled their best and found themselves wanting.

"They're going to pieces! They haven't the stuff to last!" a man in the box next the Langberths' said, and on his last words Anna turned her head quickly.

Then she looked at her son. His arms were unfolded, fingers gripping his padded knees, and she thought, with a thrill of half-frightened joy, that his chin was thrust a trifle forward.

Five minutes dragged on—and seven of the final quarter.

Yost halted, turned, and surveyed his squad.

Barstow — a bonehead; Weyler— without courage; Horning, Jeffrey, Robbins — all lacking some vital factor; Langberth—

A new look to him. His lips were parted, his shoulders were stiffly squared, and he leaned forward from

the hips rigidly; the cold, carefully preserved balance which had always characterized him was gone — a new individuality was about the boy as distinct as the change in a man when good health replaces debility.

Walker Langberth had seen other big games, but never from the side-lines; he had watched other contests from that favored proximity, but never a big game.

This was the climax of the whole cruel process of training; toward it the squad had been pointed through those long, highly strung weeks; for this they had submitted themselves to blows and strains. No! Not for this, either; they had taken that punishment to win, and the machine out yonder was proving that its preparation had been inadequate to attain the coveted end!

Through the long minutes of the first half he had looked on unmoved; he had been apart from the whole, out of sympathy with the purpose as he had been out of touch with all others during the years of his selfish, artificial life. And then, like a blow on the lips, it struck his understanding.

"They can't win!" he heard his voice say with a tone that had started in scorn and ended in a half sob.

No connection between the setting and his changed view-point was evident; it was subtle, the touching of some long latent life in his heart. The sound-surf which smothered all noises close about him made its import comprehended; the virile genuineness of that futile effort out yonder grew crystal clear—yes, for Walker Langberth, *accusingly* clear.

To those begging hosts above, to those dog-weary men before him, nothing but a common cause mattered.

They were bound as closely one to another as blood itself can bind men. Yesterday or to-morrow—differences might exist, but in this hour of fused interests they were stripped to the soul; they were a unit with no distinction between elements; and he knew, from that newly awakened part of himself, that such unity is the essence of all worthy effort; knew that men might differentiate when nothing swayed in the balance, and because of that damning qualification, all such distinctions must be based on arbitrary, inconsequential premises. It was a white light, blinding him, burning away artificialities, searing those unreal sensibilities which he had held were the utmost in life.

All sharply reasoned and swiftly, his old standards melted before the heat of his awakening. He felt his body stiffen, he felt a flood of emotion clogging his throat. Those boys out there, weary, beaten, were his fellows. He was of them, belonging among them with a fitness that would *make* them accept him. They—

"Langberth, what d' you think you could do out there?"

The words stung into his consciousness and he looked up, startled, to see the coach laughing at him, as though laughter would cover his disappointment.

On the words Langberth was beside Yost, his face flushed, his breathing out of adjustment for the moment under the stress of excitement. The coach's laughter stopped short; he whispered quickly, intently. Then the cheering draggled to silence as Langberth ran out, waving a hand at the referee and fell into a back-field position, while the worn veteran stumbled dizzily as he realized relief.

"Yea, Langberth!" rasped the bleachers; then a queer tremor came up from his bowels, thrilling him, making the skin of his back move as a dog's must to set the hair erect.

It was in his blood!

It had punctured and spread about under his skin—that spirit! And the tired, gasping roar from the seat-tiers made him know that they depended on him, made him understand that those same men who had left him to walk with another, who had unconsciously cut him time and again; that those men

who had refused to take him as one of their number, saw in him now only a hope.

And he had no thought of them as individuals, as classes; they had called him to save their cause — theirs and *his!* He was of them at last, with that new part of his inner self growing until it overwhelmed all else—that part which urged him *to do*—that part which had been buried until a moment ago!

The quarterback was whispering in his ear in great sobs as his breath tore in and out, and the long, lean punter was slapping his back with a bruised hand.

Then the series of choking signals, the crouching of the forwards before him, the irritating wait in which one knee gave and made him wrathful at the weakness of his body. He felt the ball slammed into the pit of his stomach, and was conscious of the bloodshot gaze of a red-legged tackle who played loosely before him — a challenging, defiant, superior sort of gaze, and as Langberth's head crashed into a broad back, he felt a worrying growl in his throat. He could still behold that red leer.

He swung around as some opposing force disarranged his angle of attack, but he felt his shoulders going forward—then fall; he gripped the ground with his cleats, and only when his cheek tore into the turf did he cease clawing for more inches.

He arose with a splitting yelp in his ears and some one cried:

"Goo' boy! You cut her!"

He knew that he had gained, and a strange, unfamiliar thrill, the thrill of accomplishment ran through him. He had done, answering that avid cry—*to do!* He was heedless of that rocking mass of faces which shone with love of him. He knew nothing except that his goal-posts were so close, that those at the other end were so far away, and that his heart cried him on to reduce the distance. His signal again and for the same point.

Once more the slam of hard oval against his stomach, and it angered him, coming so hard that it took his wind. He hit the line and swung and straightened away, wriggling and turning to elude arms and make for the hole he saw. He slipped through, took a stride, spun around as fingers hooked his jersey, ran backward, tripped, fell, rolled over and was buried under men, who thumped on him like great, steaming clods.

There were thundering yells once more, and he saw the head linesman urging his assistants forward. He had made the down!

His name, chanted by an army, floated to him, but he did not think on it. His mental machinery was whirring in a new manner of thought. No motive except the one directly before him; nothing ulterior. He was doing this to win and staggering under the load of responsibility; he marveled at the novelty, even as they crushed him into the same place a third successive time.

"Goo' boy!" the quarterback was crying—*crying.* "You're fresh; for God's sake stay with it!"

And a fourth time he stormed at the leering tackle. Lo! The man had ceased to leer. He staggered forward uncertainly to meet the attack, threw his arms wide, and lunged. Langberth knew that his knee caught the fellow's shoulder and flung him aside; then forgot, for the open field was before him and he centered about the fact that he crossed the second white line before they banged him down.

He was a bit dizzy when he staggered up. One ear bled badly; his cheek smarted where grime ground into the bared flesh.

They relieved him. The lean kicker plunged this time, at the same hole; once more the groggy tackle fell forward impotently, but the force which opposed him was as weak; a yard was all the play netted.

Again they called for Langberth, and again he charged the pregnable

point. It was the football of Heston's time without the aid they could give Heston. They might rush before him, but they could not push or drag him along. They could weaken the wall; then the force of his lone body must drive out the yards!

"Twenty-two—six—eleven—"

"Give it to me!" screeched Langberth, running out of position to shake the quarter's arm. "The rest can't do it; I'm fresh! Damn your soul, use me up!"

"Signals!" the other panted. "Seventeen—eight—four—ten—"

And Langberth galloped anew at the crumbling flank. He gained, and when he took his position once more he saw a strange man before him. He laughed in triumph, for some one was tenderly helping the red-leering tackle to the side-lines.

He rushed another time, swearing shrilly through his teeth as he threw out a shoulder to catch the new man's impact. He went on through, shaking them off savagely, and when he staggered back, wiping the dirt from his stinging eyes, he knew that maniacs and not sane humans cheered him.

Some one flung an arm over his shoulder and whispered a profane endearment in his swelling ear. He looked up; the goal-posts loomed before him.

And that meant that the secondary defense was drawn up; he had a double wall to puncture. He swayed giddily. His head hurt him; he was nauseated; his knees rebelled.

The game-cock of a quarterback called his own signal. He made a yard. They tried an end and made two; they rushed the right wing and wasted the effort.

Then Langberth made it a fresh set of downs through his old hole.

The musicians of the varsity band were battering dents in their instruments. Up in the press-stand reporters, dictating to their operators, put their faces close to the telegrapher's cheeks and shouted to make themselves understood. In the crowd a man cried as he swore.

Yost stood still, chewing a stogy, head a bit forward.

It was unprecedented in football! One man, almost unaided, making that sixty-yard march through the line! Up and up he crept. Slower now, for he had the concentrated strength of the opposition to combat, and those who went in his van were weaker, less effectual.

Gaining reduced itself to a case of feet.

"First down and a touch-down to go!" bawled the official, and Langberth found himself steadied after a moment of panic.

So much depended; it was uncanny, that responsibility! He nerved himself.

He wrested a yard at the first trial and felt the vertebra of his spine grit at the shock. The lean punter took the ball a hand's breadth on the other flank. Young Langberth crouched and leaped and hurtled, and pushed himself his body's thickness through the stubborn mass of flesh.

The quarter expelled his signals by throwing his whole torso forward; his eyes were set, and he turned his head to change the direction of his gaze.

"Time!" screamed the player. "Hurry!"

"—Sixty-four—three—"

The ball ker-plunked back as the voice of a whistle slithered through the sudden sounds.

The game was over — when this play should be done!

Walker Langberth heard it; the shrill sound was the dominant fact in his consciousness. He gathered the ball to him and hung his head and churned the trampled ground with his feet. The man before him in the tandem formation fell before he reached the line and Walker had to leap him, destroying the force he had gathered.

He was alone, unaided, except for the faltering forwards.

Again he felt rather than heard the growl in his throat as he struck the line and his body buckled. His cleats were in some one's back. He lifted his head and shoulders, shook his big body, twisted it in a quarter turn, lifted his voice to a shout as he put the last fiber of his vitality against that awful pressure, sidled, slipped, and went down—shouting and shoving.

Light filtered to him as they slowly unpiled. He saw that the ball he held was smeared white. He looked up. A bunting-covered cross-bar was between him and the afternoon sky. He had won the lost game.

"I guess that's about all that's necessary," he said only half aloud, for he was very tired.

And all these several thousand words have been written just to give due significance to what happened next.

Young Walker Langberth, bloody, bruised, grimed, fagged utterly, trembling from limb to lip, wanting to laugh, wanting to cry, found his feet. They were all about him—the squad, the coaches, the officials, Yost himself, and already he could see the special officers being swept away as the crowd surged over the fence, driving box-holders before it.

Walker looked about him and tried to smile.

Yost's hand was on his shoulder, the varsity captain was clinging to the other arm. He saw his father coming toward him, beaming, hands outstretched, walking-stick dangling from one wrist; about the man was a changed manner, more raw, more genuine.

Then the boy's legs gave.

He stumbled and recovered, swept past Yost with a bunt that spun the coach half-way round; he tore loose from the detaining affections of the captain; he struck a man who tried to grab his legs and lift him up. He passed his father without a thought.

He saw her through the crowd, buffeted and bewildered by the rush of mad youths. He sprang at her almost savagely and drew her hard against the mire of his uniform.

"Mother!" he cried, the hysteria coming to relieve and the tears running through the grime of his cheeks. "I did it, mother! Mother, I did it!" he cried and sank to his knees before her, hiding his face in her skirts.

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THE CALL

BY LYON MEARSON

LOVE is knocking, knocking, knocking,
On the portals of your heart.
Pride, on its foundations rocking,
Cannot keep us long apart.

Love is singing, singing, singing,
To your soul within its walls.
Pride may not shut out its ringing.
What avails it marble halls?

Love is winning, winning, winning,
Pride is failing, gold is rust.
In your heart a song is dinning.
You will answer, as you must.

Hard Hit!

by Arthur W. Marchmont

Author of "By Right of Sword," "When I Was Czar," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

BECOMING Sir Robert on the death of his uncle and cousin, Bob Marlowe, who has learned to be an expert mechanician, makes a bet with a friend that he will cross the Continent on foot, earning his living. Dick Gendall sees him off. At Issy he gets work making flights in an aeroplane; then is knocked out by a big red car in which is Estelle Gaudin, who has fallen in love with him. Having lost his memory, Bob, as Jean Colonne, plays chauffeur for a gang of auto bandits headed by Gaudin. He has promised to marry Estelle. Enid Truscott is held prisoner by the gang, and Bob, recovering his memory, tries to rescue her.

CHAPTER VII.

The Chase.

THE revolver flew yards away in the shock of the attack, and the two men grappled in a struggle in which each knew his life was at stake. Gaudin's story was true — that the police were coming; and capture by them meant death, or, what he dreaded more, a life in the galleys or the Isle du Diable; and he put every ounce of his great strength into the fight.

But Bob was the stronger of the two, and was fighting for the girl, and in her presence; and, what was of even more importance, he knew how to use his strength to the best advantage.

The one man fought more like a wild beast, with oaths and guttural cries of rage, clawing and kicking and writhing, mad with lust for the blood of his antagonist. The other was as cool and resourceful as he had shown himself many a time with the gloves on in the gymnasium.

There could be only one issue in such a combat, and but for Bob's weakened condition as the result of his recent injuries the end would have come sooner than it did. A practised wrestler, he had no difficulty in avoiding his adversary's attempts to get at his throat; and, despite the advantage which the first attack had given to Gaudin, they were soon on equal terms as they writhed and wriggled and struggled across the narrow and almost dark landing.

Foiled in his attempt to choke the life out of Bob, Gaudin's next effort was to get his thumbs into his eyes, intending to gouge them out; but the attempt failed, for Bob, finding the other man's grip relax for the moment, dashed his fist again and again into his face.

At that moment a smothered scream from Enid drew Bob's glance to her. The old hag had thrown a large shawl over her, and was dragging her away toward the stairs.

Maddened at the sight, he made a frantic effort to end the fight and get to her assistance. The two men were close to the stair-head, and with the

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for October 16.

object of thwarting the old woman's progress with Enid, rather than with a thought of any advantage in the struggle itself, Bob forced his antagonist in that direction.

But in an instant he saw the advantage it gave him. Gaudin was underneath them, and when they reached the stairs his head hung over the edge of the stair and was without support.

Realizing his danger just as Bob saw the chance it offered, Gaudin made a desperate attempt to get away. It was useless. A crashing blow came down on his face, almost breaking the neck with its tremendous force. The hands relaxed their grip instantaneously, and the struggle was over.

As Bob rose breathless but unhurt, the old woman shrieked and fled into one of the rooms, locking the door behind her. He had no thought for her, not even seeing where she had gone; his only care was for the girl who lay, huddled up in the heavy shawl, just where the woman had dropped her.

He tore off the shawl and found that she had fainted.

He called to her and tried to rouse her, slapping her hands and using such crude means as he thought of to restore her; but she made no response, and he was at his wit's end to think of the best thing to do.

One of the three men, the second he had struck, was beginning to show signs of recovering his senses; and, as he was likely to be armed, Bob was in no mind to remain in the house. He had had enough fighting, for the struggle with Gaudin had been severe enough to exhaust him.

There were two other considerations, moreover. He had already lost more time than he could afford, and there was the unpleasant prospect of the arrival of the police. He would have no difficulty in explaining things to them; he knew that, but he also knew that the average French policeman insisted upon such explanations being made at the station.

This would inevitably entail delay, and no one could say for how long—quite probably long enough to destroy all hope of his winning his wager.

There was only one thing to do, therefore. He couldn't remain, and couldn't leave Enid there; and thus, whether she liked it or not, he must take her away with him.

Pulling himself together and removing the results of the struggle from his clothes as best he could, he dashed into Enid's room for his hat, and then carried her down-stairs and left the house.

To his surprise, two motor-cars stood in the little semicircle in front of the house; one a small, old two-seater, the other a fine, powerful modern car.

"A loan from the gods!" he chuckled as he laid Enid on the front seat of the bigger car, started the engine, and took his place at the wheel. As the smaller car was in front of his, he backed out of the gate behind, which stood open.

The path was narrow and winding, and the car a big one, so that progress was slow; and as Bob had no idea where he was, he stopped a moment or two, the car drawn across the road, while he hesitated whether to turn right or left.

That to the right, which ran to Bourg through Fontenay aux Rases, although he did not know it, appeared to be fairly open, so far as he could see in the twilight, while to the left there was a bend with some houses showing beyond.

He decided for the more open way. Enid had not yet recovered consciousness, and he was averse to meeting more people than could be helped until she was better. To drive through a town with an insensible girl by his side might start all sorts of questions and suspicions and lead to trouble; and his thought was to reach some spot at a sufficient distance from the villa, and then wait until she came to herself.

He had just turned the car to the right when a loud shout startled him.

A glance over his shoulder showed that the shout came from some men in a car which had come rapidly round the bend of the road, two or three of whom were gesticulating excitedly and yelling to him to stop.

Gaudin's warning about the police leaped into his thoughts. These were they, of course; and for just a second he hesitated whether to obey and explain or make a dash for it and escape, so as to be free to get away to Marseilles. At the same instant his eye caught sight of the congested blood on his hand, and he saw in a flash how seriously he might be implicated in the long and wearisome investigation which would be held into the matters at the villa.

This settled the question; and, instead of halting, he quickened up and dashed off, hoping that the speed of his car was as good as its looks.

Bob had not had his hand on the wheel a minute before he knew that the car was a racer; and it was with a little thrill of intense satisfaction that he saw that, although the police were getting everything possible out of their engine while he was running well under full speed, he was able to hold them comfortably.

He had a lead of some three hundred yards, and, as they kept shouting to him to stop and sounding their loud horn incessantly, he quickened and the gap between the two cars soon widened.

He had had plenty of experience both of road and track racing; the excitement delighted him; the rush of cool evening air acted like a tonic upon his jaded nerves; he had no doubt of the issue of the race, and he was thoroughly enjoying himself. Even if the police caught him, it would mean nothing more serious than the possible loss of his wager, while the fact that they were the police added to the zest of the adventure.

The fact that he did not know where he was bothered him a little, but as he dashed through Fontenay he recognized the place to his intense satisfaction and got his bearings. He had been at school at Sceaux, only a mile or two distant, and the whole district was as well known to him as that round his home at Achester.

In a moment he had fixed on his route. Bourg lay ahead of him, and just to the south of that place there were a number of little crossroads with sharp, sudden turns which only a driver of exceptional skill would dare to take at anything like racing speed. Every one of them would be worth more than a hundred yards in such a race as he was running.

Another bother was more serious. Enid! If the chase hadn't been so hot he would have pulled up and let her get out if she wished, but to stop at present meant failure.

The rushing air had much the same effect upon her as upon him. It revived her quickly, and before they reached Fontenay she had recovered sufficiently to sit up. A moment later a louder shout than usual from the police car startled her, and with a gasp of astonishment she looked back and then turned to Bob, who was too intent upon his work to pay any attention.

"Who are those men following us?" she asked excitedly.

They were rushing through Fontenay at the moment, and he had just recognized the church, and made no reply.

"Do you hear me? Who are they?" she cried, plucking at his arm.

"Don't do that!" he exclaimed with an impatient gesture. "You might upset us!"

"Then answer me," she retorted. Now that she was out of her prison, her courage returned, and she determined not to be taken to another. But she was afraid of Bob, for he had ill-treated her, and even struck her in that awful house.

She had not quite understood all that had occurred in the last hour or two at the villa, and the words of that

terrible old woman was still in her mind — that his real intention was to get her away from Gaudin for his own purposes. She would rather die than face such a fate.

"If you don't answer me I'll throw myself out of the car," she said after a pause, speaking with intense vehemence.

"You'll only kill yourself," he grunted.

"I'd rather die than be made a prisoner again by you!"

Knowing that it was one thing to talk about jumping out of a car going at a racing clip and quite another to do it, he did not answer.

His silence heightened her sense of peril and confirmed her belief that he had taken advantage of her unconsciousness to carry her off. She got up, therefore, and stood, swaying, a moment as she made ready to jump.

Taking his left hand from the wheel, he grabbed hold of her dress and pulled her back into the seat.

"Don't be so mad," he growled. "They are police. I'm making a bolt of it for reasons of my own, and as soon as I've shaken them off I'll pull up and let you get out. But you can't jump."

"I will unless you stop at once. You've deceived me once before, and you're doing it now. You're taking me away from those who will save me."

This roused his temper; not unjustifiably, considering all he had done.

"Even if you're only a girl, you might have sense to understand things," he said roughly. "I'm not bragging, but I've just had the fight of my life to make that brute Gaudin and the others set you free. Do you think I'm idiot enough to take a risk like that merely to fool you?"

This quieted Enid for a time, and she tried to piece together the tangle of her thoughts and distressing doubts. As they ran through Bourg she glanced back, and her heart sank as she saw how fast they were drawing away from the pursuing car.

"For God's sake, let me go!" she cried piteously, and burst into tears.

There was nothing in the world which touched his heart so keenly as a woman's tears, and he could have cursed himself for a soft fool in heeding them now. But Enid had made a very deep impression on him, and his instinct was to tell her the whole truth and let everything else go hang.

"You're about as unreasonable as a girl could be," he grumbled; "but if you'll only wait a few minutes you shall get out."

She was surprised at the effect of her tears, but she did not check them. The alteration in his tone was so great as to allay much of her previous fear of him. She half believed in his sincerity, but she affected to be far more distressed than she really was, and sobbed vehemently.

"You don't know all that it means to me to let those beggars catch me," he said, trying to temporize and find a way of avoiding a full explanation.

"What will it mean to you?" she asked between her sobs.

"In the state you're in you wouldn't understand; and, what's more, I can't tell you," he replied bluntly in his baffling indecision.

They had reached the first of the sharp turns, and as the car whipped round she cried out, fearing an upset, and began to sob again more vehemently than ever.

"You — you're only going to take me to some awful place," she stammered.

This decided him. "I'm not going to let you believe I'm such a scoundrelly cur as all that," he said almost angrily, and began to slacken speed.

"What are you going to do now?"

"Stop for the police. What else? I hope that'll satisfy you that you're altogether wrong."

The car was slowing down to a crawling pace now, and the police horn was heard again.

"What will they do to you?" she asked.

"Never mind about me. They'll help you: and that's all you seem to think about," he answered curtly in his chagrin. "Perhaps you'll believe now that I meant what I said."

This last proof had completed her conviction of his good faith. "I—I *do* believe it," she said.

"Then why the dickens do you want me to stop just when everything is all right?"

"I—I don't want you to stop—now. I—I want you to go on!"

"Do you mean that?"

The police were near enough now for their shouts to be heard, and she started nervously. "Yes. I—I want you to save yourself. Go on. Go on!" she urged excitedly.

He needed no second bidding. He laughed in sheer wonder at her sudden change, and lost no time in quickening the speed.

"Do you mean to stop in the car with me?"

"Of course I do. Do you think I wouldn't trust you after this? Hurry! Hurry!"

"We can still do it, I think," he answered. "How far are they behind?"

"Two or three hundred yards," she told him, looking back at the police who were coming up fast in the belief that the car had broken down, and began to shout again angrily as they saw it start off again, quickly reaching its former racing speed.

The rest of the sharp turnings gave Bob all the advantage on which he had calculated, and by the time he reached the open road once more all fear of capture was at an end.

After a few miles he turned eastward and headed, choosing the by-lanes and making short cuts, for the Bois de Vincennes, by way of Creteuil and St. Maur, but skirting round those places lest news of them should have been wired ahead to put the police on the alert to stop them. His plan was to look for a secluded spot in the Bois, leave the car hidden there, and finish the journey on foot.

"You seem to know every foot of the way," said Enid later.

"I have good reason to." A reply which recalled to her what she had been told—that he was the chauffeur of the red car.

"What are you? You have a trade, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," replied Bob, shutting down a smile. "I served my time in the engineering sheds; chiefly motors and so on."

That was why he had been chosen by this red-car gang as chauffeur, was Enid's conclusion; but she kept the thought to herself.

"Where do you work?" was her next question.

"I don't work for my living, if that's what you mean."

That was her meaning, of course, and she was sorry to get such an answer. He had saved her from a terrible fate, and although he had bullied and browbeaten her at first, and even ill-treated her, there must be some good in him.

A man who was ready to face imprisonment to stop a woman's tears could not be beyond reclamation, however great a criminal he might be. And he seemed anything but a criminal.

She sat trying to think of some way in which she could save him from his present life, casting curious glances at him now and again as he concentrated all his thoughts upon the management of the car. It was impossible not to feel a considerable interest in him. He was really a fine fellow; not very good looking; a strong face full of character, with the frank, clear-blue eyes of a soldier. Not a bit like the traditional portraits of men who led a life of crime.

"What a pity!" she thought with a sigh.

They had reached the Bois and were running at a slow pace as Bob looked about for a spot suitable for his purpose; and when he found it he stopped. "You'll have to get out here," he told her.

"Why?"

"Because I'm going to hide the car behind those bushes over there."

"But I want to go to the Hôtel d'Avignon in the Rue Plassy. Why abandon the car?" she asked in surprise.

"Two reasons. First, it isn't mine and I don't care what becomes of it; and—"

"But your friends?" she interjected.

"Oh, they won't mind. Besides, I expect it's been stolen, and some one might recognize it and ask questions which I mightn't be able to answer."

"But it's nearly dark, and I don't know where we are."

"We're close to Vincennes, and I can walk with you as far as that."

"You don't suppose I wish to be with you longer than necessary?' she exclaimed with a shrug.

"You'll probably be able to get some sort of vehicle, a taxi or something, to take you to the city. You can walk on ahead and I'll follow to see that nothing happens. But get out, please. Some one may come at any moment."

She got out, and after a rapid glance to make sure that no one was likely to see him, he drove across the intervening grass, turned deftly right and left among the trees, and stopped behind some bushes which concealed it effectually.

"You've hidden it completely," she said as he returned.

"And the sooner we're out of here the better," he replied. "Will you walk on, please, and as fast as you can?"

"I think it will be better if we walk together."

This surprised him considerably, and pleased him not a little. "You must have changed if you're not afraid to be alone with me in the dark at such a time!" he said as they started.

"I have something to say to you. That's all."

She appeared in no hurry to say it, however, for they were close to Vincennes before she could make up her mind how to begin.

"Which is the real you?" she asked unexpectedly, causing him to start in astonishment.

"I don't think I understand you."

"Oh, but you must! It's I who can't understand you."

"Let's leave it at that, then. At the present moment I can't tell you any more than that I am Jean Colonne, a motor mechanic. Here's Vincennes, however. There's a hotel a little to the right where you'll be able to find something to take you into the city. You're quite safe now, and there's only one thing I'll ask—that you won't say anything about me—at all events for a fortnight. It won't matter much then, perhaps."

"But I haven't said what I want to say yet."

"I'm sorry, but I can't stop to hear it."

"Then I shall walk with you."

"It's a goodish way to the Rue Plassy."

"If I am tired I can get a taxi," and she turned to the left toward the city.

"I suppose you'll think this is very absurd of me," she exclaimed as he caught her up.

"I was thinking of something else at the moment. You may be a great help to me at the Barrier."

"How?"

"Well, it just occurred to me that the *douaniers* may be on the lookout, and perhaps the police, also, if any word has been sent on describing us. Do you mind if we talk English when we're there? Americans can be as eccentric as they please without any questions being asked; and neither of us is in very good trim."

"Do you mean that you can speak English?" she cried in astonishment.

"I told you so before."

"Yes, but your accent—"

"Oh, I can do a little better than that," he replied in English without a trace of foreign accent.

This set her wondering, and her astonishment was vastly increased as they reached the Barrier and he raised his voice and began to speak with a gross exaggeration of an American twang.

"Did I ever tell you the yarn about that cyclone in Nevada, when old Seth Williams lost his team—blew clean into the air? My gosh, but that was some doin's!" He pushed his hat to the back of his head, stopped and began to gesticulate freely. "Now, old Seth was here, and his buggy there, and the log hut over here, see?" and he indicated different points on the ground as he continued the story.

He had seen what had escaped her. A couple of police were on the lookout and had been scrutinizing them both with great interest, apparently comparing notes, and had crossed the road, blocking the path. It was obvious to Bob that they were to be stopped; and this had set him telling the story with his grotesque exaggeration of American manner and speech.

If they were questioned it was a thousand to one that the girl would take alarm and be confused; and then —good-by to all chance of escape!

For an instant the thought had flashed into his mind to make a dash for it; but he could not leave his companion in the lurch. The only hope was to try and carry the position with a bluff.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Timely Warning.

ENID, not having seen the approach of the police, was completely at a loss to understand Bob's extraordinary conduct, and listened to the story in a maze of bewilderment and without a thought that the pantomime was meant only to hoodwink the men who were now within ear-shot.

Bob did it well; his exaggerated burlesque of the American manner and drawl being intentional.

"Wa-al, the whole show was busted," he concluded with a noisy laugh. "Don't you get me? Looky here"; and he held his hands up, and as if to make the matter plainer, moved close enough to her to be able to whisper hurriedly, "Police; going to stop us."

Enid understood. She was greatly alarmed, but played up to him and began to laugh, doing her best to put a nasal twang into her voice as they turned to walk on.

The two men blocked the way, and one of them addressed Bob. "One moment, if you please, *m'sieur*," he said.

"How's that? What does he say?" asked Bob, turning to Enid.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I must ask your names and address and where you come from."

"What does he say?" repeated Bob with sharp impatience.

She told him in English. He had seen enough already to feel confident that the man had understood English, and for his benefit he burst out into a tirade of vehement indignation.

"Tell him, Sadie, tell him; and don't you forget to say that we been all over Europe, and that it's only in this dodgasted country of his that Silas Wegelin and his sister can't walk about without being held up by the darned police for their names. Gee whiz! It's a blasted shame if a citizen of the U. S. A. can't take a pike at their old castle of Fontenay without being held up in this fashion, darned if it ain't!"

Enid took the cue, and was translating so much of this as she could remember when the man, who had understood it all, interrupted her. He was satisfied, and with a "*Pardon, m'sieur et mademoiselle,*" drew aside.

"What in thunder does he want now?" almost shouted Bob. "Say, Sadie, I don't get all this palaver. But I do know that our people at the embassy won't stand for it!"

"He only means we can go on," explained Enid.

"Oh, that's a heap different! I wish

I knew the darned wop's lingo; I'd tell him—"

"There's no need for that," she interposed and walked on, followed by Bob, who uttered loud threats about the embassy, and turned once or twice to glare back at the two men who were laughing together at the little scene. But his purpose was to make sure they were not followed.

"I'm sorry for this," he said to Enid as he caught her up.

"You know a great deal more English than you led me to suppose," she answered; "and a good deal about Americans."

"I know the usual French caricature of Americans; besides, I've been in the United States. But I wouldn't have had you mixed up in this for anything. All the same, I thank you heartily. You probably saved me from being arrested."

"Have not you saved *me* from anything? Do you think I ought not to have thought of that?"

"That's different altogether. You may be compromised."

"How?"

"If that car is found soon, and these men meet any of the others who came after me and begin to compare notes about our description, there may easily be trouble and questions asked."

"I don't think I shall have much difficulty in answering them. They would scarcely take *me* for one of Gaudin's band, surely."

"It'll be difficult to tell the truth. When you tell them you were shut up in the villa and try to explain how you escaped, they'll have recognized me, and the fat 'll be in the fire."

"Possibly *when* I tell them anything about it," she said significantly.

"I understand," he replied. "Do you know why you were taken there?"

"I haven't an idea. I supposed that Margaret Gendall's friends had left, and that awful man, Gaudin—or Pincette, as he first called himself — had taken it. I simply told him who I was, and now I remember noticing a change in his manner when I mentioned my uncle, Mr. Cracroft. But I hadn't a suspicion at the time that anything was wrong. He said he knew where Margaret was, and I went with him readily to a flat in the Rue des Gambrelles. I was there three days in the charge of that terrible old woman. Oh, the horror of those days!" she exclaimed, shuddering.

"And then?" asked Bob.

"I did not see him again until the day he took me to Chatillon. He said my cousin was lying dangerously ill there, and had asked for me. I thought nothing could be worse than I had already endured, and that I might possibly escape on the way. But I think I had been drugged.

"You know how I was treated there. To-day when he first came he told me the truth—that he was Gaudin, not Pincette, and that I was to be kept a prisoner until my uncle sent him a thousand pounds—and he made me write a letter that my life was in danger if the money were not sent at once. Then he said he would take me to some other place in a low quarter of the city where his friends would know how to treat me.

"Then you came," she concluded hurriedly, intentionally avoiding all mention of his first treatment of her. "You wouldn't have had me get you into the hands of the police after that, surely?"

"Well, the account is balanced now, at any rate," he replied, hot with indignation at her story.

"No, no! Not by a long way. But I do want to do something to—to try and balance it. I want you to—to let me help you in some way."

"I'm afraid you can't do that."

"Why not? It can't be too late," she replied nervously. "You're so clever at your trade; you seem to know so much; and you're so—so different from— Oh, I don't know how to put it! But I'm sure that if you had a chance of earning your living honestly —I mean, in some different and better

way—you could. Oh, I do so wish to help you!"

She was so gentle, so solicitous, so timid in making the suggestion, so earnest and sincere, that he was deeply touched and at a loss for a reply.

"It may be, perhaps—some day," he said after a pause.

"But why put it off? Why not at once? Think what the consequences would have been if the police had arrested you just now!"

"I am thinking more of the consequences to you," he replied truthfully.

"But you ought to think of yourself—your future. Why not leave the country and make a fresh start where you are not known? Even if you only came to England I—"

"Your pardon, but I can't let you say any more. I can't explain why; and you must not ask me any questions, because my lips are sealed and I cannot answer them. I'm not likely to forget what you've said, nor the gentle motive which inspires your words. But we must leave it there."

"If you came to England I could get you work. My friends—"

"We part here, if you please," he said abruptly. They had reached a busy street, and he hailed a taxi.

"But I owe you so much," she said, hesitating. "I can't bear to think—"

"Please!" he protested again. "You owe me nothing that cannot be easily paid."

"But you won't let me. I would do anything."

"One thing is to lose no time in leaving Paris."

"You only say that on my account. But it is you I want to think of."

"I'm afraid you cannot do anything for me—unless—" He paused, looking at her steadily. "Unless you would not be ashamed to take my hand."

"Ashamed!" she cried, with a flush of protest. "After what you've done! But I make a condition," she added as she held out her hand. "You must promise to remember what I have said, and try to do what I asked."

"I am not likely to forget," he replied as their hands touched.

Then he closed the door and stood back, raising his hat as she drove off. He stood bareheaded, looking after her for a while, and then hurried away in the direction of the little hotel where he had stayed while at Issy.

His thoughts were all of Enid; her beauty, her gentle thoughtfulness, the nervous, earnest timidity with which she had urged him to better things, and the deep sympathy in her eyes at the moment of parting.

Her cab was not out of sight before he was cursing his folly in not letting the wager go hang and telling her who he was, and that all her care and anxiety on his account had been won from her by fraud. More than once he stopped to retrace his steps, resolved to go to her hotel in the Rue Plassy and tell her the truth.

But each time the thought of possible complications and trouble on the part of the police checked him. She had helped him to bamboozle the men at the Barrier; and if any inquiries were set on foot, and they were found together, the consequences might be exceedingly compromising for her.

It was better to let things simmer down and wait until he could see her in England, he concluded; and went on his way.

It was a warm night and the mist had cleared, and attracted presently by the brightness of one of the little restaurants he passed, he discovered that he was hungry. He went in, therefore, and ordered a meal. As he ate it he glanced at an evening paper and turned it over to find some account of the afternoon's meet at Issy.

To his surprise he could find no reference to it. Considering the importance attached to it, and the large crowd which had been present, this was unaccountable. He told the waiter to bring him another paper; in which again there was no such news. Then he glanced at the date and the paper all but fell from his hands.

"Friday, May 8." He could scarcely believe his eyes. He snatched up the paper he had read first. The date was the same! What *could* it mean? More than six weeks since that night he had parted from Dick Gendall at Calais!

Six weeks! It staggered him.

Presently he called the waiter and asked for his bill. "You haven't dated it," he said.

"Pardon, it is there. May 8," was the reply.

"Oh, I didn't see it"; and he gave the man a note. "By the way, hasn't there been a big flying meeting to-day at Issy?" he asked when the change was brought.

"There is flying every day there."

"But I mean a special one; a big affair."

"No. The last was five or six weeks ago. You are interested in flying? I was there. It was magnificent. It made one hold one's breath. There was that man Jean Colonne; ah, what that man could do! Wonderful!" and hands and eyes were turned to heaven to emphasize the words.

"I heard about it. Has he done anything lately?"

"No flying; but have you not heard— Coming, sir," he broke off as a customer called him and he hurried away.

Bob went out into the street with his thoughts in a whirl.

Six weeks since he had been knocked over by that car with the red-haired girl in it! Where had he been all the time? What had he done in the interval?

He was too level-headed to give way to any panic; but he could not resist a passing shiver of uneasiness as he ran over all he had heard since he had found himself in the small room in the villa staring at his mother's miniature in the ring.

He recalled what Enid had said about having seen him before, and that he had ill-treated her and even struck her. He had regarded this at the time as the result of her hallucination; but of course it must be true. It was he who had been out of his mind, not she. It accounted for the panic-stricken dread of him which she had shown when he entered the room.

He must, indeed, have been mad to strike *her!*

Yet he could not have been raving, or they would have put him under restraint in some asylum. He began to understand, then. The car must have inflicted some injury to his brain and destroyed his memory. He had heard and read of many cases of the sort where people were sane and sensible enough to all appearance, but utterly oblivious of the past.

"Heaven only knows what I may have done in that condition," he thought.

There was Enid's statement that he had been an accomplice of that scoundrel, Gaudin, and that he had driven the red car. The villain himself had said something to the same effect, with the lurid addition that he had promised to marry his daughter Estelle. A pretty mess, if that were true!

But this only raised a smile at the idea. Engaged to a girl whose very name he couldn't believe he had ever heard before, and whose father was the leader of a gang of thieves!

He made a strenuous effort to force his memory to recall the name, but without result. His mind was an absolute blank in regard to every moment of the last six weeks of his life; and unless Enid could give him some clue, there was no chance of ever learning what he had done.

He was getting near the inn where he had stayed when it occurred to him that he had better be cautious. To turn up there after so long an absence might lead to all sorts of questions; and if it was really the case that he had been associated with a set of scoundrels, the questions would be very awkward to answer.

He paused, therefore, and crossing over to the brilliantly lighted window

of a milliner's shop, looked at himself in one of the mirrors.

Could that scarecrow, grimed like a tramp, with a beard and hair cropped close as if fresh from jail, be himself? He put his hands to his cheeks and chin to make certain that his eyes were not playing him a trick; and then laughed once more.

Small wonder that Enid had taken him for a scoundrel and the companion of scoundrels, and urged him to live an honest life! The villain who was grinning back at him certainly looked the part.

The change was astounding. His best friend, even Dick Gendall himself, would have passed him in the street without a thought of the truth.

"So much the better," he exclaimed aloud as he walked on. He had only to get rid of the beard and buy a decent suit of clothes, and not a soul in all Paris would know him. It was as the scarecrow that the police were looking for him; and at the thought of the police he stopped again and looked about for a barber's shop.

Suddenly he started with a catch of the breath at something which reached his ears. The name of Jean Colonne!

Pulling himself together he looked round. A cabaret was close by, and at one of the outside tables a couple of men were drinking. He edged closer to listen just as one of them rose to go.

"But, my dear fellow, they don't know it's the same Jean Colonne," said the one who was still sitting.

"Of course it's the same. I heard it from Dupensier, the detective. He got the facts himself from Rouvelle, the airman. The daring of the beggar! The pity is they didn't nab him tonight. They got wind of a haunt of the scoundrels at Chatillon, and just as they reached the place the car came out. Dupensier was there himself. They followed; but they might as well have chased the wind.

"There was a girl with him, and they tracked them as far as St. Maur and Joinville, and then found the car abandoned in the Bois de Vincennes. Of course the fellow himself had disappeared; but they've got a clear description of him and the girl as well, and they're hot on the track. They declare they'll get him before morning."

"In Paris! And with plenty of money!" cried his companion with a skeptical laugh. "Not they."

"Well, we shall see. They know where he stayed during the Issy week. Well, I must be off," and with that the speaker went away.

"We shall see, my friend," murmured Bob to himself. "The luck's with me at any rate, or I should have gone blundering into that rotten little inn. But I've no time to lose"; and he walked off with a wary eye for every policeman he met.

CHAPTER IX.

Recognition.

BOB'S first thought was to get rid of his beard, and he hesitated whether to face the risk of going into a barber's shop or to take a safer course of buying a razor and some soap and shaving himself in some quiet spot.

He decided for the barber. He knew Paris well, and soon found a very small place where workmen were the usual customers. The man was talkative and curious, and some hints he dropped showed that he guessed something of his customer's reason for wishing to make so great a change in his looks at such an hour.

This set Bob thinking. He did not wish the thing to reach the ears of the police.

There were two inducements to make such a man keep his lips shut. Money was one and personal safety another. Bob needed a change of clothes, and if he could get the man to sell him one, he would hesitate a lot before talking to the police.

He let him chatter and began to

drop hints on his side. An understanding was quickly come to. Some clothes were produced, a hundred-franc note changed owners, and when Bob left the house he felt and looked like a different man.

"Good old luck," he said with a smile as he stood under a lamp and let a policeman have a good stare at him.

There was just the chance, however, that the barber might talk; so he went to a ready-made clothes shop and bought a really respectable suit, and put it on there and then, giving a fictitious address for the other to be sent "home."

This enabled him to go to a decent hotel, and he tumbled into bed, worn out by the day's exciting experiences, and fell asleep as if he hadn't a worry in the world.

What he would do next could wait until the morning. But one thing was certain. Jean Colonne, so far as he was concerned, was as dead as a door-nail, and should rest in his grave for all time.

He woke late the next morning and lay thinking out his plans. He had two great desires. To see Enid Truscott as soon as possible and to hide the fact that he had lost six weeks of his life, and cut all possible connection between himself and whatever he might have done in that time.

Both were pressing; but for reasons which made him both smile and sigh, his desire to see Enid carried the day. He would not lose a minute in putting himself right with her. The other things could wait.

Directly after breakfast, therefore, he drove to the Hôtel d'Avignon; but drew a blank. She had left for London by the early train. All that he could do was to put up with the check and set about the other task.

On the way to the hotel a rather whimsical idea had occurred to him, suggested by the terms of his freak wager. That was over and lost, of course; but he thought he still might make use of it for his present purpose.

He had arranged to leave his trail from Paris to Marseilles by buying something at the different towns on the route and leaving them to be sent for from London. Dick Gendall was to see to that. His idea was now to go by train or motor to a number of these towns on the way, about twenty or thirty miles distant from each other; make the purchases, and tell the men in town he had broken down or had an accident or some such fairy tale.

This would answer two purposes. It would stop all questions by accounting for the lost weeks and also enable him to return to Paris, to the Continental, in his own name; and thus effectually put every one off the scent.

Taking a map he rapidly picked out the best stopping-places.

A couple of hundred miles would be enough for his purpose, he reckoned; and he soon had a list of the towns. Melun, Montargis, Auxerre, Clamecy, Nevers, Moulins, Vichy, and Thiers. He had been through them all; and he would have his "accident" at the latter place. Two or three weeks would easily be taken up in such a walk, and the rest of the time would be accounted for by his supposed recovery.

He lost no time in starting, and took the train straight through to Thiers. From that place he wired to Gendall that he had lost the wager owing to an accident—which was true enough; and told him to forward money to Paris and to send his man with his clothes. He wired also to the Hôtel Continental to expect him on the following day. He resolved to make no secret of the freak wager, but to suppress that part of it which related to the Issy experiences.

He was occupied all that day and the next in "making the trail." It was a simple enough matter, as soon as he had decided what to buy. He did not want any record to be made by the shopkeeper, and he had to think of something cheap and common enough not to stamp the transaction too clearly on the mind of the seller.

He preferred to be served by a woman, and it must be something he could buy from a woman, as she was less likely to remember the date of his visit. He settled eventually on a couple of picture post-cards with local views.

He felt a little awkward the first time. This was at Thiers, where he hunted out a small shop kept by a woman.

"Some post-cards, please," he said as she came forward. "With local views."

She was garrulous after the manner of her kind, and had a great deal to say about Thiers and the beauty of its scenery; what he had seen; and how long he was staying and where; and he tried in vain to stem the torrent of her chatter.

When her breath failed, he explained that he was on foot and wished to send the cards to a friend in England. Could he have an envelope? While she was fetching it, he scribbled "O. K." on one of the cards and added his initials.

When she handed him the envelope, he wrote Gendall's name and then paused. "How stupid!" he exclaimed as he felt in his pockets. "I made sure I had the address. No matter. If I send *madame* the address, will she be good enough to add it and put it in the post?"

"But surely *m'sieu'* would prefer to take it with him and write it himself," she suggested.

"That is true," he said, momentarily at a loss. "Ah, no," he added with a chuckle as a happy thought struck him. "Without the postmark of your lovely town it would have no value for my friend. I will send the address in a few days from Marseilles."

The bargain was struck and sealed with a few extra sous to pay for the additional trouble. But he did not get away without hearing another flood of local gossip. He had laid the first trail, however, and was satisfied.

He got as far as Moulins that night and did the rest of the towns on the list the next day, reaching Paris late in the evening, where he found his usual rooms reserved for him and his man, Stevens, waiting for him.

Stevens was an invaluable servant with two most excellent qualities—he knew his work thoroughly and never talked about his master's affairs. But Bob wished him to talk now, and while he was changing, he coached him.

"Do you know why I came here, Stevens?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you'd better. I made a bet that I'd walk from here to Marseilles and earn my living as I went. I broke down just outside a place called Thiers owing to an accident. I left town on the 22nd of April."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but it was the 22nd of March."

"That's all right so far as people in town are concerned, but here in Paris it was April. I want you to remember that and to be quite clear about it."

"Of course, sir. April 22."

"If any one questions you, you will be quite certain that I was not anywhere near Paris between those two dates. Understand that, because it happens to be very important. Now, for once, I want you to talk freely about the wager, always bearing in mind the change of dates. I'm going to talk about it myself, and the two stories must agree. And, by the way, take care to see that my arrival here to-day gets into the papers."

"Yes, Sir Robert," answered Stevens. He was more surprised about this than even what had been said about the dates. He had never known his master to do such a thing before.

Bob had plenty of friends in Paris, and during the evening he told the story to several, with the result that it got into the gossipy columns of more than one journal, dressed up with the usual reflections about the eccentricities of Englishmen.

On the following day it occurred to him to ascertain for certain whether there was likely to be the remotest risk of his being identified by the police; and for this purpose he called at the prefecture. Casting about for an excuse for the visit, he thought of Enid's adventure.

Sir Robert Marlowe was a person of sufficient importance to be admitted at once to the chief, M. Moulin, who received him with every show of courtesy.

"Mr. Richard Gendall, of London, is a great personal friend of mine, and I came to ask whether you could tell me anything about a Miss Enid Truscott who, as I understand it, came here and was missing for some time," he explained.

The great man shook his head. "We have not heard of it," he said. "At least it has not come before me; but I will inquire," and he rang his bell. "Can you give me the particulars?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you anything more. Gendall gave me no facts."

"Send M. Dupensier to me," the chief told the man who came. "He may have heard something of the matter," he added to Bob, who had with difficulty repressed a start of concern at hearing the name. It was that of the detective whom he had heard mentioned on the "scarecrow night."

If Dupensier could not recognize him, certainly no one else would; and he watched the detective's face closely while the chief was speaking to him.

"This is Sir Robert Marlowe," he said, repeating what Bob had told him.

Bob was much less at his ease than his bland smile suggested, as the detective scrutinized him closely, with an obvious effort to place him in his memory.

"I have heard nothing of the matter, sir," he answered.

"Then I'm sorry to have troubled you," said Bob. "I reached Paris only last night—I'm at the Continental as usual—and if you do hear anything I shall be glad if you will let me know. I'll write to my friend Gendall," and he rose.

As he left the building he passed the detective, Dupensier, who was in conversation with a man in plain clothes. Both of them scanned him very closely; and he was disposed to regret his visit. A regret which was not lessened when he found that the man in plain clothes was shadowing him.

He sauntered leisurely back to his hotel, deeming it prudent to give the man an immediate opportunity of reassuring Dupensier that he was in reality what he had represented himself.

That this was a wise step he learned that evening from Stevens. He had been thinking over the somewhat unexpected fact that Enid's experience had not reached the ears of the police. He knew that she had been imprisoned for some days at the villa at Chatillon, and it was strange that her friends should not have communicated the fact to the authorities.

It was the obvious thing to do in such a case; and the neglect to do it set him wondering about her friends, and what reason there could possibly be for such extraordinary silence.

It was almost unbelievable; in fact, the whole affair was a mystery. Certainly the Gendalls could not have had an inkling of the truth, or Dick, who was in the Foreign Office, would have been moving heaven and earth and any other powers he might have thought useful, to find her.

Engrossed by these thoughts, Bob did not at first pay any attention to Stevens's question; and after a moment's hesitation the man repeated it:

"Begging your pardon, Sir Robert, but have you done any flying at Issy?"

"Issy? Why do you ask?"

"I was down-stairs this afternoon when some one came up and asked me if I was your servant. Of course, I told him it was no business of his, sir; but he was very soft-spoken; said he

was a newspaperman and only wanted to get some particulars about that bet you spoke of. I thought you might wish me to tell him, so I let him talk. And he did pour his questions in. But I just said what you'd said, sir, and didn't know any more. He wanted to know whether I was sure you hadn't been here in March, and particularly whether you'd been at the flying meeting at Issy at the end of that month."

"And what did you say?"

"I told him that I was sure, of course, sir; and he said that some one just like you went up for the great airman, M. Rouvelle. But I told him you never went up except in your own aeroplanes; and he worried on with his questions till I said I had some work to do and got away. And then one of the other men down-stairs asked me what Dupensier, the well-known detective had been trying to get out of me. I thought I'd better tell you, sir."

"Quite right, Stevens. It's of no consequence," said Bob lightly. But he knew better. He did not like the incident at all, and was glad that he had already arranged to leave Paris the following morning. He did not want any more incidents of the kind.

But he was not to get away without a further shock. A couple of friends came up to him in the lounge after dinner and insisted on carrying him off to see a dancer, La Lunette. One of them was volubly enthusiastic about her, declaring that she would soon be the rage of Paris, although she was only performing at present at the Folies Travaires.

It was a shabby little music-hall, frequented by people of the poorer class, and when the three friends arrived, Bob noticed with some annoyance that they attracted almost as much attention from the audience as the performers. Their box was close to the stage, and he kept as much out of sight as possible.

He was a great admirer of good dancing, and when La Lunette was to appear he shifted his chair to get a good view of the stage. The instant she entered he knew her, and stared at her in blank amazement.

She was the red-haired girl he had seen at Issy, and afterward in the car which had knocked him down; and, to his profound mortification, she appeared to recognize him!

Her first look was directed at the box, and as she saw him she started in such intense surprise that for a moment she appeared to forget her surroundings and to take no heed of the storm of clapping which acclaimed her entrance.

She recovered herself quickly, however, and bowed and smiled to the audience; but her eyes were all for him.

He was now impatient to get away, and after a minute, when his two friends were intently watching her dance, he slipped out of the box, blaming himself for his stupidity in having gone near the place at all, and hurried back to the hotel.

He had another shock there. On his way through the lounge to the lift some one jumped up from the table and came toward him with his hand held out. It was Rouvelle, the great airman.

Bob met him with a stony look of indifference.

"Surely, I'm not mistaken!" cried Rouvelle. "You're—"

"I am Sir Robert Marlowe, sir. What is it?" cut in Bob curtly before Rouvelle could utter the name which was on his lips. He spoke in English, and used his title intentionally to impress the other man and convince him of his mistake.

"Ten thousand pardons! But it is extraordinary," replied Rouvelle, bowing and gesturing, as he drew back.

With a nod and a wave of the hand Bob passed on and went to his room.

"I've decided to leave by the early train to-morrow," he told Stevens. "So you'd better get ready to-night and make all arrangements."

The sooner he was out of Paris

and away from the risk of all these chance meetings and recognitions the better for his peace of mind, he thought, as he lay tossing in bed for an uneasy hour; and then fell asleep to dream that he was a fugitive from justice, and that the red-haired girl, Dupensier, Gaudin, and Rouvelle were all joined in the pursuit.

CHAPTER X.

Bob's Ruse.

"NO more Paris for a few months," was Bob's decision when he reached London and was safe once more in his comfortable chambers in Piccadilly. He had had enough experience of detective shrewdness to last him a lifetime, and his most fervent wish was that Dupensier would never set those keen eyes of his on him again.

In the safe seclusion of his armchair it was easy to see the blunders he had committed during the last few hours of his stay in Paris. He ought to have taken one of two courses—either have gone straight to the prefecture and faced the music or have come back to town the instant he realized that he had been Jean Colonne for six weeks.

Every step he had taken had been wrong. It was crass short-sightedness not to have foreseen that the moment his beard was removed and he was dressed decently any one who had seen him at Issy would be able to identify him. It was obvious that the red-haired girl, Estelle, or whoever she was, and Rouvelle, the airman, had not had the least difficulty in recognizing him; and Dupensier would have done so positively had it not been that he had only seen him in the garb of the scarecrow.

The most disquieting fact was that by his own stupidity he had started the suggestion that Jean Colonne and Bob Marlowe were one and the same person. Such a suggestion was not likely to lie dormant in the mind of a man like the detective, Dupensier; and in this connection the meeting with Rouvelle at the Continental might have an extremely ominous significance.

If the airman's presence was the result of Dupensier's action—a very probable hypothesis—the consequences might be really serious.

The question was—what should be done? Was it too late to tell the truth and chance the consequences? Or would it be better to let things take their course?

There were two strong reasons against the former. The first affected Enid. He would either have to tell the whole truth or none; half measures would be no use, and the affair would make the very deuce of a stir. It was far too good a story for the papers to miss, and when once the scent was started it would be followed up to the end. His visit to the prefecture would inevitably bring her name into the thing, and the fact that she had helped him as Jean Colonne to escape would inevitably compromise her and bring her into the full glare of publicity.

The second reason concerned himself. Before he owned up it was essential to know what he had really done during the lost six weeks. How to find that out was a puzzle. He couldn't put anybody else on the job without letting the facts be known, and that was scarcely more palatable than the other course.

In the end the question was answered by quite different considerations. Among his letters was one reminding him of a promise he had made to go fishing in California, and he was about to write a refusal when it occured to him that it would be an excellent move to get right away out of England for a time.

There was nothing to prevent him except his desire to see Enid. But, on the other hand, it would be better in her interests that this Jean Colonne business should have time to die down.

Instead of refusing, he wrote that

he would go, and he told Stevens to have everything in readiness.

He was away two months, and came back as eager as ever to meet Enid again, and with the comfortable assurance that he could do so without any fear of trouble from the old Jean Colonne affair.

The very day after his return he called at Mrs. Gendall's house; but she was out of town, and thus his hope of getting news of Enid was disappointed.

At the club that afternoon he met Dick Gendall, her nephew, and asked after her.

"She's at Bournemouth. Taken a furnished house there for a month," said Dick.

"Bournemouth? Rum place to go to in July, isn't it?"

"Rotten!" agreed his friend. "But she does these things. I think she has a niece of hers, a great chum of Madge's, down there who's been a bit chippy. Enid Truscott! Ever meet her?"

"I seem to have heard the name," said Bob. This was true enough, since it had rarely been out of his thoughts for two months and more.

"A dark filly with big black eyes—natural ones, I mean; you know. Something happened a month or two ago. Madge was in Paris—she and I are great pals, you know—and the Truscott girl was to have gone over to stay with her, and didn't turn up.

"I believe she cracked up a bit just then. I didn't pay much attention. Anyway, the aunt has her down at Bournemouth, and takes her about motoring a lot. I fancy it isn't all beer and skittles at home with her. She stables with an old chap named Cracroft, a moldy old cuss of a lawyer, and I expect she has a rotten time of it."

"I know Bournemouth a bit," said Bob casually.

"A rattling place for crocks, they tell me. She's on the West Cliff, wherever that is. A house called 'Rataplan,' of all ungodly names! By the way, have you heard that wheeze about Spooner?" and he rattled off into a story to which Bob paid no attention until it was time to laugh.

That afternoon saw his car on the Bournemouth road, and he reached there late in the evening. He knew the place much better than he had suggested. He had made it a motoring center more than once, and the people at the garage were only too glad to see him.

His intention was to call on Mrs. Gendall the next day; but, now that he was within touch of Enid, he was conscious of a most unusual and embarrassing diffidence. He had never given a second thought to any woman except Enid since the affair with Olive Peters in the old days, and he felt as awkward and self-conscious as a boy in his teens. A thousand fears as to how she would meet him worried and perplexed him.

Women were such inscrutable creatures that one never knew what they would do. It was quite on the cards that she would only be disgusted the moment she recognized him, and hate to be reminded of that business in Paris. Even Dick had said there was something mysterious about the affair, and there were a hundred and one reasons why she might wish the whole thing to sink into oblivion.

Plagued by these tormenting doubts, he loafed about the front during the morning; and in the afternoon, instead of calling at the house, he had his car out and went for a long spin into the New Forest. He half wished he had not come to the place at all, but had left it for them to meet in the ordinary way. The thought of forcing himself on her was most distasteful.

Besides, Mrs. Gendall was a particularly shrewd person, and if he went to the house she'd be sure to spot his object. She'd know that he wasn't the man to be at such a place by chance.

When he got back to the garage he

had all but resolved to throw the thing up and wait in town until his friends returned. But something occurred there which gave him an idea.

He had had some trouble with the petrol-valve on his car, and was giving directions about it, when he heard the manager mention Mrs. Gendall's name.

Her car was garaged there, and her chauffeur having been taken ill, she asked the garage people to send a careful man to drive her out the next day. Like a flash Bob resolved to play the part instead of returning to town.

He waited until he heard that a man named Simmons was told off for the job. He knew him well, and had given him many a tip; and during the evening he thought out his plan.

He waited for the man on his way to the garage in the morning, and stopped him.

"Just a word, Simmons. Do you want to earn a fiver?" he asked.

"Can't remember the time when I didn't, sir; and it would come in particularly sweet just now. The missus is desperate bad, and I'm going to ask for a day off."

"You needn't do that. You're to drive Mrs. Gendall's car, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I want to take your place. You could trust me with the car, I suppose?"

"If you couldn't take care of it, no one could, sir," said the man, with a smile.

"Then listen to me. Look out for me at the corner of Grosvenor Road, and let me take your place at the wheel. You can go home to your wife, and I'll come to your house when we get back, so you can take it to the garage. And I'll give you a fiver. But you must hold your tongue."

"But if the boss gets hold of it he might—"

"I'll see you right with him, and look after you if there's any sort of trouble. But there won't be."

"All right, sir," was the instant reply, and the bargain was concluded. "I'm to be there at ten sharp, and I believe they're going to be out all day, sir," added Simmons.

"So much the better," was Bob's thought as he went away to complete his preparations. The longer the drive lasted, the better chance he would have of seeing Enid, and perhaps getting a word with her, if he thought it prudent.

Then he suddenly burst out laughing. "By Jove, I never thought of it!" and he continued to chuckle at intervals all the time until he had to meet the car.

He was wearing a peaked cap, long white overalls, and goggles big enough to conceal the greater part of his face. He looked the professional chauffeur to the life, and was confident that he would not have the slightest difficulty in playing the part.

But things did not go quite so simply.

He drove up to the door punctually and waited. Some minutes passed and nothing happened; and then it occurred to him that he ought to have rung the bell.

"You're precious late," the maid who opened the door said pertly. "When missus says ten, she don't mean half past."

"I was here on the stroke," he replied.

"Then why didn't you ring? Did you expect us to be waiting for your lordship on our knees on the door-step? Or do you s'pose I can see through a closed door? You're to come in."

With some misgivings he went in and unthinkingly made for the open door of the dining-room, only to be pulled up by the girl.

"If the 'all ain't good enough for you, you'd better bring your own drawing-room along next time," she scoffed. "And take that bandage off your face."

"Is that the car, Mary?" asked Mrs. Gendall, coming out then.

"Yes'm," she answered and went off.

"What's your name?"

"Simmons, mum," replied Bob, touching his forehead and altering his voice.

"I hope you're a careful driver. It's most provoking that Jenkins should be ill to-day. My friend is an invalid, and you must be careful not to go too fast."

"I'll be extra careful, mum."

"Can't you take that—that thing off?" and she pointed to the goggles.

"Only my—my goggles, mum," he replied, taken aback by the request. It was a hundred to one that she would recognize him at once if he complied.

"But I wish you to," she persisted, looking at him.

For a moment he did not know what to say. His hesitation obviously annoyed her, and he remembered that it was one of her little weaknesses to believe that she could read character. "I—I am very sorry, mum," he stammered at length; "but it's against the rules of the union."

"Well, I declare! I wonder what we're coming to next? I never heard anything so ridiculous in my life! I hire a man, and can't even look at him to see what he's like. Monstrous! It makes me hesitate about trusting the car to you."

"Just as you like, mum," he replied, beginning to wish himself out of the thing altogether.

"Do you know the forest well?"

"Oh, yes, mum—thoroughly!"

"Well, I suppose there's no help for it now. We're going to spend the day there, and are going first to Lyndhurst. I'll give you your further orders there."

"Very good, mum." And as Mrs. Gendall turned away he went toward the door.

Another blunder. "You don't seem to know much about your work," she said sharply. "Can't you see the rugs? Take them out to the car, and then come and help my friend. Are you ready, dear?" she asked some one in the drawing-room as Bob went out with the rugs.

He tossed them into the car and returned, bracing himself for the meeting with Enid, who was, of course, the invalid, he concluded. She must be much worse than Dick had suggested. It was not Enid, however, but a woman of much the same age as Mrs. Gendall herself; and to his dismay there was no sign of Enid anywhere.

He did that part of his job well enough. He helped her carefully into the car, where the pert parlormaid was placing an air cushion, and he wrapped a rug about her as if he had served an apprenticeship at the business.

"I don't know what time we shall be back, Mary," said Mrs. Gendall; and, to Bob's further dismay, she got into the car, and the maid shut the door.

"Go on, Simmons," she said sharply, as he stood waiting for Enid. "Go round by the pier," she added.

"A rotten investment of a fiver," thought Bob ruefully, as he climbed into his seat and started. The last desire in his mind was to drive two old ladies for a whole day about the New Forest. But he was soon smiling at the turn of things. It served him right; and, anyway, the man whose place he had taken would be able to spend the day with his sick wife.

"The Undercliff Drive," called Mrs. Gendall when they reached the pier; "and go very slowly, ready to stop when I tell you!"

There were plenty of people about on the sands and the drive, and he was watching some men bathing from a boat and wishing, rather enviously, that he could have changed places with one of them, when Mrs. Gendall called to him to stop.

Some one was waving a towel from the top of one of the little bathing bungalows, and, with a catch of the breath and a sudden glow of intense delight, he recognized Enid.

A very different Enid, indeed. She was no invalid. A glow of perfect

health lighted her tanned cheeks, and her great eyes shone with high spirits as she ran to the car and chatted for a moment with the two occupants, and then jumped up beside Bob and favored him with a good stare as he stooped to wrap the rug about her.

He no longer envied the bathers. His pulses were all tingling, and he wondered that men should waste their time bathing when the day was literally ideal for a motor run in the New Forest.

CHAPTER XI.

"You!"

"I HOPE you know all about a car and are careful," said Enid a moment later. "Mrs. Gendall is very particular, and Jenkins is top hole as a chauffeur."

"Yes, miss," replied Bob, muffling his voice as well as he could. He ran to the end of the drive and turned in the narrow space without having to back the car.

"Good!" she cried. "Even Jenkins has never done that. There's no doubt you know how to drive. What is your name?"

"Simmons, miss."

"Are you a Bournemouth man, Simmons?" She was in no mood to sit silent for a whole day, and it was always a good beginning to get a man to talk about himself.

"No, miss," he answered, not feeling entirely at ease under her questioning.

"Where do you come from?"

"London."

"Have you been here long?"

"No, miss."

"You're a Londoner, then?"

"Not altogether, miss."

She smiled. He wasn't very promising material, with his monosyllabic answers; but this only determined her to make him talk. "What does that mean? Was half of you born there and the other half somewhere else?"

"I've lived there a good deal."

"You haven't any cockney accent. What part of London?"

"The West End, miss."

"Driving for a private owner?"

"I have a car of my own," said Bob, beginning to enter into the spirit of the thing, and rather liking it now.

"Taxi?"

"I take parties out, miss, sometimes."

"Oh, I see! A sort of private taxi."

"I don't call it that, miss."

"Have you a cold? Your voice is very husky," she said next, unexpectedly; and out of the corner of his eye he could see she was scrutinizing him closely.

"Thank you, miss, no. I'm quite well."

"Where do you keep your car?"

"In a garage off Piccadilly."

"But if you have a car of your own, why do you come down to Bournemouth?"

"It's out of the season, miss."

"Have you got your car here?"

He had hard work not to smile at her cross-examination. "I never ply for hire in the country, miss," he fenced.

"Does it pay you just for a few months?"

"There's always a job to be got in the country out of the London season, miss."

"How long have you been with the Westminster people?"

"I've been there several times before," he parried.

"But this time, I mean?"

"I've only just come down this time."

"The air seems to be doing you good. Your voice is getting much clearer.

He winced at this reminder of his carelessness. It was very difficult to keep the husk going. "It varies a good deal," he said, overdoing the husk now.

"That's funny," she replied, looking at him again. He was certainly an unusual person. His grammar was

irreproachable; he had a car of his own and yet hired himself out for what was probably a very meager wage; and he had a voice which "varied a good deal."

As she watched him, the mouth and chin—all she could see of his face because of the huge goggles—seemed not altogether unfamiliar. He was certainly no ordinary chauffeur.

Then she returned to her cross-examination, asking all sorts of questions about his car, his charges, his experiences, the people he took out, and his usual manner of life; and she studied his replies much more carefully than he perceived. The result was inevitable; she caught him tripping and contradicting himself.

This at first amused, then irritated, and at last interested her, and roused suspicions that he was no ordinary chauffeur at all.

She proceeded very shrewdly, breaking away from a subject to talk about the scenery, and then returning to it suddenly, and putting her questions with such an air of carelessness that he had not the slightest idea of her purpose. But he realized it just before they reached Lyndhurst.

She had led him to describe his car. "Such a car as that must have cost a lot of money," she suggested.

"About eight hundred," he replied, off his guard.

"You said three just now, and told me how you managed to save the money," she answered very dryly. "Which was it?"

He had no reply ready. "There were the accessories," he said lamely.

She laughed. "Three hundred for the car and five hundred in extras. You must have better *accessories*"—stress on the word—"than memory."

They stopped at the church then, and she laughed and jumped out. "Perhaps your memory will be better presently, and your voice less varied—*Simmons.*"

She laid such a special stress on the name that after he had helped Mrs. Gendall's friend up the steep path to the church he went back to the car, intensely puzzled and not a little disconcerted.

Up to that moment Bob had enjoyed it all; but his satisfaction was rather clouded by the thought that Enid had been playing with him and leading him into all sorts of mazes of irrelevant statements. He was able now to recall some of the discrepancies, and when they came out of the church he was not a little bothered as to the result. It was a much more plaguey business than he had anticipated.

But she was splendid; infinitely brighter and jollier than he had expected, and infinitely prettier, too.

Instead of getting into the car at once, they crossed to the Crown, and Mrs. Gendall told him to go and get some lunch; and as he touched his hat respectfully Enid laughed.

Could he have guessed her thoughts he would have laughed as well. She had come to the conclusion that the whole matter was a joke; that he was some one whom she had met somewhere before, and that he was pretending to be a chauffeur and had in some way contrived to be sent to drive the car that day. That thought had struck her very early in the drive, and a certain fact which had flashed across her mind confirmed the belief. This was why she had spoken so freely with him.

During lunch she praised his skill with the car to Mrs. Gendall, who herself had been very pleased with the care he had shown. But Enid did not breathe a word of her thoughts. She was thinking out a means of punishing the stranger, and was exceedingly curious as to who he really was. She had enjoyed herself immensely, but discretion suggested that it was a case in which the pleasure need not be shared with her aunt.

Whoever he might be, of course his object was connected with her; no man would be so absurd as to do such a thing merely to drive two old ladies about. So her first punishment was to

declare her intention of riding with Mrs. Gendall. It was a real punishment, too; for Bob was hugely disappointed. He grudged every minute of the time; the more so on account of the consuming curiosity she had excited by her last words.

They went first to Rufus's Stone, and she walked off without so much as a glance in his direction. He might have been an ordinary taxi-driver for all the notice she took of him. He helped the invalid to get out, and gave her his arm to the Stone and back to the car; and all the time Enid kept at a distance.

When Mrs. Gendall was telling him where to go next Enid got into the car and chatted to the invalid, and Bob was so chagrined that he could scarcely listen to Mrs. Gendall as she told him to drive where he pleased for an hour or two and then find some place where they could stop and take tea.

"Do you understand? You don't seem to be listening," said Mrs. Gendall sharply. "And it's so tiresome to have to tell a thing two or three times over."

"I understand, mum; thank you," said Bob, and he shut the car door, started the engine, and went to his seat.

Then the world smiled again. "I'd better go in front again, as he seems so stupid!" exclaimed Enid, and the next instant she was by his side. "I thought you said you knew the Forest —Simmons," she said with a pause before the name.

"I do, miss, pretty well."

"We expect when we hire a chauffeur that he knows the district. Perhaps you've forgotten it. Your memory does seem a very in-and-out one—Simmons." Same pause and emphasis. He glanced round at her. Her face, except the eyes, was as severe as a Greek statue. "I haven't forgotten the Forest," he said.

"You'd better keep your eyes on the road. We don't want to be upset. You really are a most extraordinary chauffeur."

"You needn't fear anything of that sort, miss."

She paused a second or two, and then fired a broadside, turning to him to watch the effect.

"That's what you said last time, just before you nearly ran into that wagon. Don't jump in that way or you'll have us into the ditch," she added as he started in astonishment.

"I don't think I understand," he mumbled.

"Surely your memory can't be as bad as all that! It's not much more than a week ago."

"I'm sorry, miss; but I — I don't remember it," he said very lamely.

"Simmons!" she cried.

"Well, the fact is, miss, the people at the garage always tell us to use the same name. They think it saves trouble for their customers."

"Oh, I see! Then what was the other man's real name?"

"I'm not sure whether it was Tompkins or Smith."

"Mightn't it have been Jones or Brown or Robinson?"

"I don't know all their names, miss."

"Can you remember your own?"

"Simmons."

"But your real name?"

"Simmons will do, miss, if you please."

"Do you want me to be a party to a fraud on Mrs. Gendall, then?" and she persisted relentlessly to ply him with questions. Why should he hide his name? Was he ashamed of it? And so on, finding a keen delight in framing awkward questions and pressing them home, until he was more than half disposed to admit the truth and be done with it. Presently she changed the subject to his goggles.

"Why do you wear such large goggles—Simmons?" She never uttered his name without the significant pause in front of it.

"They're part of the regulation uniform, miss."

"What? Big things like those?"

"They protect the face better."

"When you're running at this frantic speed—about eight miles an hour?"

"We're not supposed to take them off, miss."

"Another rule of the garage people?"

"Yes, miss. They're very strict."

"But the other—Simmons didn't wear any at all."

"Confound the other Simmons!" thought Bob. "I know that some of the men don't always obey the rules."

"How wicked of them! Those things must be very hot and uncomfortable."

"A little, miss."

"Then take them off. I'm sure Mrs. Gendall won't object, and *I* don't," and she was off again with probe after probe. Why wouldn't he take them off? Why were they so large? Had he anything the matter with his face? Was his skin too tender? Did he wish to hide his face as well as his name? Why did people generally wear a mask? Was he afraid to let people see his features?

"You needn't be afraid of us. We're not likely to be frightened because a man is ugly," she said in a tone of compassion. "No one can help his looks. All we want is a man to drive the car properly. I'm sure you're suffering tortures wearing those things. Shall I ask Mrs. Gendall if you can take them off?"

"No; thank you, miss. I—I prefer to keep them on," stumbled Bob.

"Why? In goodness' name, *why?* You admitted they were hot and uncomfortable."

"I'm all right as I am; thank you, miss," replied Bob rather bruskly, driven into a corner.

The reply piqued her. She had virtually asked him to avow himself, and he had refused. She answered sharply, therefore: "It is not very pleasant to ride with any one who is afraid or ashamed or something to let one see his face."

"Shall I stop, miss?"

"Yes, if—" She left the alternative to explain itself.

This was a direct challenge, and Bob accepted it. He had long realized that she suspected something about him; but her manner showed that she had not guessed the truth, and he decided that that was not the moment for any disclosure. So he pulled up.

Enid had not expected this, and rose with a shrug of disappointment, and he scrambled out and opened the door of the tonneau for her.

"Thank you," she said icily, and then explained to Mrs. Gendall that she wished to rest her back for a time.

"What does she really think?" Bob asked himself as he started the car again, and plagued himself with a dozen different answers. She could not have a glimmer of truth, he was sure. She would not have been so high-spirited and would have treated him very differently if she had connected him with that adventure of hers. What would she say when she knew? Had he better keep the thing secret and wait for another chance of meeting her?

It looked uncommonly as if that would be the safer course. She was far too charming for him to risk displeasing her.

Then it occurred to him to make himself known to Mrs. Gendall and let her vouch for him in his own name. It was tempting; but — there are always "buts" in the way. Enid had most certainly pressed him to tell her his real name, and if he acknowledged to Mrs. Gendall voluntarily what he had refused to tell her it might offend her hopelessly.

On her side Enid was racking her memory and thoughts to decide who he was. She had met him before. She was certain of that. There was something about him quite familiar. His voice as soon as he had dropped that ridiculous husk out of it; his handling of the car, too; there was something in his attitude as he bent over the wheel which suggested a connection

she couldn't link up; even his manner when he accepted her challenge — for of course he, too, had seen that she meant it for one—and let her leave the front seat rather than give in.

Who was he? She thought of the men she knew, trying to fix on one who would be so ridiculous as to do such a thing. Dick Gendall was a possible; he would dearly love to play such a prank on her and on his aunt; but there wasn't the remotest likeness between the two men. She had to give it up, vexed with herself for being irritated by her failure, and positively angry at feeling any interest in the man whatever. She would spoil his joke by leaving him to make the avowal of his own accord.

But this mood didn't last long. It would be much better fun to spoil it by forcing his hand, and then her eyes brightened and she laughed merrily.

"We're close to Mrs. Baines's cottage, Aunt Aline," she said to Mrs. Gendall presently. "Don't you think we might get her to give us some tea? The money would be such a blessing to the poor old soul."

"Just the thing, dear," agreed Mrs. Gendall readily. The old woman was a protégée of hers, whose tiny cottage, buried in a lonely part of the forest between Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst, they had discovered one day by accident. "You'll be able to have a good, quiet rest there," she added to her invalid friend, and then gave Bob his orders.

As the car turned along the narrow way to the spot, Bob noticed a little encampment of gipsies; and as he was looking over his engine he had this in mind when he saw Enid leave the cottage by herself after tea and stroll off.

He was not much surprised, therefore, to hear a cry of alarm from her a moment or so later. He was off like a deer, forgetting in his excitement that he had pushed up his goggles. He found her struggling in the grip of a big, rough-looking fellow who was trying to prevent her calling for help.

A single blow sent the brute sprawling to the ground, and he picked himself up, ran off a few yards, and then turned, as if in dread of pursuit.

But Bob had no thoughts of following him. His look was riveted on Enid, and he read her expression as plainly as if her face had been a book. She had recognized him at last.

"*You!*" she gasped at length, paling and breathing hard after the struggle, and drew back from him.

He remembered then and, pulling the masking goggles into place:

"I had better walk with you to the cottage," he said quietly; and they turned and walked back without another word passing between them.

Shambling steps followed, and Bob turned to find the man he had struck coming after them with a broad, half-inane grin.

"Be off with you!" he cried angrily.

"Begging your pardon, sir, but the lady promised me 'arf a dollar extra if you struck me. It was worth a dollar, miss."

Bob understood the trick then without the confirming evidence of Enid's confusion. Despite her trembling agitation, she could not wholly resist the temptation to smile as she felt for her purse.

Their eyes met, and they both laughed.

"Here you are," he said, as he gave the man five shillings.

"Your honor's health," replied the man, with a broader grin than ever. "May you both have the best o' luck."

Bob turned to Enid; but she had gone on, and was hurrying quickly to the cottage.

CHAPTER XII.

Jean Colonne Again.

BOB did not attempt to overtake Enid, but went back to the car to finish his inspection of the engine, speculating with no little curiosity about what the result would be.

The meaning of the little scene was plain to understand. Enid had seen that the chauffeur business was a sham, and had mistaken him for some one of her men friends who had probably paid her considerable attention. That was why she had plagued him with her innumerable questions. She had changed her seat in a huff because he had refused to take off his goggles, and had then planned this little coup to settle the matter in her own way.

He had been hopelessly tricked, but was quite ready to admire the ingenuity of the thing, and equally ready to laugh at the fatuous way in which he had fallen into the trap.

That the recognition had been both a consummate surprise and a big shock, however, her manner had proved beyond doubt or question.

What would be the effect? That last laugh was somewhat reassuring; but the trouble in her face when she knew him, the instinctive shrinking from him, and then her haste to get away to the cottage were all most disheartening indications that he had made a huge blunder. A joke with a tragic ending.

He could not do anything, of course, except just wait and let her decide on her own course. There was one test which would throw some light on the problem—her conduct for the rest of the ride. If she joined her aunt in the tonneau, he might fairly conclude that she did not wish to have anything more to do with him, or even to hear a word in explanation.

It was thus with growing anxiety that he waited for them all to come out of the little cottage.

Enid herself had been considering just the same question. The older ladies had not heard anything of the incident, but Mrs. Gendall noticed her agitation when she returned to the cottage.

"You look as if you had seen a ghost, child," she said kindly.

"I have," was Enid's thought, but it was not uttered aloud. She smiled and passed it off with a word or two, and for a time joined in the talk of the others. She wanted to think, however, and soon relapsed into silence, leaning her arm on the window-sill and staring blankly into the little garden.

It had been a shock. Meaning no more than a trick, she had come suddenly face to face with a discovery which startled and disquieted her profoundly.

"Jean Colonne again!" All the incidents of those terrible days in Paris and Chatillon came back vividly to her mind. Her captivity; his conduct, at first so rough and brutal, and then so self-sacrificing in the time of rescue; her strange interest in him, despite his evil past; her powerful desire to help him; his sturdy refusal to the moment of their parting; and all her thoughts about him.

The man was a mystery, indeed. How had he found her now? And why? He must have done it designedly. It was not possible that his presence was a mere accident. Did he need her help, and was he ready now to accept what he had refused so peremptorily? Had he listened to her entreaties and turned a fresh leaf in his life, and wished her to know it?

No. He would not have fenced her questions as he had all that day.

Did he need money, and was this a way of preying on her? She scouted that thought indignantly. Again, no! He would have taken some reward that night in Paris. He was not that sort of man at all; and she surprised herself by the warmth with which she asserted this in her mind.

There was the amazing change in him, too. Not in looks only. She had recognized his features instantly, despite the change; it was not likely she would forget a man who had saved her from such trouble. But the change in his manner, in everything. This man had the appearance and all the manners of a gentleman; and if only playing a part, playing it to the life. She did forget how he had played that of

the indignant American that night, but now he had acted so well that she had been convinced he was one of the men she had met in London or somewhere.

What ought she to do? Give him a chance of explaining? There would be an excellent opportunity if she rode by him on the return to Bournemouth. Quite a safe one, too; for he could not make any trouble. And again she found herself repudiating the thought that he meant her any harm. He should make his explanation, she decided—she was exceedingly curious to hear it—and the sooner the better.

After all, there was really nothing to be afraid of. Certainly not on her side, at any rate. The worst that could possibly happen was that her terrible experiences in Paris would be known.

Her uncle had for some reason told her to hush the thing up and say nothing about it; but if it was forced to come out, it was not her fault. She had thus recovered from the shock of her discovery and regained much of her customary self-control by the time Mrs. Gendall was ready to leave; and she was laughing when they all went out to the car.

Bob did his work with an impassivity worthy of Stevens himself. He helped to settle the two elderly ladies in their seats and wrapped the rugs about them, and then stood holding the door as if expecting Enid to follow.

"I wonder if it would be too cold on the front seat," she said to Mrs. Gendall. She knew perfectly well what Bob's thoughts would be, and did not intend to let him know that she had made up her mind.

"If you've any doubt, dear, you'd better ride with us. Don't get a chill," replied Mrs. Gendall solicitously.

"Perhaps I'd better. What do you think—Simmons?"

"I never feel the cold, miss," he answered, touching his hat.

She held up her hand as if to feel the strength of the breeze. "Let's see," in apparent indifference. "We shall have it in our faces."

"There isn't much breeze, child." As a matter of fact, there was none at all. "You might try the front seat, and come in to us if it's too much."

"Yes, of course. I ought to have thought of that. How stupid of me!" and she got up in front.

This was a little overdone, and Bob did not fail to notice it. He understood that her hesitation had been the merest make-believe, and the fact served to strengthen a purpose which had occurred to him a few moments before in regard to the explanation he wished to make.

She expected him to begin at once, but he had no such intention; and they covered some miles without a word from either. Her patience was not so persistent as his. "Well?" she said at length.

"Yes, miss?"

"Don't keep that up," she exclaimed, vexed that he had forced her to break the silence. "What does all this mean?"

"It is a singular coincidence."

"You mean me to believe it is an accident?"

"Don't you believe it?"

"No, of course I don't!" He received this in silence. "So you are Jean Colonne. Of course, I could not expect to meet you again; but I hope you have taken my advice about earning an honest living."

"And about coming to England, as you see."

This was not at all the tone she had anticipated. Not a bit what a contrite thief should have said, an associate of such a villain as Gaudin. It puzzled her, and she frowned as she looked round at him, in annoyance that those horrid goggles prevented her seeing his face. "You might take those things off now, I should think," she exclaimed after a slight pause.

"I do not wish *madame* to see me," he replied putting just the faintest suggestion of French accent into his voice. He was so delighted by the way she was meeting the situation that he

felt he could safely punish her for the trick she had played him. He would bring Jean Colonne to life for a little while.

"Who are you in reality?" she asked next.

"*Helas!* You have discovered me." He spoke in French, with a sigh of despair.

Her inclination was to laugh; but there was a good deal beneath the surface which was too serious to be treated as a mere jest. It was all very well while she had believed him to be one of her friends. But who was he? Why had he sought her out? She must know this before she could feel quite at ease.

She had not a single spark of fear of him; but there might be fear *for* him. As she had known him so promptly, others might recognize him.

"But in reality, who are you?" she repeated.

He shrugged his shoulders. "In Paris two months ago, Jean Colonne; here at the garage, John Simmons; to others, Sir Robert Marlowe, an Englishman of wealth. What is there in a mere name? A man can take any one he pleases in this country of yours," and he laughed slyly.

The laugh grated on her ears. He should take a very different view of the position.

"Are you French or English?"

"What does it matter? France and England; what are they but so much land; so many square miles? If one will not have a man, there is always plenty of room in the other," he replied gaily.

She leaned back in her seat frowning, sorely perplexed and troubled. The puzzle was beyond her. She had expected that he would talk in any way but this—in this tone of airy indifference. And yet—it pleased her.

"I do not wish to pry into your life," she said at length, very seriously. "Your secret will be safe with me. I owe you more than that. But tell me why you have sought me out in this way? Of course, it's ridiculous to pretend that you are here by any accident."

"Of course it is no accident. I heard of your being at the house of this lady, and I followed you on purpose."

"And why did you follow me?"

"Because I have not forgotten."

"I dare say you know what that means, but I don't."

"You promised you would help me."

"And so I will, of course! But how?"

"Introduce me to the lady who owns this car and your other friends."

"Do *what?*" cried Enid, sitting bolt upright in surprise.

"Introduce me to this gracious lady, your relative, Mrs. Gendall," he repeated.

"For what purpose? In what name, pray?" she exclaimed, as if he had asked her to reach down a bit of the setting sun.

"In my present name, of course," he replied as evenly as if making the most trifling request. "Sir Robert Marlowe."

"She happens to know the real Sir Robert Marlowe," she replied caustically.

"Ah, that is a pity. But I can take another name." He affected to think, and then added very gravely, shaking his head: "But that cannot be. There is no other man of that name."

"Why do you presume to ask so preposterous a thing?"

"You said you would interest your friends in me. It would give me many opportunities which I greatly desire."

"Opportunities—of doing what?"

"To gain something of the most vital importance to me." This was far more true than she guessed; but he succeeded in suggesting that it was something evil, akin to his association with Gaudin and the infamous red-car gang.

She shivered with a chill of disappointment. This was so utterly op-

posed to all her thoughts of him. "I hoped you had given up everything of that sort."

He flung his left hand into the air. "I shall never give it up," he answered with one of the laughs which jarred so disquietingly upon her nerves.

He did it so well that her disappointment began to harden into doubt. He appeared to glory in the sort of life he led—a life of imposture at the best, and who could say what—at the worst That desire for better things which his brave deliverance of her had suggested; the self-sacrifice of his offer to risk capture by the police in order to save her; the almost chivalrous care for her which he had afterward shown—had it all been merely a passing whim; a fleeting flash of his better nature, which had flickered out as instantaneously?

She sighed. She was under a deep obligation to him; and the knowledge troubled her, urging her still to do what she could for him, even if he was actually what she could not bear to think.

"Why do you tell me that you are Sir Robert Marlowe?" she asked after a long pause.

"Because of my love of truth," he replied in the same light, irresponsible tone. "Because at the moment I am."

"Please!" she cried, with a piteous appeal in her voice. "I am so—sorry for you. I—I—"

Her look of deep distress made him fear that he had carried the thing too far, and he made no response. She was silent for a long time, and then bent forward and spoke very earnestly:

"What you have asked me is, of course, out of the question. An utter impossibility. I won't ask your motive; I can only hope it is not what I—what some might fear. But if there is anything I can do, anything in the world that is in my power, I will do it promptly, cheerfully, and with all my heart."

Intense sincerity rang in every syllable of the words, recalling to him her earnest tone at the moment of their parting that night in Paris.

"That is a wide pledge. I wish I knew how far it would reach. I may claim its fulfilment some day in a way that may cause you to regret and recall it," he answered as earnestly as she had spoken.

"I shall never regret it and never recall it; but it must not be such a burlesque as what you asked just now."

"I accept the condition," he replied in the same earnest tone. "You remember that night in Paris?" he asked presently.

"I am not likely ever to forget it."

"Nor I. Do you remember that when you were urging me, I stopped you, saying that there were things I could not tell you because my lips were sealed?"

"Distinctly. I have often thought of that and wondered."

"After you had gone I repented my silence, and turned more than once to hurry after you and tell you everything. I went to your hotel the next morning to do so, but you had left."

"You asked me to go as soon as possible."

"Would you care to listen to me? I came down to this place to tell you. You have been strangely mistaken about me, and for the last half-hour I have been intentionally perplexing you, because"—he paused and smiled—"because of the ingenious ruse by which you succeeded in seeing my face."

He paused again, hesitating how to begin, and Enid was on the very tiptoe of expectation.

"The truth is what I have told you—"

"Stop! Please *stop!*" cried Mrs. Gendall excitedly. "Enid, dear, Mrs. Latimer has fainted! Do come, child at once! I can't find the sal volatile or anything!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Faint Hope—and Charity

by Tom S. Elrod

GRAHAM was the kind of a fellow who hesitates between two neckties. Such a man, lest he be careful, is likely to become, at the age of fifty or sixty, the exact counterpart of the cartoonist's popular conception of "the common people."

One could look at him and wonder if, when he really did reach that age, he would have his rather thin cheeks decorated with a whisker each; if his somewhat somber brown eyes would continue to peer through thick lenses; if his slight frown would be grown deeper, and his tendency to stoop more pronounced.

But then the people with whom Graham associated most did not really know him, any more than the utter strangers who passed and repassed him in the streets. They barely suspected that he kept his emotions, his real feelings, hidden so deeply that it was only at rare intervals they were given even a glimpse of his true personality.

And so, because his parents had named him Francis Hope Graham, in honor of an uncle, his friends had dubbed him "Faint Hope" Graham because of what they were pleased to call his disposition.

Naturally, when he began to rather sit up and take extensive notice of the fact that there lived such a feminine person as Miss Twanette Drake, this little circle of friends rolled down all of their individual and collective sleeves that they might laugh therein. They thought it would be such an interesting diversion to stand by and see Graham fall in love.

Which he did—and it was.

Had Graham and Miss Drake been the characters in a moving-picture play, the people out in front would have recognized him as being in the neighborhood of twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old, and having the other attributes previously mentioned in his catalogue. It is likely they would have passed him by with a glance or two, especially if Miss Drake was in the picture with him, because she was a young woman of the early twenty period who commanded attention.

She was a little taller than Graham, and his opposite in almost every way. To look at her now was to fill the eye with satisfaction, although the same people who might have predicted Graham's picture at sixty would doubtless have confessed that Miss Drake would be, to say the least, plump by that time.

However, curves are easier to watch than angles, and there was something restful about the girl; something appealing in the direct way she looked at you, in the delicious sweep of her cheek, the quivering mirth that seemed

always to hover about her lips, and the habit she had of tossing her head like a thoroughbred.

Graham, who had intended being a lawyer, had fallen into money, and had become a student, first of one dreary topic and then another. On the other hand, Miss Drake was so busily engaged with the superficial things of life, like tangoes, teas, and tennis, that her well-poised head very likely would have ached had she forced herself to remain quiet long enough for Graham to read her a chapter from one of his favorite books.

Mrs. Kellogg, who was famous for doing the wrong thing at the right time, had commanded Graham to take Twanette in to dinner at her home one night, and all the other guests—they happened to belong to the same intimate circle — had neglected their own talk to watch these two struggle along in the heavy surf of conversation.

Just what they talked about nobody exactly knew, although every person at the table could see Graham's interest growing. But had they been privileged, they would have read the following as Graham's entry in his diary late that night:

My dinner partner at Mrs. Kellogg's tonight was a Miss Twanette — remarkable name—Drake. She affected me strangely. I fear that I talked more than my usual wont.

I apprehend that I may have bored her, to use a common expression. Nevertheless, being in her society is a very agreeable experience, and one, I must confess, I would not be loath to repeat. She appeared to understand me, something the average person who poses as my friend utterly fails to do. I shall not place here in writing any estimate of her physical attractions. In fact, I feel my ideals in that respect undergoing a change.

I shall need some time for reflection before I finish this entry.

"Do you know what you have done?" demanded one of the Taylor twins—one could not tell them apart—of Mrs. Kellogg the next day. And when Mrs. Kellogg had violently shaken her head in alarm, the girl continued: "Why, you placed that funny Mr. Graham and Twanette Drake side by side, and he seemed to be utterly devouring her with his eyes. And you know, Mrs. Kellogg, he is supposed to be so deep, and so queer, and so—oh, all that sort of thing—that none of the girls ever has been able to get along with him at all. And now it would be the most killing thing in the world if Twanette, who never had a serious thought, should get him all worked up about her and then let him drop as if he had fallen out of an aeroplane."

"Well, I'm sure," defended Mrs. Kellogg, "that Mr. Graham is a perfectly eligible young man; a trifle studious and reserved, perhaps, but Heaven only knows it is a relief to see a type of that kind nowadays."

Seeing she had been unable to make the older woman appreciate the true inwardness of the situation, the Taylor twin hurried away to impart her information to members of the younger generation, those who would laugh with her and at the unfortunate plight into which the young man seemingly had been plunged.

An affair of that kind is not generally allowed to lag. People thought it would be too good a chance to slip through their fingers, so they literally arranged dinner after dinner, and occasion after occasion, where Graham had to be the escort of the lovely Miss Drake. And anybody with half an eye could see that he was getting in deeper and deeper all the time.

That is, anybody but Graham himself; and, of course, no one knew what he was writing in his diary each night.

"Anyhow, he means well," Twanette had insisted when one of the girls sought to plague her about what she termed the new catch. "He has a soul above auction bridge and cocktails, and he handles words with the greatest ease—words that I couldn't even lift."

"But he's serious," the girl declared. "He's falling in love with you, and one of these days he will be pro-

posing in Sanskrit, without you having the slightest notion of what he is discussing."

"I venture I shall know what he means if he ever does anything like that," Twanette retorted, her face growing rosy; "and if you girls keep on tormenting me about him I shall begin to think it is because I've discovered him and the rest of you are jealous because you never realized his possibilities."

The other gasped and fled.

That statement about Graham being the kind of a fellow who hesitates between two neckties is not altogether wrong. That was his trouble. He never knew when to make up his mind, excellent mind though it was.

People who knew about such things often sat and discussed him, telling what a great man he might have been had he been possessed of a little nerve. But always at the critical point Graham's shyness, his lack of belief in his own abilities, came up as a sort of bugbear to him, and he shut himself in his little shell, too faint-hearted to go out and fight the world to make it give him what his friends said was rightfully his.

So it was but natural that Graham took to worshiping Twanette Drake from afar. In his precious diary, he wrote:

She is my queen, and I am the lowliest of her lowly subjects. Fain would I approach her throne and there declare myself as willing to be her slave, not that I could hope for more, but that I might do her a service, that I might feel I could go forth and accomplish something for her, something that would win me the right to touch the hem of her garment, to have her reach forth her wonderful hand that I might brush it with my lips.

The gentleman who said all of the romance was gone out of this world was looking in the wrong dictionary. The word is still there, and it means the same thing. The trouble is that too many people run past it and skid around the corner without realizing what they have missed.

"You have a great mind," Twanette told him one evening. "You know more than any man I ever met. Sometimes you appal me with your knowledge."

Graham blushed painfully and polished his thick lenses.

"And you"—he halted, gulped painfully—"you have the— Oh, by the way, did I mention to you an article I was reading in the 'Progress of the Universe'? It was speaking of the humanities, and I recall it said—"

Twanette was tapping the floor with the toe of her slipper, and her mind was far afield. Never before had she encountered a young man who absolutely refused to rise to every kind of bait she might use.

To have young fellows make love to her was as natural as for her to eat and sleep and go shopping. But though she could read the wildest kind of devotion in Graham's eyes, he never allowed himself to use the spoken word.

"Oh, I am so unworthy," he declared to himself the next day as he rambled by himself in a deserted section of the park—"I am so utterly unworthy! Would that I could walk up to her proudly, firmly, calmly, and say the things that are in my heart to be said! Even though she spurned me, I would always have the sweet recollection of having told her of the greatest love the world has known."

You see, Faint Hope Graham was not only heels over head in love; he was touching bottom every few minutes, and he struggled along there, too shy to speak, too wretched to go away and leave her, too much in love to do anything but think about it, and too foolish to accept even one of the little advances she constantly made him.

Twanette wasn't exactly in love with Graham, but she was interested by his peculiar manner.

She considered him a sort of problem, and the longer she thought about him in that light the more determined she was that the problem should be

solved. To bring him actually to her feet and his knees — that was something she had to do, or she never would smile a hearty smile again.

"Bet you ten dollars," said Walcott to one of the Taylor twins, "that Faint Hope never will call his Drake 'ducky.'"

"You must be looking for a sure thing," the girl retorted. "He would even hesitate to call *himself* anything but mister."

There is no telling where the affair would have ended, or how long they would have drifted, had it not been for the Belgians.

Mrs. Kellogg insisted they should do something to relieve the distress in stricken Belgium, and also provide for the destitute people of that country.

"Here is an opportunity," she announced, "to actually demonstrate whether or not the people are really charitable."

"I have been reading about the people of Belgium," said Graham, who happened to be one of the party—that is, happened intentionally, because Twanette was there—"and I recall that in 1664 there was a—"

"My, how time does fly!" suggested Walcott. "Suppose you come down to the present a little while, Graham; we're talking about immediate needs, not ancient history."

"Oh, in that case," Graham agreed, "I should be glad, of course, to contribute to any fund that might be raised for the relief of the destitute."

"Now, my idea about this," resumed Mrs. Kellogg, "is that we—"

"Oh, I know!" interrupted one of the Taylor twins. "Let's have a bazaar, and sell things for seven or eight prices, with the understanding that the money goes to the relief fund, every cent of it. That way we can charge people any price we want to charge, and they'll simply have to patronize it, because, while we're accomplishing an immense amount of good, we'll be doing a social stunt as well, and we can have dancing and—"

Nobody was allowed to finish a whole sentence after that because, after the manner of refined and fashionable people, they all spoke at once.

Somehow or other, out of the deluge of suggestions a sort of plan was formed. The bazaar would be held in the home of Mrs. Kellogg. That would give it social tone. People who never got into her house through the ordinary invitational channels would hasten to come now, just to see her furniture, her silver, her draperies, and her pictures, if for no other reason.

Curiosity and charity often go hand in hand, and there was a secret feeling in Mrs. Kellogg's breast that she could induce them to lead the grand march on this occasion.

"You know," ventured Walcott, as they were preparing to leave, "I read somewhere of a charity fair, or something on that order, and there was a kissing booth. The paper said this booth took in more money than all the other departments combined."

Twanette had been looking through a window, a dreamy expression on her face. Suddenly she came to life.

"What a capital idea!" she exclaimed. "Of course, we must have one of those departments."

"B-b-but," spluttered Mrs. Kellogg, "who in the world would be willing to have charge of such an unconventional booth as that?"

"Well"—Twanette's eyes were cast down and her color was rising—"if no one else speaks for it, I will volunteer. It's a noble cause, the most noble in the world. We should be willing to do almost anything for charity."

Graham never exactly knew how he got out of there or where he was going.

His usually quiet eyes were flashing fire, and, although he was a little man, he collided rudely with a traffic policeman and never begged the officer's pardon. As his anger rose he veered around a corner, knocked over a child's toy wagon, and took a fiendish delight in having done something that would cause pain and anguish.

Finally he sighted a drug-store ahead, hurried to the refreshment-counter, and demanded a glass of ginger ale with as much carbonated water in it as possible. The stinging beverage brought the tears to his eyes as he gulped it down; but then he was very near the crying stage, anyhow, and he did not take the trouble to wipe the tears away.

"To think," he fumed aloud—"just to think that this woman, this — this person I've worshiped from afar; this wonderful, this perfect sample of the Creator's handiwork, is going to cheapen herself, to so far forget her womanhood, her sacred birthright, to allow men, *men* — ordinary, common men—to kiss her, that she may secure dirty money to send to some foreigner she never has seen!"

But he couldn't go to Twanette and protest because he realized he had no right to raise his hand or his voice. Never had he indicated to her by word or deed that he loved her.

This information was something he had kept religiously to himself, and now, when she was tottering on the pedestal where he had placed her, when she was ready to fall, he, faint-heartedly, held back when he might have saved her; when he might have prevented this monstrous thing if he was man enough to win her love.

Sadly, as the fire of his anger burned low and left only a painful, throbbing wound, Graham sought his home, buried his head in his hands, and wept tears that all the ginger ale in the world could not have brought to his eyes.

"'And s-s-seeing at l-l-last,'" he sobbed, "'t-t-that she n-n-never could k-know and n-n-never could understand!'"

In the active days of preparation for the Belgian Bazaar nobody seemed to miss Graham unless it was Twanette, and she never mentioned his absence. Every one was busy; every one had a new suggestion and wanted it adopted at once.

The newspapers played the story for all it was worth—not only because the movement represented a worthy cause, but because Mrs. Kellogg stood sponsor for it, and she was socially prominent enough to make news without the slightest effort.

And on the night the bazaar opened there was a rush such as the society editors and feature writers never had seen before.

Mrs. Kellogg met the people at the door and welcomed them, one and all, no matter whether they were members of the social-elect or not. If they had money they were possessed of the necessary card of admission, and the more they spent the more likelihood there was — perhaps — that the same doors might open to them at some more exclusive function.

One of the Taylor twins did a classical dance in the library, and admission there was two dollars a ticket. The other twin dispensed ordinary candy at a fancy price, but people bought it because she was selling it, and because the money went to the Belgians.

There was a fortune-teller in a booth, and the amount she charged for a reading was little short of highway robbery, had it not been for such a worthy enterprise. There was a home-made vaudeville show going on upstairs in the drawing-room, and admission there cost more than a midnight revue.

But while these and numerous other attractions created excitement and were well patronized, the kissing-booth was what might have been termed the real feature of the bill. It was there Graham found himself being drawn by some unseen force in spite of his many resolutions never to go near the home of Mrs. Kellogg that night or any time in the future.

Trembling with anger and paying but slight attention to the crowds of people surging around him, his eyes were only for the heavy silk curtains that hid Twanette from the rest of the world.

Behind these hangings he realized—realized it with a pain that stabbed him through and through — that she was allowing men to kiss her at five dollars per kiss, and all for the starving Belgians. He watched young Alexander, a particularly weak-minded young cub, approach the booth.

He read, as did Alexander, the big placard announcing:

KISSES FOR CHARITY.

Miss Twanette Drake offers them at Five Dollars Each.

Alexander was given a ticket by the young man at the entrance of the booth, went inside, remained what appeared to be an age to Graham, and came out blushing. Other young men followed, and some in the ranks of the patrons were not so young. That seemed to Graham to make it all the more horrible.

Without realizing it he was within a few feet of the booth.

"Here y'are!" spieled the imported young man in charge; "step right up, gents, and take a chance! And another one right down here; that's the stuff! Five dollars a throw! Come on now, boys; come on and show yer nerve! Here's the chanst of a lifetime, chanst to get a kiss fer the askin'! Hey, there, you feller with the specs on, take a chanst!"

Without realizing what he was doing, Graham clutched the ticket that was placed in his hand, vaguely heard the spieler say something about "pay the lady inside," and was through the slit in the curtains.

The beauty of the girl he loved made him gasp. She was dressed in black, her neck, shoulders, and arms bare. Around her were black velvet hangings, and the only light was the softened rays of an indirect fixture overhead. This mellow glow accentuated the whiteness of her skin, made of her a picture that would have charmed him even had he not fallen a victim to her long ago.

"And you"—she broke the silence with difficulty—"you want to patronize my booth?"

"Heavens, no!" he shouted so loudly he would have been heard outside had there been less pandemonium; "do you think I would willingly come here and try to buy a kiss from you, from you of all people when I—I—"

"You what?" she asked, leaning forward a little at the table where she sat.

"God knows it's hard to say," he went on, "because it's all so futile, all so hopeless; but—but— Oh, don't you understand? Can't you see I've loved you madly, wildly, passionately for months? And then to think you would cheapen yourself this way! It simply drives me crazy."

"And don't you want a kiss?" she asked again.

"Don't I want a kiss?" he echoed; "I want a kiss more than anything in the world, but I won't stoop that low. I'm going away from here to-night, and I am never, never coming back again. And now you know how I've felt; how, in spite of everything, I love you even now, and how in the years to come, when I hope this hateful memory becomes easier to bear, I will look back and know I did all I could."

He was out of the booth before she could speak. His face was twitching with emotion, and he had been too blind to see the hands she had flung out to him as he turned away.

Pawing through a pile of coats and hats in an effort to secure his own garments, for the check-boy was hopelessly confused, he encountered Walcott, who had followed him there.

"So you got stung, too," said Walcott, and slapped him on the back.

"What do you mean?" Graham demanded.

"Oh, you needn't try to act so foxy

about it!" Walcott laughed. "I got mine as well as the rest of the fellows. But we have to hand it to Twanette, whatever we do. No other girl would have thought of luring the fellows in there with the idea that they were going to have a chance to kiss her, make them part with five iron men, and then have her hand out a candy kiss, neatly wrapped up in tissue-paper. Of course, nobody howled out loud, because each sucker wanted to see the other fellow take the hook. Now, there was—"

"You — you mean Miss Drake merely sold candy kisses?" demanded Graham, his voice shaky.

"Why, what else would I mean?" questioned Walcott in reply; "you ought to know; you were in there, and you had every op—"

But Graham was gone — gone so quickly he almost knocked over several smiling people who were in the way. He never stopped for a ticket as he rushed through the opening in the silken curtains.

And Walcott, who had followed him in idle curiosity, suddenly saw a great light.

"I've got a new way to say it," he told one of the Taylor twins later in the evening when the bazaar was over, when they were sitting down to supper, and when his gaze rested on the radiant faces of Twanette Drake and Francis Hope Graham.

"To say what?" she wanted to know.

"It's like this," he replied—"Faint Hope and charity, and the greatest of these is—charity."

AUTUMN IN TOWN

BY OLIN L. LYMAN

THE mellow haze of autumn days
Outspreads in mists of aerial seas,
Bringing the spell of woodland ways,
The fire-hued mourning of the trees
To us who're exiled from the hills,
Bound to the iron-rimmed wheel in town,
Feeling the lure of olden thrills
Reborn as leaves come drifting down.

Breeze from the sea comes stealing in,
Rife with the winy zest of fall,
Stirring, amid the city's din,
The soul to heed the silent call
Of wide-flung hills which pierce the skies,
Far from the steel-girt, thundering town,
As back the homing fancy flies
To hills where leaves come drifting down.

The House of the Purple Stairs

by Jeannette I. Helm

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

JOHN GORDON, young New York lawyer, finds Bertha Wetherall just after midnight bending over the body of her aunt, Mrs. Wetherall, at the foot of a flight of stairs of sinister history in a town up the Hudson near New York. The girl says her aunt had started down-stairs and had suddenly shrieked and pitched to the bottom. In the woman's heart is found a long hatpin; yet they two were alone in the house, Mr. Wetherall having started for the train just before midnight. An inquest is begun by Dr. McDonald, the local coroner.

It develops that the hatpin belongs to Bertha, who sticks to her wild story that she saw her aunt suddenly stagger and fall when half-way down the stairs. Martha Jenkins, the maid, says there was ill-feeling between Bertha and her aunt. Mr. Wetherall hints at insanity on the girl's part. Gordon meets a queer tramp; becomes Bertha's lawyer, since she is suspected, and falls in love with her. He is nearly killed on the stairs by a chunk of plaster, and sends for Rollins, a detective, who declares the plaster was loosened on purpose.

CHAPTER XV.

Gordon Interviews the Doctor.

"BY Jove!" said Gordon, and again a momentary nausea came over him. "Who was it?"

"That's what we've got to find out. Who in this house is most interested in putting you out of the way?"

"I don't know any one that should be," answered the young man, "unless—Mr. Wetherall. And what earthly reason could *he* have?"

"People don't show their reasons," observed Rollins, "or there wouldn't be any detectives needed. Tell me exactly what happened."

Gordon did so, adding: "But Mr. Wetherall was in bed, having taken a sleeping draft—or so he said."

"Saying doesn't count for much," said the detective dryly. "The question is—how did he know you were going to be there at that time?"

"I told him I was going out for a breath of air, and he asked me to close up everything, and then went on to bed. Besides, I didn't hear any noise, and it must have taken some strength to shove that molding off."

"What did you do after Mr. Wetherall went up-stairs?"

"I went outside for a while, and when I came in I thought I'd look over the stairs and see if I could imagine any plausible reason for Mrs. Wetherall's death. You know what a help it is to put yourself in another person's place."

The detective nodded. "Well?"

"I got to the spot where Mrs. Wetherall must have fallen, and then

—though I am not imaginative, Rollins—the thing came over me with such force that *I* had to go outside again to steady my nerves—"

"And that's what did the trick," interrupted the detective. "How long were you outside? Four — five minutes?" as Gordon nodded. "Just time enough for old man Wetherall to loosen the molding exactly above the spot where he had previously seen you standing. Then it would be an easy matter for him to push it off when you were underneath it again, keeping out of sight himself."

"Yes, but what was his motive?" inquired Gordon. "I don't think he fancies me, and I return the compliment; but I have nothing more than a feeling to go on, and it's coming it a bit strong on the old gentleman to accuse him of trying to dispose of a guest in that way, no matter how unwelcome."

"Now, see here," said Rollins; "there's only one practical way to arrive at the solution of any mystery. If you can't fasten it directly on any person or thing, you've got to eliminate the improbable bit by bit until you arrive at some possible conclusion. Let's work it out in this case. There were in the house, besides yourself, Mr. Wetherall, his niece, and the servants. How many servants have they?"

"Two, maids. There is an old gardener, but he sleeps in a house by himself."

"What are these maids like?"

"One of them, the cook, I know nothing about. She's new here. Mr. Wetherall got her from town yesterday. The other, Martha Jenkins, had been with them some time before; left when all the other servants did, and came back again."

"H-m; we must look up this Martha Jenkins. I think the other won't count, but we can't be sure. Still, I believe we can safely eliminate the maids until we find some direct motive for them. That leaves the choice between the other two—unless you incline to the ghost theory, and it must have been rather a substantial one to be able to pry off that molding."

"Well, I'm sure Miss Wetherall didn't, and I'm not ready to believe Mr. Wetherall did, either," replied Gordon coolly.

The detective thrust his hands into his pockets and whistled.

"All right; lay it on the ghost since we haven't yet found a third person."

"That reminds me—there was a third person outside," returned Gordon; "but I doubt if he was in any condition to have done it, even if he could have got in unseen by me."

Rollins wheeled on him sharply. "A third person? Who do you mean?"

"A tramp that I found lying drunk in the grass when I went outside the first time, but judging from the state he was in, I think we can eliminate him, too."

"Tell me all about him," demanded the detective.

"He's an odd sort of chap I met late in the afternoon after the inquest. I stumbled over him in the woods about a mile off, and he asked me for some money, which I was weak enough to give him. He was a most unkempt specimen; was half gone with consumption, I should imagine from the way he coughed, and was helping himself along the other half with drink and dope—or so he said. He seemed to have belonged to a better class once, in spite of his dirt and appearance, and I couldn't help feeling sorry for him. He was on his way to see some one who, from what he said, I judged had no desire ever to see him again. I shouldn't have thought of it again if I hadn't discovered that person to be Mr. Wetherall."

"How?"

"By overhearing a conversation between him and the tramp the next morning."

"Tell me every word they said." The detective's eyes were snapping

with eagerness. Gordon repeated the interview faithfully.

"And what became of him?" demanded Rollins. "Couldn't you find him afterward and get a chance to talk with him?"

"I tried to, but he had disappeared entirely. Mr. Wetherall said he had sent him off about his business."

"A-hum!" snorted the detective. "I guess he knew his own business when he did that. There's more in this than appears."

"But I am positive he was dead drunk that night, and couldn't have pushed a pebble off, not alone that molding."

"Perhaps so, but he might not have been so drunk the night before."

"You think he had anything to do with the murder?" queried Gordon sharply.

"Can't say; every clue counts in a maze, and I think we are on the scent of a possible solution. The thing for us to do now is to find that tramp."

Gordon beamed with satisfaction. "Bully for you, Rollins. I believe we are on the right track at last, and I knew I was wise in sending for you. I should never have thought of the tramp in that connection myself—he seemed so feeble and harmless."

"Wait and see," answered the detective dryly; "and don't build too much on anything just yet. Facts have a queer way of hitting you from behind like a boomerang; and I'm a fat lot mistaken if there isn't more in this than is on top."

"Exactly what do you expect?" asked Gordon curiously.

But Rollins shook his head, and busied himself in making minute diagrams and measurements of the stairs, the library, even the hall above. He examined the windows carefully, particularly the purple ones, which were set in half-way up the stairs, and satisfied himself that Bertha's statement of the moon shining in through them could be verified, as the roof of the conservatory was of plain glass, and even now the sun was pouring in through that and staining the stairs with purple.

"Where do these side stairs lead to?"

"Up to the servants' quarters. We tried to go up them that evening, and found that the door at the top was locked."

"'We'?"

"Miss Wetherall and I. Mr. Wetherall had carried his wife's body up the big stairs; but we both felt the same distaste of going that way ourselves, and went up the side stairs."

"And they were closed off—why?"

"Mr. Wetherall said that his wife was nervous and had everything shut up that night on account of their being alone."

"Was there any time during your examination of the body and helping Miss Wetherall carry it over to the couch when any one could have slipped out unseen?"

Gordon hesitated.

"It might have been possible," he admitted. "We were naturally centering all our attention on the body. They would have had to go out of the big door, however, and that, as you see, is so close to the stairs that I think we should have seen any one passing that way. All the doors and windows were undisturbed the next morning."

"Did you make any search before you went up-stairs?"

"No, we didn't consider it necessary, as no one knew then that Mrs. Wetherall had been murdered. But I suppose the tramp could have got in before and hidden himself somewhere. Only when I met him the next day he was nearly a mile away from the house; and, judging from what he said to Mr. Wetherall next morning, it was his first appearance on the scene of action. And then there is Miss Wetherall's story, which she sticks to in spite of that hatpin. The more I think of it all, the more confusing it gets."

"Wait until we get more facts to

think about," returned the detective laconically.

He made Gordon take him outside and show him the exact spot where he had found the tramp lying that night, and whistled softly as he contemplated the two empty whisky bottles, which lay half-hidden under the bushes.

"If he could hold all that, slip into the house unseen by you, and get upstairs in time to drop that molding on you, he must be some stronger than most men," he observed. "But," as Gordon's face fell, "this doesn't affect the main theory I'm working on, and we've got to get hold of that man as soon as possible. You say there is no phone in this house? We'll have to go down to the village then, and while I'm calling up, you had better get hold of the doctor and the minutes. Find out all you can."

This plan suited Gordon excellently, for he wanted, from motives of delicacy, to get away from the house when the funeral party returned, and it was nearly time for that now. He and Rollins struck across the lawn and found a short cut which brought them into the village in fifteen minutes.

There he left Rollins to his own devices and hunted up the doctor. The latter was not in the coroner's office, which was tucked away in a dirty frame building between the Red Men's hall and the local undertaker; but he was fortunate in catching him in his own home.

The doctor received him civilly enough, and professed himself at Gordon's service when the latter asked for a few minutes of his time. He plunged at once into affairs, for he had taken the doctor's measure and felt sure that frankness would serve him best with the bluff Scotchman.

"I have taken up the case for Miss Wetherall, doctor, but I am not here entirely in my professional capacity. I want to ask you first whether you have reported the case to the district attorney?"

"I have," answered the doctor bluntly. "The evidence left me no choice. I have not heard from him yet, but he will probably send down a man at once to look into the matter."

Gordon had expected as much, and he blessed the foresight which had made him send for Rollins immediately. Every hour gained before the coming of the other man was so much added to advantage.

"I need not ask," he said suavely, "whether you were fully convinced that the hatpin was the sole cause of Mrs. Wetherall's death, because otherwise you would not have allowed the funeral to proceed without waiting for the district attorney. Knowing as I do your high medical ability, it dispels any doubt on that subject."

Two spots of color mounted to the doctor's high cheek-bones.

"Most certainly there was no doubt," he retorted sharply, "and the condition of the body was such that the funeral could not be delayed. I am confident that the district attorney will feel satisfied with my action when he reads the evidence."

"I am quite sure of it also. The case was exceedingly well handled, if you will allow me to say so. And that reminds me, could you spare me a copy of the minutes to glance over? There are some points I would like to refresh my memory on."

The doctor's momentary annoyance was dispelled by Gordon's tactful praise. He had looked up the young man's record, and remembered now having read of his brilliant handling of a somewhat complicated appeal case. It flattered him also to be associated with so distinguished a colleague.

"I have an extra copy which you are very welcome to. I'll call up my clerk now and tell him to bring it over here. He'll be back at the office by this time. If there are any other questions you would like to ask I'll do the best I can for you. I have ten minutes to spare."

Gordon thanked him and offered a cigar while they waited for the clerk.

"These cases are a bit out of your line, aren't they?" asked the doctor as he lit his cigar.

"Yes, and I should have hesitated to take it up, but I have been so strangely associated with the whole affair that I am interested in seeing what I can make of it."

"Well, I don't mind saying you will have a hard time convincing any jury of Miss Wetherall's innocence," returned the doctor complacently. "It's a sad thing, for the young lady is sweet and charming. Homicidal mania is the best you can make of it, I'm thinking."

"I shall not be content with that," said Gordon quietly.

"So you think she is innocent, eh?" The doctor shot him a queer look from under his shaggy brows. "Well, I hope so, for her sake. They are one of our best families."

"Have you ever noticed any signs of delusion in her before?"

"Not particularly. I haven't seen much of her, to tell the truth; but the family has always been queer, and living shut up in that gloomy old house is enough to make any girl strange."

"What kind of a person was Mrs. Wetherall?"

"Quiet, and very harmless; the last sort of person I should imagine any one murdering in that cold-blooded way. That's the strongest proof of insanity, *I* consider."

"Was Mr. Wetherall fond of his wife?" asked Gordon carelessly.

"Absolutely devoted; they were an ideal couple in every way. Miss Wetherall's father was a queer chap, and I think you can trace the taint there. He died suddenly, too; and there was some talk of a legend and a ghost mixed in it, but I don't take any stock in those things. That kind of story always springs up like fungi around an old house. Well, here's your evidence," as the clerk appeared with the minutes. "If there is anything more I can do for you let me know."

"Thank you, doctor. You have been very kind to give me so much of your time to-day. I know you will be glad if I can clear the young lady."

"Certainly," agreed the doctor. "But you've got a tough job before you. I'll stake my professional reputation on the facts. There was no need even of an autopsy. But if there is anything to be found, go ahead and do it."

He smiled tolerantly as he showed the young man out.

Gordon did not say anything, but once in the street, he, too, smiled to himself as he proceeded hopefully toward the hotel where he had agreed to meet Rollins.

CHAPTER XVI.

Where Is the Tramp?

WHEN he went into the entrance he saw Rollins already there, and hurried up to him eagerly; but the detective shook his head.

"It's no go. I made some local inquiries, and no one remembered having seen any man of his description around here. Then I called up Riverbank, the town below this, thinking that he might have gone through there on his way to the city. The station telephone was out of order and couldn't be fixed for a couple of hours."

Gordon's face clouded over. He only knew what he had hoped from this clue by the bitter disappointment he felt now.

"Then there's no use in hunting for him?"

"Every kind of use," answered the detective briskly. "He is the man I want most to see right now. We must find him, and quickly. But while we are waiting to phone, there's another thing we've got to find even more quickly—something to eat. It's past two o'clock, and I'm starved. There's an oyster-house here that looks fairly decent. Come on in, and I'll tell you

what I found out after I fill up this aching void of mine."

When they had finished a satisfying if not elegant dinner, Gordon related his interview with the doctor.

"Huh!" grunted the detective when he had finished. "That doctor's nut is a full man's size, and that don't need any Sherlock Holmes to find out either. These country ginks think they know everything. Wish I could have had a friend of mine take a look at the body. Still, the doctor must have been pretty well satisfied to have let the funeral proceed. Let's have a look at the evidence. We'll go over it together while we are waiting for Riverbank; there's no one here now, and this is as good a place as any."

In fact the little oyster and chop house was nearly empty, and when Gordon had tipped the waiter with instructions to leave them alone, they had the place to themselves. The detective read the evidence through carefully, marking several passages. Then he looked up and nodded as if satisfied.

"If I didn't feel dead sure before that we needed that tramp in our business, I do now. See here, Wetherall states positively that there was no one in the house when he left except his wife and niece; but a little further on he admits that he made no examination of the premises before he carried his wife up-stairs in order to see if any one had got in during his absence. He may not have suspected that her death was not a natural one, but ordinary precaution would have led him to take a look around to see if everything was all right."

"Don't you think under the circumstances that was excusable?" asked Gordon.

"Yes, of course he may have been too upset to think of anything else, but it don't seem like him—as you describe him. Anyway, Miss Wetherall says here that she left the house unguarded, and with two windows and the door open when she went down the walk with her uncle. There was the chance for our man to have got in."

"Yes, although Miss Wetherall seemed to be quite positive that no one could have done so without her knowledge, and the gardener testified that everything was closed and bolted as usual when he came in at half past six. I'd like to believe your theory, Rollins, but when I think it all over I don't really see how any one could have very well passed by us in the hall without our knowing it."

"He could have been let out," said the detective quietly.

"Do you think it was a put-up job?"

"I'm not thinking anything until I know more facts. Detective work is like a picture puzzle, Mr. Gordon. You find a couple of bits that fit together, and you go around looking for more of the same kind. Sometimes you have to try to fit all sorts of impossible bits together until you get the right ones.

"I think we have got hold of one of the biggest bits now, but I'm not saying anything till I see how he fits in. And we haven't even got hold of him yet."

"Well, it sounds plausible enough, although the man seemed to me hardly capable of such a carefully planned act, which must also have required considerable strength; and I can't possibly imagine what his motive could have been. Still, in such a motiveless thing as the whole performance seems, it might as well have been he as any other. One thing is sure, we must get him as soon as possible. Mr. Wetherall said he sent him off early, he can have got quite a distance off by now."

"That's right," agreed the detective, rising, "and we can't afford to lose any time with that other fellow of the district attorney's likely to butt in at any moment. I'll try Riverbank again, although I left word they were to call me up as soon as the wires were fixed."

He went out, and was gone long

enough for Gordon to become impatient and hunt him up. At the door he found the detective talking with a man who looked like a farmer. He left him and came toward Gordon with an air of decision.

"We're on the track now," he exulted. "This man thinks he saw a man of our chap's description asleep by the road as he drove in from Riverbank this morning. He's going back now, and I've hired him to take us with him to see if we can't pick up our man by the way."

"Had they seen anything of him at Riverbank?"

"I couldn't get them; the wires were still broken or busy; but this farmer has a very decent little mare, and she'll get us over in nearly as good time to find out. That is better than waiting here, and there's the chance of picking up our man on the way."

Gordon nodded and jumped into the buggy, and the other two squeezed in after him. But although they kept a careful watch along the road, they saw no signs of the man they were hunting for, and there were no traces of any one in the place where the farmer still declared he had seen him sleeping.

"Well, take us on to Riverbank, then," said Gordon, "and the sooner the better."

The little mare, despite the heat and her triple burden, gave a good account of herself, and brought them to Main Street in less than ten minutes more. Rollins jumped out before she had fairly stopped, and disappeared into the police station. He came out after a few minutes, more leisurely, and stopped at the curb to light a cigar with provoking deliberation.

"What is it, man?" called Gordon impatiently. "Have they seen him?"

"No, worse luck; and though they called up Weston and Shirley, the nearest villages, for me, there were no traces of him there either."

Gordon's face fell.

"Then there's not much chance of our finding him?"

"Every kind of chance," returned Rollins briskly. "We haven't exhausted every place yet. He may have gone off by the river, but even then he's got to land somewhere. I've notified the police on both sides to watch out for him, and meanwhile to go over all the near-by places with a fine-tooth comb. Judging from your description of the kind of man he is, I don't think he will be hard to locate. Booze will land him if the police don't.

"Well, we had better get back as soon as possible and see if we can pick up the trail. I want to look over things a bit more, have a talk with Miss Wetherall, and one with her uncle, if you can manage it, and find out about the maids. This Martha Jenkins seems to be in the family secrets quite a bit."

They persuaded the farmer to take them back, and were finally deposited at the entrance of the Wetherall place late in the afternoon.

As they went up the drive Bertha came out on the piazza and stood there waiting for them. Her face was calm, but she was pale, and there were shadows under her eyes, and a pathetic drooping of her figure that gave Gordon an almost irresistible impulse to take her in his arms and comfort her.

Her forlorn expression vanished, however, as she saw Gordon, and she acknowledged his introduction of the detective with one of the smiles that made her face so rarely beautiful.

"I am so glad you have come, Mr. Rollins," she said, "and I know you will throw some light on this dreadful mystery."

"I hope so, indeed," answered the detective.

He had given her one quick, steady look, and after that he glanced at her but seldom. His manner toward her, however, was both reassuring and protective, and Bertha responded to it readily.

"Is there some place where we can talk privately?" he asked. "I should like to hear your story, if it will not be too painful for you."

"No, though it will be told for the second time this day," she answered with a sigh as she led the way to a small summer-house.

"Who else have you told it to?" asked both men in the same breath.

"To a man who I thought at first was your friend here, Mr. Gordon, but who said the district attorney had sent him to investigate the case. That was why I came out—to warn you."

Gordon and Rollins exchanged glances.

"Why didn't we get back sooner?" muttered the detective to himself. "Now, Miss Wetherall," he went on, "it will make it easier for both of us if you repeat to me exactly what you told the detective in answer to his questions, as far as you can remember in the exact order in which he asked them."

Bertha did so, and he followed her with deep attention, referring often to the copy of the minutes. The other detective, she said, had begun by asking when her uncle left, and why she had been outside at the time.

"Then," continued Bertha, "he asked me if I was entirely alone."

"H'm," said Rollins, "what did you say?"

"That to the best of my knowledge I was," answered Bertha simply. "My aunt was up-stairs, as I told him, and there was no one else in the house."

"If only we had got that tramp!" muttered Rollins. "What did he ask you then, please?"

"Oh, he asked me before that if I had noticed anything unusual about my aunt that evening. I said that she had complained of a headache and had gone to bed early. Then he asked me what time I had returned to the house. I told him about twelve, though I could not be absolutely certain. He wanted to know what had happened after that, and I repeated what I had told at the inquest about seeing her come down-stairs—" She shivered involuntarily.

"One moment," interrupted Rollins. "Did you tell him anything about the ghost theory?"

"No."

"Good! What next?"

"I told him about Mr. Gordon's coming in and helping me. He asked if I had known him before, and when I said I had not, asked again if I were positive on that point. I don't think he believed—" she hesitated, and then finished quickly—"that I was telling the truth."

Gordon started, and looked at Rollins, but that individual was gazing thoughtfully out over the river.

"Don't worry about what people think," he said, apparently coming out of a brown study, "as long as you feel sure you are telling the truth yourself. What else did he ask you?"

"If I remembered where I had lost the pin. I told him that I thought I had left it in my aunt's room."

"What's that?" exclaimed Rollins sharply. "You don't speak of that here in the evidence."

"No; I didn't remember it until yesterday when I told Mr. Gordon."

"It would have been better to have kept that to yourself," remarked Rollins rather shortly.

"Why? Do you think—"

"Nothing in the world, my dear young lady, but 'the least said, the soonest mended,' is a wise motto just now. But don't you worry, we'll clear things up; only, if he asks you any more questions, just stick to what you told in the evidence. And now may I ask you a few things myself?"

"Surely," she answered with a patient little sigh that went to Gordon's heart. Rollins's voice, too, was even more gentle as he went on:

"Had your aunt been in good health previous to that evening?"

"Why, yes; she was never very robust, and the heat tried her greatly, but I never heard her complain of anything except a headache like the one she said she had that evening."

"Do you know what she usually did for her headaches?"

"She generally slept them off. Sometimes, when they were severe, she would take a dose of bromid."

Rollins made a note in his book.

"Did she take any that night?"

"Yes, my uncle gave her some. She hated medicine."

"And you, Miss Wetherall, how were you feeling that night?"

She met his eyes frankly.

"Very nervous, somehow. The heat and oppressiveness of everything made me feel jumpy, but as far as the rest was concerned, I was as well as usual."

"I see," Rollins closed his notebook. "Thank you, Miss Wetherall, that will be all. Isn't that our man now, coming out? He evidently wants to speak to you, Mr. Gordon, and as I want to see Mr. Wetherall, it's a case of change partners. Don't let this fellow get on to my being a detective. And by the way, Miss Wetherall, my name just now is Smith." He nodded and went up toward the house.

Bertha turned to Gordon.

"Can I see you after you have spoken to him?" she asked. "I'll come down here when he's gone," and without waiting for an answer she followed the detective.

CHAPTER XVII.

Enter Mr. Quinn.

THE man who came down the gravel walk toward Gordon was a direct opposite to the one who had just left, and in spite of himself Gordon smiled at the contrast. This detective was small, wiry, and nervous, with sharp, restless eyes and an apologetic smile, as of one who deprecates in advance the unfavorable impression he is about to make.

When he spoke, however, Gordon received a surprise, for instead of the high-pitched tones his small figure suggested, his voice was deep and rich, with a resonance one would have expected from a man of twice his size.

"Mr. Gordon, I believe? My name is Quinn—James Quinn—from headquarters. The district attorney wired me to come. May I have a few words with you?"

Gordon did not start, although he had received a still greater surprise at the sound of the name. He had never met him, but he had heard of Quinn, and liked very little what he had heard. He had been a criminal lawyer of sharp practise and unenviable repute, had narrowly escaped the penitentiary, and finally landed through personal influence in the detective bureau, where he became known as a remarkably clever tracker of criminals.

But it was not this fact which made him the worst man that could have been chosen by the district attorney to investigate the case. Two years ago Gordon had been instrumental in hastening the departure to Sing Sing of Quinn's former associate, "Big Bill" Lloyd, Quinn having saved himself from a like fate only by "squealing"; and it had been reported to him at that time that Quinn meant to "get even."

It was reasonable to suppose that he still remembered it, and Gordon had no doubt that if a chance came now he would take it.

There was no recognition or expression of any sort, however, in the little man's face as he waited for Gordon to speak.

"I am at your service, Mr. Quinn," said the latter, with formal courtesy. "Shall we sit down here? We are not likely to be disturbed."

"I understand that you were the first person on the scene of the murder," said Quinn, as he seated himself. "That is, according to Miss Wetherall's statement, you came in directly after she saw her aunt fall at the foot of the stairs. Will you tell me just what you saw?"

Gordon disregarded the insinuation of the first part of Quinn's speech, and proceeded quietly and clearly to repeat the substance of what he had told at the inquest. The little man listened in

silence until he had finished, his nervous hands twisting about his cane, and his restless eyes on the ground.

"Were the screams you heard in a young woman's voice, or that of an older person?" he boomed with such suddenness that Gordon nearly jumped.

"They came from Miss Wetherall, I thought, but can't be sure."

"Why did you arrive at the house so late?"

"I was trying to find a short cut to the station."

"Rather a long short cut?" observed Quinn innocently.

"I had lost my way," returned Gordon stiffly. He did not like either the man's tone or manner, though both seemed inoffensive enough.

"And you were entirely alone with Miss Wetherall?"

"So far as I knew at the time."

"No servants in the house, I believe, and Mr. Wetherall away?" pursued Quinn.

"Yes." Gordon was becoming irritated, but he endeavored not to show it. He suspected that Quinn's motive was to badger him into betraying his hand, and he was too wise to do so.

"Why did Miss Wetherall call for help when she knew she was absolutely alone?"

"I'm afraid you must ask Miss Wetherall that yourself, Mr. Quinn."

The little man blinked without any appearance of annoyance.

"Quite right, quite right. Had you known Miss Wetherall before you came here?"

Gordon felt himself growing hot. What did he mean by repeating the question he had asked Bertha? The little man's eyes were not on him, however, but still fixed on the ground.

"I am an entire stranger to the family and this place," Gordon answered with emphasis.

"Of course, of course." Quinn's voice was irritatingly soothing, as if to a petulant child. "Your interest is purely philanthropic. I understand you are representing Miss Wetherall in this, and I only wondered why you had taken up a case so different from the majority of your practise."

Gordon looked squarely in the restless eyes.

"I have no objection to answering that, although it is no concern of yours. I know that Miss Wetherall is innocent, and I am well aware that the evidence has thrown unjust suspicion on her. I have never hesitated to take up any case, Mr. Quinn, either in order to punish the guilty or right the innocent, no matter what the consequences were."

The allusion was direct, and the young man's face was grim enough to have brought it home; but Quinn's own face did not show recognition of any ulterior meaning. He blinked again nervously, and nodded as if satisfied.

"Quite right, Mr. Gordon; quite right. So you know the young lady is innocent? That is interesting, very. Would you mind telling me how you know it?"

Gordon felt the dull color mounting to his cheek bones, and a spark of light glinted in his eyes that promised little good to his questioner. But Quinn's apparently innocent question had struck on the weak spot, and Gordon knew that to show anger would be to acknowledge uncertainty. So he only answered half contemptuously:

"I shall give you a chance to find that out for yourself, Mr. Quinn. It would be a pity for you to come all this distance without having an opportunity of exercising your talents."

"Thank you, Mr. Gordon," the other answered almost humbly. "I shall certainly avail myself of the opportunity."

Gordon regretted his anger and the hasty speech it had forced him into almost as soon as it was over; the more so because Quinn showed no outward signs of resenting it. He was not deceived by that last fact. Quinn was a man who never forgot or forgave, and

it had been unwise to anticipate trouble.

He would have regretted it still more if, when after a few more perfunctory questions the detective left him, he had seen him slip quietly into the back part of the house in search of Martha; and the smile on the little man's face as he jotted down her statements would have warned him of new dangers ahead.

His thoughts were unpleasant enough, however, as he sat there watching the hot sun dip behind the line of blue hills across the river. So far nothing had been done to clear Bertha, and the presence of the other detective complicated matters to an extent he hardly liked to acknowledge. Rollins was clever, and he trusted greatly in him; but he had not had time to find out much as yet, and the only clue they had unearthed thus far had led to a blank wall.

The more Gordon thought it over, the more important it seemed for the tramp to be found. But how? He had apparently vanished into space. Where on earth could he be?

The sound of crunching gravel made him look up quickly, expecting to see Bertha; but it was only old Jerry coming slowly along the path, watering-can in hand. With a sudden new idea Gordon leaned forward and spoke:

"Good evening, Jerry. Can I have a word with you?"

The old man blinked at him suspiciously for an instant.

"Oh, it's Mr. Gordon. I thought you was one of them 'tective chaps that's been a pokin' round and askin' questions all day. Precious lot *they* got out of me, I tell you. I know what I know, but I'm not a tellin' every one."

"You're dead right there, Jerry," laughed Gordon; "and from what I know of you, it would be a clever detective who could get a word more out of you than you wanted to let by; but as I'm not a detective, and I'm sure you're as anxious to clear Miss Bertha as I am, I know you won't mind telling me what you've seen."

Jerry put down his watering-pot and stared.

"Be they a suspectin' Miss Bertha?" he croaked. "I heard somethin' of it in the village, but I just laughed at them. The idee of her doin' sich a thing as that, her that I've knowed sence she was a little shaver!"

His indignation choked him, and he stopped, speechless.

"That's the way I feel, too, Jerry," returned Gordon; "and I'm going to do my best to make others feel the same way. Have you any bit of information on the subject? Tell me, for it may help me to clear her."

"I'll tell you anythin' you want, Mr. Gordon; but maybe it won't be so much, after all. Most folks don't think a sight of an old man's idees."

Gordon saw that he wanted encouragement, and proceeded to supply it.

"Come now; you know very well you're smarter than most, Jerry. I'd like to have your opinion as to who murdered Mrs. Wetherall."

The old man coughed importantly, and looked around with exaggerated caution.

"Some folks say as how Miss Bertha done it; but *I* know better than that; and some folks thinks 'twas the ghost—"

He paused dramatically.

"Oh," said Gordon disappointedly, "I remember you said you thought Mrs. Wetherall had seen 'Her'—only how about the pin in her heart?"

"That's just what I'm getting at," returned Jerry sententiously. "Ghosts can't kill with human weapons, but there are black devils in human form that can!"

Again he stopped and looked around. A faint shiver passed over the young man in spite of his conviction of its absurdity.

"What do you mean?" he demanded quickly.

"I ain't accusin' anybody, mind you; but the person that killed the poor

old lady had a black devil, and it wasn't in a man, either!"

"You can't mean—Miss Bertha?" Gordon's voice was sharp-edged.

"No, sir. I'd as soon suspect my old woman. I ain't a sayin' as any one special done it; but what did the other mean by tellin' all kinds of tales to the rest of the girls about lights, and black figgers creepin' down-stairs, and her bein' so scared to be near the place after dark; and then standin' there on the very spot talkin' to a strange man when she was supposed to be gone along with the other servants?"

"'The other'?" repeated Gordon. Then his mind quickly seizing an inference from the confused jumble of the old man's words: "Do you mean Martha Jenkins?"

Jerry nodded portentously.

"None else, Mr. Gordon. I seed her myself."

"When? What man was she talking to? This may be very important, Jerry."

"I was thinkin' so myself, sir; but talkin' gets one into a heap of trouble; and them detective folks has a way of twistin' things around out of all meanin' to suit themselves. She's a devil, too, and she don't favor me, neither; so I guessed I'd better keep my tongue still, and it wouldn't do no harm to no one. But seein' it's you, sir, and Miss Bertha's in danger because of that hatpin business—which to-day is the first I've hearn of it—"

"Yes, yes," reassured Gordon impatiently. "You can trust me not to get you into trouble with any one. Tell me everything you know, Jerry—in detail."

Jerry needed no urging as to this last.

"Well, sir"—with much enjoyment of the effect he was going to produce—"it was seven o'clock, and I had just finished watering the plants and was pottering around a bit, like I always do at that time to see that things was all right. The servants had all left long before to get the 3.30 for the city, Martha Jenkins among them, and my old woman had come over and cooked the dinner which the folkses was having right then in the dining-room, which, as you know, is in the back of the house.

"I was kind o' keepin' an eye on things, for their being back there left the rest of the house pretty deserted, and tramps sometimes come around here, us bein' so close to the river; so when I heerd a sort o' whisperin' like comin' from the hall, I thought I'd go and take a look.

"There's a glass door leadin' from the greenhouse on the right of the hall into the hall itself, and I went in there soft and peeked through the glass door. I could just see the corner of the stairs, and close by it was a woman's figger, all in black. I ain't afraid of regular ghostses, as I told you before; but I declare it was creepy to see that black figger there, and I was clean scairt. I'd 'a' run out only I was too scairt stiff to do more than stand there starin', my heart tickin' like an alarm-clock so hard I was afraid it would be heard all over."

He paused, and taking a plug of tobacco from his pocket, carefully bit off a large mouthful.

"For the Lord's sake go on, Jerry," exclaimed Gordon. "What happened then?"

"Well, sir, it was lucky I was so stupefied; for if I'd run off I'd never have seen what followed. The black figger began to talk again, and somehow the voice sounded familiar. That kind o'-steadied me, for it was a real human voice and one I'd heerd lately. I knelt down on the floor and eased the door open a crack. Then I heerd man's voice chime in. 'I won't allow it, Martha,' it said; and *then* I knowed who the woman was—Martha Jenkins!"

He was not disappointed in the effect of his news on Gordon. As the latter's quick mind took in the significance of what he had just heard, he

uttered an exclamation and faced Jerry eagerly.

"And then?"

"She said sharp like: 'Don't you be interfering in what don't concern you.' Then he answered in a hoarse voice: 'If I'd interfered before when it concerned me, I shouldn't be drinkin' myself to death now tryin' to forget it. I'll see her and make her stop it.'"

"And was that all?" demanded Gordon, as the old man stopped in his aggravating fashion to roll his quid over to his other cheek.

"It was all I could catch, sir. They began whisperin' and I didn't dare open the door wider for fear they'd see me. The man's face was turned toward me."

"Oh, so you saw him then! What did he look like?"

"I couldn't rightly see him through that mite of a space; but from the little I did see, he wasn't the kind I'd like to have around the house. A regular dirty tramp he was."

"A tramp!" Gordon whistled significantly. "Was he very thin and consumptive-looking, with a bad cough? Had gray hair and a big red scar on the right cheek?"

Jerry nodded. "That's him. Somehow I thought I'd seen the fellow before, but I couldn't be sure. Well, all of a suddint they disappeared. I could hear 'em tiptoeing soft like out onto the porch. I sneaked out the way I come in as fast as I could go, tryin' to catch 'em before they got down the steps, but when I did there wasn't hair nor hide of 'em—in the shrubbery or in the grounds, either, though I hunted all over. Now, what I want to know, sir, is why that jade Mahtha left with the other servants and then came back again; and who the man was. Neither of them were up to any good, I'll bet."

"That's what we've got to find out; but I think your guess is a shrewd one, Jerry. Anyway, you've put me on to some very valuable information that I'm sure will help clear Miss Bertha."

"I hope so, too, sir. I'm glad if I've done you any good. Thank you, sir," as Gordon handed him a bill. "Yes, I'll keep my eyes open and tell you all I sees. I've got a smart boy that I'll put on the watch, too. Ain't much that 'll escape young Jerry, I tell you."

"Nor his dad," laughed Gordon. "If either you or he can put me on the track of that tramp, you can retire from gardening for good. But why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Well, sir, I hadn't heard of the pin, and I wasn't going to speak until I saw how things were. I wish I had now, sir; but mebbe it isn't too late."

"No, no; only let me know anything more you find out at once!"

He caught sight of Bertha coming down the path and, cutting short the old man's garrulous protestations, hastened to meet her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

New Clues.

"I COULD not get away before," she said, as they met. "I am afraid we shall have only a few minutes now before dinner. But tell me, have you heard anything?" as she noted the suppressed excitement in his face.

"I've stumbled upon an important clue," he answered eagerly.

"What is it?" she asked with equal eagerness.

He repeated what Jerry had told him, and added:

"Have you ever had any reason to distrust Martha Jenkins?"

"I never trusted her. She was always repellent to me somehow; I know she didn't like me, and I often fancied that she spied on me. She was a good servant in other ways, and my aunt relied on her a great deal."

"Had she been with you long?"

"Since my father died. She married some sort of worthless man, I believe, who ran away from her; but my aunt was very good to her and took her in her employ."

"Ah-h," observed Gordon slowly.

She stared at him.

"Why, have I helped you?"

"It makes things fit in. Did you ever see this man she married?"

"No; I was away at the time. Do you think it might be the same man that Jerry overheard her talking to?"

"Yes; and more than that, I think that if we can find that man we shall know who killed Mrs. Wetherall."

Bertha started. "So you *still* think she was murdered?"

Gordon bit his lip. He had forgotten, in his excitement over this discovery, the theory to which, it was evident, she still obstinately clung.

"I must, Miss Wetherall; for there is no other theory that will fit the case and at the same time clear you. Can't you see that for yourself?"

A spasm of something like fear disturbed the calm of her face.

"It's the same old thing," she cried despairingly. "You don't believe me! But I am positive that I saw my aunt come down the stairs, and that before she fell she was as alive and well as you and I are now."

"And the hatpin?" he queried.

"I know. When I think of that my brain reels; it all seems so dreadfully improbable. And yet I am positive that I was not dreaming — nor mad. Can't you believe that, also? I shall be, if this does not stop soon."

Gordon imprisoned both her wildly fluttering hands in his.

"You must calm yourself, Miss Wetherall, and leave this to me. I believe nothing but what is best of you, and others shall, too."

Her hands lay quietly in his now, but she looked up at him with the same hunted expression.

"If I could only think so! If there was only some way to reconcile the impossible. I feel as if a great net were closing around me, and when I try to think of a way of escape I can see none."

"Try not to think," he interrupted. "I am here to do that for you, and I am confident that the way of escape will open, for I intend to make it."

She looked up into his resolute face, and a hope dawned in her own.

"I believe you will, and I am glad it is you who are to do it."

There was more than gratitude in the eyes that looked into his, and Gordon's efforts to maintain the proper attitude of a lawyer toward his client would have succumbed swiftly but for a sudden interruption.

"I beg your pardon," boomed out the deep voice of Quinn behind them; "but your uncle asked me to tell you, Miss Wetherall, that dinner is ready."

Their hands fell apart, and they turned quickly to see the little man peering at them with his usual nervous and embarrassed air.

"Now, how the devil did he know we were here?" thought Gordon to himself savagely, while Bertha flushed with painful embarrassment. As if in answer to the unspoken question, the little detective hurried on:

"He thought you might be somewhere about the grounds, and asked me to tell you if I should happen to meet you."

"Thank you," she answered coldly, and, turning, went toward the house.

Quinn bowed, and with a sonorous "Good night!" to Gordon, slipped away noiselessly.

Gordon followed Bertha with an annoying uncertainty in his mind as to how much of their conversation the detective had overheard. Half way to the house he met Rollins, but had only time to tell him to come back that evening, as he had an important clue.

Gordon could hardly restrain his impatience during dinner or endure the polite conversation with which Mr. Wetherall always favored him, and which fell unheeded on two pairs of ears that evening.

He slipped out as soon as he could, and hurried away in search of Rollins. He encountered that individual halfway up the drive, strolling leisurely along, smoking a huge cigar, the glow-

ing end of which served almost as well as an acetylene headlight to mark his approach.

He ceased puffing, however, when Gordon began his tale, and let his cigar go out while he listened.

"You certainly have found out something important. If we can nab our man, I'm willing to bet we can clear Miss Wetherall. The fact of Martha Jenkins being in with him gives more motive to the whole case. It wasn't robbery, for nothing was stolen; but revenge is more probable. If he is the drunken husband Miss Wetherall spoke of (as he undoubtedly is), it might be possible that he considered Mrs. Wetherall responsible for Martha's leaving him, and so have wanted to get even."

"But Miss Wetherall said that *he* left *her,* not she him," objected Gordon.

"He might have been made to go away," returned Rollins. "He might have known more than was wise about family affairs. From what you overheard him saying to Mr. Wetherall, it is evident he thought he had some hold over him."

"But why should he have come back after the murder when the wisest course would have been to clear out?"

"Because he had no money to clear out with, and he wanted to blackmail Wetherall into giving it to him."

"But Wetherall must have suspected him. Why didn't he arrest him?"

"Maybe he didn't dare. Anyway, he couldn't, for the tramp didn't kill Mrs. Wetherall."

Gordon stared at the detective's immovable face.

"What! Who do you think did, then?"

"The skirt," returned Rollins laconically, as he relit his cigar.

"Whew! What makes you think it was she, rather than he?"

"Because whoever jabbed that pin had a steady hand and a vindictive aim. I haven't yet seen our friend, the tramp; but from your description and the way he was boozed up, I am willing to bet he had neither. It was either a woman or a clever doctor that pushed that pin in."

"I believe you are right," reflected Gordon thoughtfully. "But what was her motive?"

"That's what we've got to find out. I had a talk with her just before I left, but couldn't squeeze out any facts worth having. She's a deep one, or I miss my guess. The cook is a stupid Swede, and is out of the question."

"Martha must be strong nerved to return after doing such a thing," mused Gordon.

"That's just what made me think she did it. If she had covered her tracks well — and she did, except for old Jerry's spying—it was a clever dodge to throw off suspicion by coming back, and at the same time give damaging evidence against Miss Wetherall. It took nerve to do it, but the person who committed that crime had both nerve and a cool, calculating brain, or I am much mistaken."

"Perhaps Mrs. Wetherall had some hold over her." suggested Gordon; "but it must have been more revenge that made her come back to do such a thing as that. There are a lot of things here in this case that don't agree, and we've got to smooth them out better before we can convince the Grand Jury."

"They'll come," said Rollins confidently. "Even if we can't fix it on the tramp, we've got to get him; and when we do, I'll put him through a third degree that would raise hair on a brass knob. I've got the police in New York and Albany on the job, too. If he got money from Wetherall, and I suspect he did, he's going to put considerable mileage between himself and us. The booze is going to trip him up, though, and we'll catch him then. What does Miss Wetherall think about it?"

"She sticks to her same story," admitted Gordon reluctantly.

"That's strange. She seems well balanced in other ways."

He puffed in silence for a few minutes.

"By the way," asked Gordon, anxious to change a subject which puzzled him also, "have you seen anything of our friend Quinn?"

"He had dinner at my joint. I saw him making for the telegraph office as I came up. I've chatted with him a little in my capacity as your clerk only. Hope he doesn't get wise to what I am. I expect he'll be nosing around after us. He's the kind I'd like to send up in an aeroplane headed for England, and I shouldn't care if the engine stopped in mid ocean. He'll make trouble if he can."

"That's right," agreed Gordon, with a yawn. "Well, I guess I'll go back to the house if there's nothing more to discuss. I'm beastly tired. I've never put in two such lively days in my life before."

"You'd better get all the rest that's coming to you," observed Rollins. "I'll report to-morrow at ten; I want to make a few inquiries in the village first. Good night."

He paused in the act of turning away.

"Better lock your door to-night, and don't prowl around the staircase; it isn't a healthy spot just now."

"Do you think it was Martha who pushed that molding over?" asked Gordon curiously.

"For a guess, yes."

"But what reason could she have for doing it?"

"You knew too much. That's the best of reasons for putting any one out of the way."

"Well, I'm not worried," laughed Gordon. "Good night."

CHAPTER XIX.

A Hunt in the Night.

As he went toward the house, looming dark and quiet among the motionless trees, he could not repress the same little feeling of nameless dread that always came over him at its very sight. The night was sultry and overcast, and the heavy rankness of the undergrowth choked and oppressed him as it had done the first night he came.

As he gained the top of the piazza he stopped to wipe the sudden perspiration from his forehead, and his eye caught a dark figure seated in the farthest end. It turned slowly, and he recognized Wetherall. The faint light from inside fell on his face, and showed it more than usually drawn and white.

Moved by a slight pity, Gordon went up to him.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Wetherall? I'll close the house up if you want to go to bed now."

"Thank you," the other answered. "Martha has already shut up everything." Then he added, with more interest in his tone: "Did your man find out anything?"

Gordon stared. He had purposely not told Wetherall that Rollins was a detective.

"My clerk?" he asked with affected surprise.

"Oh, come, Mr. Gordon," returned Wetherall good-humoredly; "there is no need of attempting to mystify me. That fellow Quinn evidently recognized him, because he told me he was a detective. I intended to send for one, but you have forestalled me."

Gordon realized that the secret was out, and that he might as well inform Wetherall of his standing in the matter.

"Miss Wetherall has retained me as her lawyer. I presumed that she had already consulted with you."

"She rarely consults me," remarked Mr. Wetherall, without any show of offense; "but I think she has made a wise choice. Would you mind telling me what line of defense you are going to take?"

Gordon felt the latent sarcasm under this apparently harmless remark. His

own tones were formal as he answered, "I intend to prove that Miss Wetherall had nothing to do with her aunt's death, directly or indirectly."

"But how?" persisted Mr. Wetherall blandly.

"That, I am afraid, you must allow me to keep to myself for the present, until my deductions are proved correct."

"I suppose so," assented Mr. Wetherall, still with the same good-humored tolerance that was more irritating to Gordon than open derision. "You lawyers like to wrap yourselves in mystery. I trust, however, that your theory will prove itself correct, and that my poor niece may be cleared of any suspicion."

"What is your theory?" asked Gordon bluntly.

Mr. Wetherall's face clouded. "I am afraid I'm not so hopeful as you. Strive hard as I may to think otherwise, everything points to the same dreadful conclusion."

"What is that?"

"That, although my niece is innocent of all actual thought of murder, it was her hand that did the deed."

"How can you say such a thing?" exclaimed Gordon hotly. "When I, a perfect stranger, can believe her innocent, how can you even think to the contrary?"

Mr. Wetherall's opaque eyes did not waver under the other's angry ones.

"It is because you are a perfect stranger that you can believe," he returned slowly. "If you had seen her (as I unfortunately have too often) when her violent fits of temper made her totally unlike her usually sweet self; fits of which she herself kept no after knowledge, you would understand the conclusion to which I am forced against my will."

For a moment Gordon could not speak.

"You must have strong grounds on which to make such a statement," he exclaimed at last. "You said nothing of this before."

"Naturally not," returned the other. "I am only telling this to you in strictest confidence, because you are her counsel, and should know everything fully; but I hope and pray that I may be wrong and that my dear niece may be fully acquitted. You can count on me to do everything in my power to assist you."

He got up wearily. "You will pardon me if I retire now? I am very tired, and the events of the last two days have shaken me greatly."

He did, indeed, seem very feeble and suddenly old. Gordon made no further comment, and followed him up-stairs silently. The light was still on in Bertha's room, but it flickered and went out as he passed by her door.

Gordon's desire for sleep had left him. He lit his pipe and settled down to think. What Wetherall had just told him would have disquieted him more if it had not been for the new element introduced into the case by Jerry's story.

With this possible solution of the mystery at hand he could afford to discount what might, after all, be only a malicious invention.

And yet what object could Wetherall have in accusing his own niece? Gordon made a mental note to telephone in early next morning and set Brinsley to making inquiries about him. He distrusted Wetherall profoundly, but had to acknowledge to himself that so far he could not be accused of any unworthy motive for his actions.

This, however, might be the chance to trip him up. If only Bertha would not stick to her ridiculous story!

The only theory by which he could explain it away fitted in too uncomfortably with Mr. Wetherall's to suit him. But he told himself impatiently that they were on the right track, and to-morrow might see the capture of the tramp and the end of the puzzle.

The house was very still. Outside in the sultry darkness the great trees

stood motionless; an occasional light glowed on the dark river beyond, and a far-off whistle from a passing train was the only sound that punctuated the undertone of the insects. He rose impatiently, tapped the ashes from his pipe, and began to undress. He was in no mood for another midnight séance in this house, and it was already past eleven.

He had only taken off his coat, however, when his ear caught a sound which sent him to the door, listening by it with held breath. Some one was going along the hall, softly but unmistakably, for a board creaked just then.

The rooms were all on a narrow hallway that made a rectangle around the open stairs. Bertha's room was a large one on the southeast of the house with the hall to the servant's wing running along its western side; next to her was the attic stairway, then came Gordon's room facing the east, with the servants' rooms beyond. Mrs. Wetherall's room was on the west side, almost directly opposite the end of the stairs, with a sitting-room and guest-room between that and Mr. Wetherall's room on the southwest.

From the sound, the person, whoever it was, was coming from Bertha's end toward the staircase.

Gordon did not hesitate, but pushed open the door and stepped out into the hall. A white figure was approaching him slowly.

Although he was plainly visible in the light which streamed from his room, it did not hesitate, but continued to glide toward him steadily, and something in its unnatural fixity of purpose made prickles run down Gordon's spine. Then it passed under the shaded light that hung in the hall, and with a sudden relief, Gordon recognized Bertha.

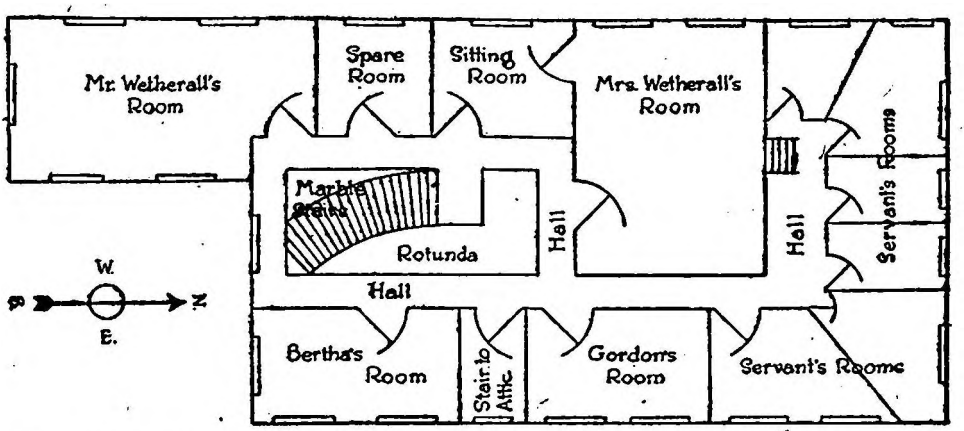
He waited, expecting her to speak to him; but she moved toward him still with the same unnatural rigidity, and as he met her unseeing eyes, the balls of which seemed almost glassy, he realized at last and with a feeling of shocked surprise that she was walking in her sleep.

She passed by him so close that he was obliged to step back into his room for fear of waking her, and went on down the corridor. He followed her softly.

She went on steadily, turning to the left, until she came to the room that Mrs. Wetherall had occupied.

In front of it she hesitated a moment, then turned the handle of the door and went in. Gordon followed her, feeling his way cautiously in the half-darkness.

Bertha, however, seemed to find no such trouble. She moved confidently



SECOND-FLOOR PLAN OF THE HOUSE OF THE PURPLE STAIRS

over to the bureau, and began searching for something on it, her hands moving with uncanny deftness over the various toilet articles without knocking any of them over.

Gordon had never been in Mrs. Wetherall's room before, and he was glad of the chance of an inspection; but by the uncertain light that came in from the night-lamp in the hall, he could only make out a large mahogany bed, a dresser, and a chest of drawers.

Suddenly he remembered that his electric flash-light was in his trouser's pocket. He drew it out and cautiously tried it. The battery was almost exhausted, but it gave light enough to distinguish objects by, and he was thankful for his foresight.

Bertha had abandoned her search on the bureau and was now standing by the chest of drawers pulling out their contents and examining them with the same unnatural dexterity. It was certainly a strange situation; the girl, accused of murder, standing there in her sleep searching the belongings of her supposed victim; and if Gordon's mind had not been so keenly strung up to find the motive of this act, he would have been struck by its gruesomeness.

What was she looking for, and why did these impatient little sighs shake her at intervals?

As he questioned his mind for a solution, the girl picked up a little white packet and held it for a moment irresolutely before putting it down again. Looking over her shoulder, Gordon could see where she placed it, and as she moved back to the dresser and recommenced her restless searching there, he picked up the packet and examined it curiously.

It seemed to consist only of powders, put up in neatly folded papers such as druggists use, and held together by an elastic band. He opened one and found it was filled with a white, crystal-like powder.

He would have replaced them if a half-memory that had been troubling him had not flashed back at that instant.

Where had he seen paper just like this, with the same creases and folds—only empty this time? And with the question came the answer — on the stairs the night he had stooped for the piece of paper and so escaped being brained!

That slip of paper was identical with the one he now held in his hand—that he could swear.

He did not stop to reason out the possible significance of the fact, but slipped the whole package into his pocket.

Bertha was standing now in the center of the room, clasping and unclasping her hands helplessly and murmuring: "Where is it? Where have I put it?"

He was afraid of waking her, but he was also afraid of some one hearing her. He risked the former, and coming close to her said soothingly, "What is it, Miss Bertha? Let me find it for you."

She looked at him unseeingly, but the tones of his voice seemed to have a calming effect. She allowed him to slip his arm under hers gently and lead her back to her own room. He listened outside the door for several minutes until he heard the creaking of the bed as she got into it, and presently her soft, even breathing.

He had a half idea of going back to Mrs. Wetherall's room to continue the search for more clues, but as he tiptoed softly along he saw a light appear under Wetherall's door.

Gordon did not want to be found there by him, and he could hardly fail to hear, as the rooms were so close, so the young man returned to his own room, where he undressed quickly and went to bed, resolutely determined to suspend all thoughts on the subject until the morning. But, though he fell into the sleep of weariness, it was hag-ridden with dreams of figures that moved slowly up and down a colossal staircase at the top of which Mr.

Wetherall stood wearing his most charming smile!

CHAPTER XX.

The Powders.

HE woke next morning, jaded and unrefreshed, and lay for some time thinking over the events of the past day, wondering what the next would bring.

One thing was hopeful; that if Bertha were a sleep-walker it might possibly explain the puzzling confliction of her story with the facts. If she had perhaps fallen asleep while glancing over the book just before she retired, and had then walked in her sleep toward the staircase, the shock of being wakened by stumbling against her aunt's prostrate body might have confused her to the extent of making her imagine that she really saw what she described so vividly.

But whether it was psychologically possible for a somnambulist to carry a dream-born idea over into the waking consciousness, he did not know. He must ask a doctor, and as he felt that Dr. McDonald was prejudiced, he decided to call up a New York specialist.

Nevertheless, though he assured himself that Wetherall's story had been purposely exaggerated, it left an annoying impression on his mind which he could not shake off.

He set about his toilet, and after a cold bath felt more like himself.

Bertha had a headache, her uncle told him, and felt too miserable to get up. He did not wonder at it, after last night. Something had been on her mind that had disturbed her and sent her wandering and searching through the hours of rest, and the results of the strain would show physically, if not mentally.

And what had she been looking for among her aunt's things with a familiarity that showed her well acquainted with its probable hiding place? Somehow he felt as if he did not want to know, and that the knowledge would only increase the mystery which hung over the whole affair.

And yet he could not keep his mind from the subject, try as he would. It could not have been the packet of powders which she had been searching for, for she had hesitated only an instant before returning them to their place.

He wished he could get the memory of her anxious, frightened face out of his mind, and forget the sound of her voice repeating, "Where is it? Where is it?"

The thought of the powders made him draw them out from the pocket where he had hurriedly thrust them and examine them more closely. There was no druggist's mark on them, and no way of telling what the contents were. The connection between them and the little piece of paper he had seen on the stairs was very slight, and the fact might be of no importance whatever; but in this maze of mystery everything counted.

He returned them to his pocket, and resolved to ask the local druggist if he knew what they were or remembered having sold them to Mrs. Wetherall.

After breakfast he set out for the village. It was very sultry, with promise of a thunder-storm later, and as he plodded along the hot, dusty road he thought half regretfully of the cool club-rooms and the comfortable leather chairs that he had given up.

This was no time, however, he told himself, for such vain regrets, and the thought of Bertha quickly put everything else out of his mind. He went to the drug-store and telephoned Brinsley, and, cutting short that individual's complaints of important cases neglected, together with dire predictions as to the ruin of the whole business, bade him look up the records of Benjamin Wetherall's will, which Bertha had told him had been executed and probated by his lawyer in New York, a Mr. Spencer.

"Go and see him about it, and find out all you can," Gordon finished,

"and send me an answer here at once, general delivery. And for the Lord's sake, stop worrying me about the business! Playing *Sherlock Holmes* is no joke, and I've got my hands full here."

He laughed as he heard Brinsley's aggrieved grunt, and rang off before he could follow with any more protests.

Next he called up Dr. Wilson, a well-known neurologist. He got very little satisfaction there. The busy specialist demanded details which Gordon for obvious reasons could not supply, and he was obliged to take him into his confidence at last.

Even then the doctor could tell him little more than he already knew. A person walking in sleep did not retain any memory after consciousness. He did not think it possible that any dream or idea she might have had during that period would be so real when she waked as to convince her that she saw her aunt come down-stairs and fall.

Only one thing gave any hope.

"Now, if she had fainted instead," said the doctor, "at the precise moment she saw her aunt starting to come down-stairs it might be on recovering she would not realize she had fainted, and would supply the gap with its natural continuation—the picture of her aunt falling. It is a nice question as to how much of anterior impressions the mind retains after a faint, but there have been cases where a person has been totally unconscious afterward of having fainted at all, and declared he had only slept. And we know how indignantly old people deny having nodded during a sermon or conversation. That last depends largely upon the psychological make-up of the individual, and I should have to study the young lady carefully before pretending to give a definite opinion."

With that Gordon had to be content. At least he had found a loophole through which, if matters came to the worst, they might drag Bertha. She admitted having felt faint for a moment when she saw her aunt fall. Could it not have been for a much longer period?

He gave the packet of powders to the druggist, and asked him if he knew what they were. The man smelled, tasted, and examined them carefully.

"They weren't bought here, for one thing," he said. "I use a different kind of paper to put my powders in—a smaller size usually. The powder looks to me like some coal-tar product. I can't tell for certain without making a chemical analysis."

"How long would that take you?" demanded Gordon.

"The better part of the morning. I could let you know by noon."

Gordon hesitated. After all, it might not be of any importance. But the man seemed unusually intelligent, and something urged him to follow up this clue.

"Good!" he said. "Go ahead, and I'll stop in for the result. By the way"—on an impulse—"have you ever sold any large amount of drugs to the Wetheralls? Any kind of narcotic?"

The man looked at him oddly for a second.

"Not lately."

"But you used to? Please be frank with me. I am conducting an investigation for the family, and they want all the facts, and are not afraid to have anything told that may assist the case."

"Well, sir, I did used to sell Mr. Wetherall quite a bit of morphin and cocain. He didn't use it himself, but said he wanted it for a friend who was staying with him at the time, and who had to have it. Mr. Wetherall said he was trying to break him off it by decreasing the doses, but he had to give him some to keep him from going crazy. It seems to me though—"

"Well?" encouraged Gordon as the man hesitated.

"Well, he seemed to use just as much in the end as in the beginning—

maybe a bit more if anything. Mind you, sir, I wasn't to blame for selling it. The laws weren't so strict then as they are now; and I'd have had to give it to Mr. Wetherall, anyway, seeing as he wrote out the prescription regular."

"Wrote prescriptions! How could he?"

"He has a doctor's diploma, sir, all right and legal, for I asked to see it. College of Pennsylvania, and signed by the faculty. He told me he had studied to be a doctor, but didn't practise except now and then. So it was all right my giving it, and he wouldn't mind my telling, either, I expect."

"No, of course not. How long ago was this?"

"Summer before last."

"All right. I'll be back for the result at noon."

He walked on toward Rollins's hotel, thinking over what he had just heard. Mr. Wetherall with a doctor's diploma, cocain, and the powders—there was some connection between all of them if he could only get it.

He met Rollins just coming out.

"This is luck," said the detective. "I was just starting out for you. I have been down to the station, where, by the way, I met our friend Quinn nosing around, and the station-master was positive that Martha Jenkins had not taken any train the day of the murder. He did not remember, either, having seen her the next day, and as he said he was at the station all the time, and I know for a certainty that he's a nosy old guy, that settles Mr. Wetherall's story of her having come back from the city.

"He remembered seeing the other servants take the train—like everybody else in this small town, he knew them by sight. I also got word from Hazleton, which is ten miles below here, that a man resembling our tramp had been jugged for drunkenness six days ago; so he must have come through there on his way here.

"Now I want to talk with old Jerry. Heard anything new?"

Gordon told him in full about his interview with Wetherall, the sleep-walking episode, and the doctor's comment, adding the fact of the powders. Rollins listened, chewing his unlit cigar with a thoughtful air.

"You did a pretty good piece of work last night, Mr. Gordon," he said. "Wish I had been there. It was a clever idea to keep those powders and have them analyzed. We can't afford to overlook any possible clue in this affair. So the specialist thinks she could have fainted and then when she came to not realized it? That's interesting, and bears out a little idea of my own. So does the fact of Mr. Wetherall's having a man staying with him. Wonder what she was looking for last night?

"That theory of Wetherall's is about as neat an explanation of a crime as I've ever heard. But we'll fix up a better. I've a little joker in my head that will give this thing the jinx!"

But when Gordon pressed him for an explanation he only remarked again oracularly, "Wait until we've seen Jerry," and walked on, whistling thoughtfully.

They found the old man pottering about the greenhouse; and, though he was at first inclined to fight shy of the "'tective," Rollins's good humor and ready tact speedily set him at his ease.

"Had you ever seen this tramp before?" asked the detective.

"Well, now I come to think of it, seems like he was kind o' familiar; but it was dark, and I couldn't get more than one look at him. I can't remember faces good, but voices stick to me; and, though he was whisperin' and husky, seems as ef I'd heard him talk before."

"Did you ever hear of Jim Merton?" asked Rollins abruptly.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Dead Man's Shoes

by

Octavus Roy Cohen and Manning J. Rubin

THE sudden death of Joe Thompson, who for fifteen years had occupied the post of sales manager and optimist for the McClary Hardware Company, threw Sam McClary to the verge of nervous prostration. It was worse than a cut in rating could possibly have been.

It was cataclysmic.

It is possible that had Thompson known what confusion was to follow on the heels of his untimely demise, he would have reconsidered, or arranged a settlement, or performed one of the miracles for which he was noted. But even in that event, Sam McClary admitted lugubriously, Old Man Pneumonia would eventually have won.

He insisted on Joe Thompson, and Joe answered the summons—without a hint, as was his way.

Thompson had come into McClary's employ when the annual sales totaled twenty-five thousand dollars; when he died the sales totaled something more or less than fifteen hundred thousand annually, and if he had not died—but die he did, and there's an end to him.

But although his body had departed from this mundane sphere, his spirit remained—the iron, optimistic spirit which had bolstered every man and woman in the employ of the McClary Company—the spirit of Do-It-iveness, the unquenchable optimism.

Somehow, Sam McClary found it hard to consider another man for the vacant desk; he felt vaguely that he would desecrate the memory of the dead man by such an attempt. The position was hallowed, for Thompson had been more than a sales manager—he had been the guiding spirit, the leader, the one man of them all who blithely tackled the impossible—and did it.

Perhaps, reflected McClary seriously—and McClary was not of a sentimental nature—perhaps Thompson had been called away to arrange things in heaven. Such, at least, was McClary's estimate of the deceased.

In his blind reverence for the departed, McClary tried to fill the vacant chair himself. For a month, two months, he tried it, and it became grimly evident—as loose ends accumulated and details went wrong and contracts and orders were lost—that the work was too much for the owner of the business, who was kept constantly busy signing papers and dictating correspondence.

Sam McClary knew—and Charley Shepard and Jerome Masters knew that Sam McClary knew—that some one must be secured to fill, as well as

was humanly possible, the chair of the departed Thompson.

McClary grudgingly admitted that he had, to use the vernacular, bitten off more than he could chew, and that a strategic retirement was inevitable. He cursed the theory that a machine —a business machine—can run itself when the motive power is removed.

Thompson had builded a marvelous business machine, and now it was going to pieces—a bit here and a bit there, waiting for the moment when it should emulate the famous One Horse Chaise.

And since the appointment of Joe Thompson's successor was a mere matter of time, Jerome Masters and Charley Shepard worked even harder than had been their wont in months gone by—for the envied position, with its handsome salary, was destined for one or other of them. And why not?

They were old and trusted employees, and, best of all, they had been tutored by the great Joe Thompson himself.

As a matter of fact, ever since Thompson's death, they had assumed the major portion of the work which had formed the daily duty of the sales manager. Of course, McClary had taken unto himself the responsibility, but regularly each day he had turned over to the two young men—young as business men are rated—the mass of detail.

The rivalry was intense; the situation ironical.

Had it not been sufficient that both sought the hand of Helena Creel, who, from eight in the morning until six in the evening, was the efficient and wholly attractive head stenographer of the McClary Hardware Company? Helena Creel, the feminine business woman, the expert stenographer, the born manager — diplomatically unbiased concerning the two young men who battled for her affections — yet nevertheless keenly interested in both and keeping her preferences strictly to herself.

Great is the jealousy of man for man when both covet the same woman, and almost as great is the jealousy of man for man when both covet the same position. How great, then, is the jealousy of man for man when both seek one woman and one job. It is stupendous, yet such was the jealousy fostered by Jerome Masters and Charley Shepard.

Outwardly they maintained attitudes of curt aloofness and cold indifference, but inwardly they were consumed with fiery hatred.

The eyes of each kept covert watch of the other, and the ears to phonographically record every significant word calculated to have bearing on either great goal for which they strove. There were incessant efforts—however unconscious they may have been on either side—to influence the favor of the big boss, and subtle attempts to curtail the popularity of the opposition.

The atmosphere of the office had become electrically surcharged with a tense combativeness, and the office force generally was expectant.

As for Helena, she watched the race with the keenest interest, for she knew that the attainment of Thompson's position was not the ultimate goal. She well knew that the victor would seek her to lay his hard-won laurels at her tiny feet. Whether material advantage would weigh very heavily with her was another question; but she watched closely, very closely.

Aside from her interest in the two young men, her next greatest passion was a desire to please McClary, the big boss who had treated her so well, and who, since the death of his right-hand man, had become irascible, officious, and very hard to please.

The hands of the big clock in the outer office of the McClary Hardware Company indicated the twelfth minute after nine o'clock. For twelve minutes Sam McClary had been in his private sanctum with the morning's

mail. And then the glass door banged open and he whirled into the outer office, waving aloft a letter typed on viciously yellow paper.

His resonant voice was made harsh by choleric wrath, and the ears of the general office were jarred.

Eyes focused on the big boss. Employees who had erred in the past trembled with nervousness. But McClary did not notice the underlings; he sailed straight across the room to the place where the typewriter desk of Helena Creel wedged itself insinuatingly between those of Masters and Shepard.

"Which of you fellows did *this?*" he roared menacingly. "Which of you, I say? Which one?"

"I sh'd say that some one was in f'r a hot time," muttered Dan Birch dryly, momentarily glancing up from his ledger. A passing stenographer snickered, and the aged bookkeeper frowned disapprovingly and bent once more over his column of figures.

Masters rose, but did not answer the boss's heated inquiry. Shepard, concern delineated on every line of his not unattractive face, stepped close to the boss's side.

"Did what, sir?" he inquired meekly.

"Did what?" echoed the boss with apoplectic violence. "Did *what?* Did this, that's what!" And the yellow letter-paper was once more waved belligerently.

"A mistake?" asked Shepard mildly.

"Mistake! Mistake! Oh, yes—a mistake. A he—a peach of a mistake, that's what. What I want to know is which of you fellows quoted the Callahan people guns at seven dollars, when the price should have been nine? The Callahan people; and now they've accepted the offer, and we have to fill it. It means that we're about six hundred dollars in the hole on the deal.

"Nine dollars was shearing our profits down to nothing. Every gun sold at that seven-dollar figure means a dollar and eighteen cents dead loss. That's what. The man that quoted that price is a rank incompetent. Speak up. Which one of you—"

"May I see the order?" requested Shepard politely.

The boss shoved the order into his outstretched hands. Shepard inspected it quietly, very quietly. Hushed whispers and sympathetic glances were exchanged in the office. Dan Birch shook his head wonderingly, and marveled at the metamorphosis in the boss.

Little did Joe Thompson know that by dying he was changing Sam McClary from a patient, efficient, and easy-going executive into a fuming, blustering, even brutal, man-higher-up.

As for Helena, she stared at McClary with her cheeks highly colored by righteous wrath.

"Why didn't he call them inside," she said to herself, "instead of humiliating them out here?"

Shepard shook his head and handed the order back to the boss.

"It was not I who quoted that seven-dollar price," he declared positively, and there was a vague note of triumph in his voice. "In fact, I don't remember having written the Callahan company; and besides, I'm thoroughly familiar with our gun stock."

The boss whirled to transfix Masters with his baleful glare.

"So it was you, eh?" he queried caustically. Masters examined the order and nodded affirmatively.

"Yes, sir," simply. "I wrote the letter quoting them seven dollars. It was my fault."

There was an audible flutter in the office, a stir of ill-concealed excitement. One and all, the employees of the irate McClary stared sympathetically at the unfortunate whose blunder had proven the last straw to break the back of the camel. As for Helena Creel, she was conscious of only one thought.

"He isn't scared," she soliloquized proudly.

"You, eh?" half snarled McClary, his manner bellicose to the extreme. "You! I imagined that it would have proved to be some idiot who belongs on a farm instead of a business office. Two dollars — what difference is two dollars? One thing is sure—it won't happen again!"

"I'm very sorry, sir."

"Sorry? So am I sorry. Sorry for that six hundred dollars. Remember, young man, this is a business house, not a nursery. Mistakes cannot and must not happen. There's absolutely no excuse for a mistake of this kind, and I'm not the man to stand for it. Get that?"

Masters appeared unruffled.

"Yes, sir," he retorted suavely. His very suavity seemed to rub McClary the wrong way. It was as though he realized that he had let go of himself too much, and had become angry because of it.

"A simpleton," he snorted, "after training under Joe Thompson, would have known better. It won't happen again. Young man, you'll hear from me later. And very little later!"

The boss's mouth snapped shut, his lips compressed into a straight white line. He whirled, strode into his office —thump-thumping his heavy shoes belligerently. The door slammed viciously.

All eyes furtively surveyed Masters.

As for that young man, he seated himself at his desk and tried to hide his feeling by a plunge into the routine work of the day. Shepard, his feelings radically different, hummed slightly as he plunged into his work. As for Helena Creel, she covertly brushed the back of her hand across her eyes and pounded the keys of the typewriter until the machine seemed fairly to fly.

There was a reason!

A knock on the door—short, sharp, assured. McClary snapped his glance from the letters on his desk to the door and growled a curt "Come in!"

Jerome Masters entered, a batch of correspondence in his hand. McClary's scowl became blacker.

"Oh! It's you?"

"I've come to—"

"You needn't start a flood of excuses. I hate excuses. You've got six hundred dollars to make good if you wish to retain your job. Maybe that'll teach you a needed lesson."

The faintest ghost of a smile flickered for an instant on the lips of the younger man. When he spoke his voice was calm and unruffled. It commanded, without words, thorough attention.

"I have no excuse, sir; but I have an explanation. I have here with me the original letter from Callahan. They ask for prices on our No. 22 gun. The letter evidently was first referred to you, for you will see"—extending a slip of paper—"that you have written on a slip of paper and fastened to the letter, 'Quote seven dollars each.'

"I found the letter on my desk with the other mail; and even though it has not been customary for me to attend to firearms orders, I answered the letter as per your instructions. The first time I had a hint as to an error in price came this morning when you burst into the office. It is probable that you were very busy, and so made the mistake. Mistakes, occasionally, are really very human, you know."

McClary was staring, open-mouthed, at the young man.

"But—but—why didn't you tell me this before — outside?" he spluttered, his voice combining wonderment and a tinge of humility. The abashed look was, of itself, sufficient triumph for Masters. His answer was tactful.

"I hardly wished to cause you any embarrassment, sir. If you will pardon my recalling the incident, you were—er—rather excited and positive when you called me down, and I must admit that I was strongly tempted to vindicate myself, but I thought I owed it to you to momentarily shoulder the blame — so that you might not suffer

in the eyes of the office force. Just some of Joe Thompson's teachings, sir. Besides, Mr. McClary, I knew that when I explained — privately, of course—you would make amends."

The boss's eyes were shining with frank admiration.

"Damme if that wasn't a nervy thing for you to do, young man. It shows presence of mind, tact, business ability. It proves the right stuff for handling a refractory customer in a place where the average man would lose his head. It shows— Why, confound it, Masters!—it proves that the spirit of Joe Thompson is in you!"

Wherewith the boss uttered the greatest compliment of which he was capable.

Masters flushed rosily at the compliment. Here, indeed, was indemnity for his humiliation.

"Thank you, sir."

"There's more coming, too," McClary grinned. "This little incident has taught me two great lessons. The first is that it is worse than folly for me to try to do my own work and Thompson's, too. It's been sentiment with me—principally, I guess, because I couldn't find a man whom I thought had a chance to prove satisfactory. And the second thing it has shown me is that I have found the man.

"Any one may cultivate business knowledge and machinelike accuracy; but we have a growing firm, Masters, and we need a growing man to manage our sales department. It needs a man of courage, ability—and tact. You have proved to me that you have them all.

"You're loyal—loyal to me and to the house. You can be depended on—unless I'm mightily mistaken, and I'm not often mistaken in judging men. I want your kind of a man for sales manager. I want *you* for sales manager!"

It was a long speech for McClary—a very long speech—and he mopped his forehead with a spotless handkerchief.

"Thank you," Masters stammered.

"You—"

"I always tried to study Mr. Thompson's methods."

"Of course," with religious finality, "nobody can ever entirely fill Joe Thompson's shoes. Let me tell you about him, Masters. He came to me and applied for a job when I needed no one—or, rather, when I thought I needed no one. But I discovered pretty quickly that I needed him. He didn't say a word about money—just told me to pay him what he was worth. When he died he was getting six thousand a year. It wasn't a tithe of what he was worth, but unfortunately it was all I could afford to pay.

"It was Joe Thompson who made me a success. I found myself trying to emulate him. I took advice from him. I actually worked *under* him—but he had tact—and he never let me know that he realized it. I—I—I'm in Joe Thompson's debt—and now, in death, he has added to that debt by furnishing me with his successor—a man trained by him."

"The boys all liked him," vouchsafed Masters, feeling that some word of praise was in order.

"Everybody does—did, that is. I—But what's the use of talking more about him? I'll only say this: you're to start in as sales manager immediately; and when you get up against a snag, ask yourself what Joe Thompson would have done under the circumstances, and you can't go far wrong. I'll start you off at three thousand a year. I hope to be forced to increase you. That's all."

The new sales manager was surprisingly calm—externally. Internally he was aseethe with delight. He knew that he was wildly, deliriously happy; that he wanted to shout for joy and proclaim his new-found fortune to the world. And he knew, above all, that he wanted to confront Helena Creel with the gladsome news.

Masters rose.

"I won't try to thank you in words, Mr. McClary. I'll try to show by my

work that your confidence isn't misplaced. But I don't mind telling you that I think—I hope—you've settled more than one of my problems."

The boss smiled understandingly.

"I hope so—and I'm not blind. Only I hope you will be able to replace her with another stenographer equally as competent. And, by the way, let me be one of the first to congratulate you. Eh, boy?"

Masters grinned sheepishly.

"I will that, sir, provided the cause for congratulation arises."

"It will"—heartily—"it will, all right—if I have to talk to her myself."

Masters stepped once more into the outer office—the target for a battery of eyes. His face betrayed excitement—and it was perfectly natural that it should be misconstrued. He crossed to Helena Creel's desk.

"May I speak with you for a second by the door?" he asked softly.

She rose without a word and joined him.

"I've lost my job," he announced simply.

Her big eyes became filled with unutterable pity.

"I'm so sorry."

"I don't know whether I can get another. That is, as good as the one I've just lost. I believe I can. But—if I do—I wonder if—if—"

Her eyes were suddenly downcast—and her bosom rose and fell tumultuously.

"What?" she breathed.

"—if I might hope—might ask—you—"

Two heavy drays clattered by the door, a motorcycle narrowly avoided collision with a street-car, two men quarreled within ear-shot—quarreled profanely and bitterly; another trolley, the motorman of which was loudly voicing his disgust at being blocked by a fruit-vender, stood motionless with stridently clanging gong. But the man and the girl in the doorway noticed none of this material activity—they were in cloud-filled realms.

"Yes—" she breathed.

"—if—you would marry me?" he burst out impetuously.

She gazed fearlessly into his eyes.

"Yes," she answered simply, and then silence fell between them once more; but this time it was the silence of ineffable happiness—of complete understanding. Then he spoke:

"I—I'm happy, little girl," he said softly, "especially because I have deceived you."

"Deceived me?"

"You see"—he smiled with pardonable pride and triumph—"I *have* something to lay at your feet—something worth while. McClary has just appointed me sales manager!"

"Oh"—her hands flew to her breast and her eyes shone with delight and pride—"how—wonderful!"

"It was this way," explained the young man quietly; "I've never handled the gun-stock—and don't know anything about it—prices or anything else. It appears that the letter must have gone direct to McClary, because the notation to quote the guns at seven dollars was in *his* handwriting. And, of course, he made a second mistake when he sent the letter to me to be answered."

He paused. The girl was hanging on every word eagerly.

"But that still doesn't explain—"

He shrugged: "It was just that I didn't mention it in the outer office. I didn't want to embarrass him. I told him privately—and, well, you know how appreciative he must have been."

Her forehead was puckered thoughtfully.

"That explains something else," she remarked quietly. "Shepard has always handled the guns, hasn't he?"

"Yes."

"And the Callahan people use horrid, ugly, yellow letter-heads, don't they?"

"Yes."

"Then *that* explains it all," triumphantly.

"Explains it all? *What*, please?"

"I remember the very letter. Mr. McClary called me in that morning and gave me two batches of letters to be answered. On the very top of the pile intended for Charley Shepard was that terrible, screamingly yellow letter paper—a woman could never forget that color.

"I put that on his desk.

"A few minutes later I saw him read the letter, smile peculiarly, and walk across to your desk, where he left the letter among those which were intended for you to answer. I asked him if I had made a mistake, and he smiled and answered that I had not, but that Mr. McClary had. I probably would not recall the incident—if it hadn't been for that yellow paper."

The humor of it struck Masters, and he threw back his head and laughed. The girl laughed with him. The office force exchanged significant glances and smiled. The big boss, stepping into the outer office, took in the tableau, and he, too, smiled benignly.

Charley Shepard, of them all, did not smile.

And, risking discovery, almost inviting discovery, Jerome Masters boldly reached for his *fiancée's* hand—and squeezed it affectionately.

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UNDERSTANDING

BY WILLIAM DOUGLAS CADDELL

TO understand the aching heart,
My own heart must have felt
A bitter loss, a searing pain;
I must have knelt
'Mid hopes and treasures slain.

To understand the tortured mind,
My own mind must have dipped
Into the sea of storm and stress;
I must have tripped
O'er waste and uselessness.

To understand the sin-stained soul,
My own soul must have gained
A knowledge of temptation's power;
I must have strained
Against an evil hour.

To understand the tides of life,
My own life must have been
An active, changing, learning force;
I must have seen
And fought each troubled course.

To understand the future— Ah,
No understanding there!
The present is our only state
To ~~do~~, to dare!
Fruitless to speculate!

A Lost Letter*

by Fred Jackson

Author of "The Biggest Diamond," "The Masked Bride," "Hunter's Wife," "A Self-Made Widow," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A Matter of Form.

MR. LLOYD DEMAREST stood at his front windows, which overlooked the drive, and stared down meditatively into the growing dusk.

Daylight was giving way to dark after a violent struggle—not suddenly in cowardly surrender, but gradually retreating — but fighting every inch of the way. There could be no doubt about the issue, however.

Here and there lights began to gleam forth, shining banners of the night's victory.

The Palisades, formerly the radiant stronghold of the day, were now lost in blue-gray mist.

The figures of home-going pedestrians were shrouded in mystery and shadow.

The thinning chain of vehicles went forward with increasing speed.

The denizens of the day were hurrying to cover. The satellites of the night were coming into their own again.

Demarest was one of these.

In the daylight hours he existed. He did the things other men of his own set did. He played golf, he attended to his business affairs, he rode, he drove, he stopped in at a club or two, or he stayed in his own rooms and read.

He went the way of the others of his own kind. But that was only while the daylight lasted.

At night he lived.

Darkness was his element. The artificial lights that pierced it were more wonderful to him than sunlight.

He moved with lighter step; he breathed more deeply; his blue eyes glowed.

His entire aspect changed. He grew younger—more eager—more enthusiastic. He grew restless to be out and doing.

The first star seemed to charge him with a strange force that vitalized him anew.

He was thinking about this, wondering about it now as he stood there at the windows.

He was wondering, too, what this coming night held in store for him.

It was an occasion not to be missed. Mrs. Demarest and the Treynes had

* This is another story about *Lloyd Demarest* who was introduced to ALL-STORY readers in "Sir Wilfred's Sapphire" (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, September 18, 1915).

gone into the country, and he was quite free to follow adventure.

That adventure would seek him out he had no doubt.

He would dress, and drive to one of the clubs to dine. And something would turn up, as something always did.

With this thought in mind he turned from the window and crossed to the bell.

But before he could put his finger upon it his man threw open the door and advanced toward him.

"A gentleman calling," announced Edwardes, offering his tray.

Demarest picked up the card that lay upon it, and read the name aloud:

"Mr. James Redway? I don't think I know any Mr. Redway, Edwardes."

"A man of about thirty-two, sir," said Edwardes. "Dark hair, dark eyes, sharp-cut features, mouth that snaps shut. Somewhat careless as to dress, sir."

Demarest shook his head.

"I don't recognize him at all, Edwardes."

"He has never been here before, sir," admitted Edwardes.

"Well, show him in, anyway. And stay within call. He'll probably not be long."

Edwardes bowed and moved off toward the door.

Demarest glanced critically about the darkening room, switched on a big, brass lamp near the doorway, another off by the windows, and came back to the smoking-stand to fumble for a cigarette.

He was in the act of lighting it as Edwardes showed the visitor in, or, rather, he was about to strike the match.

He did not, preferring not to reveal his own face distinctly until he had had a good look at his visitor in the glow of the brass lamp by the door.

"Mr. Demarest?" asked the visitor uncertainly, not easily perceiving the ex-thief in the gloom.

"At your service," said Demarest, striking his match. Mr. Redway advanced.

"Cigarette?" asked Demarest.

"Thank you."

Demarest offered a great boxful of them, smiling faintly.

"A brand of my own devising. No one else has ever used them but a late king.

"I yielded to his entreaties once when I was in rather a tight place, and shared my secret with him on condition that he make no attempt to buy, beg, or borrow more than he required for his own personal use. My maker supplied him.

"When he died the royal family learned to use another brand. You like it?"

"It's astonishingly good," agreed the visitor slowly. "I've never tasted anything quite like it."

Demarest smiled and invited his visitor to be seated. He remained standing himself, however, one arm resting lightly on the chimney-piece.

Mr. Redway regarded him curiously.

"Mr. Demarest," he said, "no doubt you are wondering why I have come to you in this fashion, since you must have realized by this time that we have never met before."

Demarest inclined his head.

"The fact is," went on Redway, leaning forward eagerly, "I've heard a lot about you and your exploits, and I've come to ask you to do me a great service. It will be a business arrangement, of course. I am willing to pay anything within reason."

Demarest smiled, and shook his head slightly.

"I am sorry," he said. "Nothing would please me more than to aid you. I have the time and the inclination. But I have made a rule, Mr. Redway, that I never depart from under any circumstances.

"I exercise my peculiar talents only for the benefit of my friends, or my friends' friends. This rule positively bars you!

"If you had been introduced to me

—or if you had come with a letter of introduction—I should have listened to your case with much interest. As things are, however, it would be unjust to you to permit you to explain further."

He changed his position, as though to indicate that the last word had been said.

But Mr. Redway sprang up in great distress.

"You must help me," he cried. "I don't know to whom I could go—if you refuse. And you've no idea how important this thing is."

Demarest shook his head regretfully.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"I'll give you five thousand dollars!"

"Money is of no moment to me," answered Demarest. "The only way you can obtain my services, Mr. Redway, is to seek an introduction to me through ordinary channels—or to present to me a letter of introduction from one of my friends."

Redway scowled. Determination was stamped plain upon his brow.

"I wonder," he began gravely, "who I know—that you know, too?"

"Do you belong to any clubs?" asked Demarest.

"Yes. Several. The Settlers, the Sunday-Night Club, the Manhattan Country—"

"Do you know Mr. Peter Voorhees of the Manhattan Country Club?"

"Yes. He's president."

"Quite so. Would Mr. Voorhees give you a letter of introduction to me?"

"Certainly."

"Then I'll be glad to serve you—upon the presentation of such a letter. If time is an object, you can drive over to Mr. Voorhees's place and be back within the hour. You might dine with me here, say at seven. It's not quite six now."

"But suppose I fail to reach Voorhees."

"You'll not. He is always home at this hour. He sees his grandchildren every day between five and seven."

"You are sure?" cried Redway, hesitating.

"Positive. I, too, am a grandfather. We frequently discuss our descendants together."

It was one of Demarest's proudest boasts that he was a grandfather. He looked so young.

Just nearing forty-six, he could pass easily for thirty-six or seven. His own son-in-law looked as old.

But then he did not take the care of himself physically that Demarest did.

"Very well, then!" decided Redway. "I'll cab it over to Voorhees and get the letter. You'll make no other arrangements in the mean time?"

"No," said Demarest, smiling. "And I'll expect you to dine at seven."

He rang the bell for Edwardes, then offered Redway his hand and conducted him as far as the door.

Edwardes then ushered him out.

The door had no sooner closed behind him than Demarest was at the telephone calling Voorhees.

A few moments later he was learning from the old gentleman that Redway was a grandson of Jacob Van Hadyn, a very wealthy and entirely reliable young man.

So Demarest urged that nothing be said about this phone message, and that the letter of introduction be given without comment.

These precautions he found necessary.

During the years of his thieving he had made many enemies. Some of them, he knew, still bore him a bitter grudge, though he had reformed, after a fashion, and had made reparation by serving his government faithfully in a diplomatic capacity.

Many of them were still inclined to put him behind prison bars "as an example" if the thing could be done.

So he had to consider carefully every commission that was offered him.

Satisfied now, however, that Mr. Redway meant him no harm, he went off to dress with a light heart, and amused himself by speculating upon the nature of the enterprise that was so soon to engross him.

CHAPTER II.

The Commission.

ON the stroke of seven precisely Mr. Redway returned.

He had not stopped to dress. He had had time only to drive across town, get the letter, and return.

"We are dining alone, I hope?" he cried uneasily, as he perceived that Demarest had changed.

"Entirely alone," answered Demarest, accepting the letter the other man extended, and glancing through it hastily. "You will pardon me for dressing, I'm sure. I did it partly because I did not know just where your commission could take me, partly because dressing for dinner is a part of my daily routine.

"I am an epicure—I confess it proudly—and dining is an event to me."

Edwardes was moving off with Mr. Redway's hat and stick and light topcoat.

"Cocktails, Edwardes," said Demarest. "You'll have one, of course?"

Redway nodded.

"Rather. If your cigarettes are any sample of your good judgment."

"My cocktail formula was discovered accidentally by a stupid Chinese servant," said Demarest, smiling, "a coolie I had at my villa in Los Angeles. He misunderstood directions, and put the wrong things in—with the astounding results that you shall presently perceive."

Edwardes appeared with the cocktails, and departing announced:

"Dinner is served, sir."

Demarest nodded and sipped the mixture to be sure that it was right.

Then to cover the fact that he was not drinking, he went on:

"It often amuses me to reflect how many of our greatest inventions and discoveries are due to accidents or blunders. All of our much-vaunted progress develops really out of our stupidity rather than out of our intelligence—and still there are some of us who doubt the hand that guides us so well. Do you believe in fate, Mr. Redway?"

"I don't know," said Redway, setting down his empty glass. "Do you?"

"Emphatically. I believe to such an extent that I haven't the least doubt our meeting to-night has occurred for some definite purpose.

"Shall we go in? I'm anxious to hear your story in order to guess what that purpose can be."

Redway followed him into the dining-room, where covers had been laid for two. They faced each other across a small expanse of shining damask, glittering crystal and silver.

"Now," said Demarest. "Suppose you begin?"

Redway glanced significantly, uneasily at Edwardes, who was serving the soup course.

Demarest smiled.

"Edwardes never remembers anything that I don't want him to remember," he said. "Edwardes doesn't even hear what is not meant for his ears. You can proceed without hesitation."

Redway shrugged. Edwardes's expression did not alter.

"Very well," said Redway. "You know best, of course. The thing I want you to steal for me—is a letter."

"A letter?" repeated Demarest regretfully.

"Yes. Carelessly, I made use of the word 'steal.' In truth, the letter is really mine—because I wrote it. The woman in whose possession it now is has no right to it whatever."

"You mean it was not written to her?"

"No, it was not."

"But she has managed to obtain possession of it?"

"Exactly. She has got it, and she refuses to give it up. I can't tell you how vastly important it is to me to recover the thing. My domestic happiness is at stake. My honor. My self-respect—my fortune, too.

"I—I'm in a dreadful predicament—and this woman absolutely refuses to return my letter or to sell it to me."

Demarest sighed.

"When will we learn not to write things to women that we are sure to regret later on?" he wondered.

Redway made no answer.

"You are engaged—or married?" asked Demarest.

"Married," said Redway.

"And this letter was written since your marriage?"

"Yes."

Redway scowled.

"I think I begin to see. Who is the woman?"

"All this is in confidence, of course. Mrs. Lawrence Humphreys. Do you know her?"

"No," said Demarest.

"You've seen her, surely?"

"No."

"Well, she's a pretty little thing, girlish, timid-looking She looks like a child that ought to be taken care of, but she can take care of herself well enough.

"She's from the South. Family penniless. Came up here to marry well and landed Lawrence Humphreys. I suppose you know him?"

"I've met him, of course, but I don't boast of his acquaintance."

"He's a very bad boy—an old dissipated rake."

"One might forgive her a good deal since she's married to him," said Demarest gravely. "A girl, you say?"

"She's not very old. But don't begin pitying her. She can take care of herself, I tell you. She knew what Humphreys was when she married him, but that didn't stop her. She had her eye on the Humphreys millions."

"But I don't see where your love-letter comes in," said Demarest slowly.

"No, that's another story altogether. I—I don't really think I need go into that. It's enough, isn't it, that the letter she has wasn't intended for her eyes at all.

"I wrote it to another woman. But she's holding it over my head to compel me to do something I don't want to do.

"She's got it locked in her jewel-case—a small, square, gold box that stands on the dressing-table in her room. You are to gain access to this case, get the letter, and return it to me. If you succeed, I will pay you five thousand dollars in cash."

Demarest reflected. "Five thousand to steal the letter from the jewel-case and return it to you?"

"Exactly."

"Does she know you are trying to get it? Is she likely to anticipate my visit?"

"I think not. I defied her just before I left her the last time. I invited her to keep it, and told her I would manage to live without it. But I was bluffing."

"I see. You made no threats to get it in spite of her?"

"No."

"She assumes that you have lost interest?"

"I don't know. I lead her to believe that I had."

"Not exactly the same thing, eh?" Demarest smiled.

"One thing more. How shall I know the right letter when I see it?"

Redway hesitated.

"Well," he said, "it's written in a very heavy black scrawl, on heavy white letter-paper. And it's folded twice. The paper is headed 'Settlers' Club.' The letter begins with the word 'Dearest.' I think that is enough, don't you?"

"Yes. Probably. It is written on paper provided by the Settlers' Club, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall be all right. Don't want to be wasting time on a copy of the original, you know. Where does Mrs. Humphreys live?"

"In the Humphreys house on Eighty-First Street, ordinarily, but she is in an apartment just at present—the Appomattox — on Fifty-Seventh Street."

"You are sure she's there, now?"

"Positive. I saw her there yesterday."

"Is her own house closed?"

"No, it's being redecorated. There's a sort of caretaker in charge."

Demarest nodded.

"And the jewel-case which contains the letter is with her?"

"Yes. She has had it only since her residence in the apartment."

Demarest was silent, thoughtful. Redway added anxiously:

"Do you think you can do it?"

"Recover the letter?" asked Demarest, smiling. "To be sure. I've never yet attempted anything and failed, and I've attempted a number of more difficult feats than this.

"It is the simplest thing in the world to enter apartments. In a private house every visitor — every one who comes or goes can be accounted for. In apartments, where innumerable families live together, such an accounting is impossible.

"Your case is really unworthy of my attention. It is very like petty thieving. A common or garden sneak-thief could do it. The sort of crude professionals that hire out as maids or butlers would have suited your purpose, and would have charged you much less than five thousand dollars.

"Crown jewels, secret treaties, rare objects of art, a lace handkerchief from the Michel Angelo Museum in Florence, the watch of Queen Mary—these things are more in my especial line.

"However, if you must have the services of the master of all secret agents, the king of thieves, you will find me complaisant."

"I don't want any other. I'm looking for no notoriety at present," said Redway. "If you recover the letter I shall pay you five thousand."

Demarest nodded.

"Done, then. I agree. Come back to-morrow at noon and bring the five thousand dollars in cash. I shall have your letter for you."

"You'll try for it to-night?" asked Redway eagerly.

"I'll *get* it to-night," answered Demarest.

Redway had gone.

Demarest moved to the telephone book, looked up Mrs. Lawrence Humphreys's number on Eighty-First Street, picked up the desk-phone and called it.

Already he had a fairly clear plan in mind for the recovery of the letter —as clear as he usually had in beginning an adventure.

For the details he always waited for the inspiration of the moment.

He knew, to begin with, that Humphreys must be decoyed out of the way for a few hours so that Demarest could interview Mrs. Humphreys without fear of interruption; therefore, it was for Humphreys he asked when Central finally connected him with the caretaker in the Eighty-First Street house.

He was told to ring the Appomattox, and he did—as soon as the caretaker had disconnected.

At the Appomattox a servant informed him that Humphreys was out of town and would not be back before morning.

Demarest then asked for Mrs. Humphreys, but he hung up before she came to the phone.

He had no desire to speak to her over the wire. He had asked for her only in order to be sure that she was at home.

As soon as he hung up the receiver he seized his hat and stick and top-coat and hurriedly descended the stairway to the street.

A great happiness possessed him—the happiness of doing his own work.

It was not always a creditable work—not always an admirable work—but it was his.

He thrilled to the call of it. His blood ran hot at the thought of conflict—of setting his own wits against another's.

There was a strange taint in him. That is the only possible way to account for his love of thieving.

To set out frankly with the avowed determination of outwitting some one out of some particular treasure was life to him.

When he succeeded (as he always did) he asked no greater boon of Fate.

It was not that he wanted the things he stole. He never did.

He stole them always upon commission, exacting from each client as much as he could, simply because money was the symbol of success—and he was fond of luxuries.

He never stole anything for the money that it would bring him. He never bothered about that. If he could have made twice as much money at banking, he would not have changed his mode of life.

He stole to demonstrate his own cleverness. He stole because to him stealing was a game—a wonderful, absorbing game.

He was a gambler by instinct and the stakes he played for were always the highest stakes obtainable.

For he risked his life and his liberty every time against five thousand, ten thousand, even a hundred thousand dollars.

The money was only an incidental.

He liked money for what it would bring; but then he had amassed a fortune. He was not compelled to steal.

He liked to steal. He liked to take something that other people were trying to guard against him. He liked to triumph over the armed forces of civilization—the law—the police—the whole of organized society.

He liked to demonstrate time and time again that bars and bolts were of no use against him.

Each commission furnished him with a new means of testing his strength. The harder the thing seemed the better he liked it.

This affair of the love-letter interested him only because nothing more important was on hand, and because it saved the night from being entirely wasted.

If he had not taken it, nothing more promising might have turned up. And then, too, as he had pointed out to Redway, the hand of Fate might be in it.

So, hailing a cab at the nearest stand he entered it eagerly enough and headed for Mrs. Humphreys's apartment. He stopped once, near One Hundred and Sixth Street, but only for a moment.

By a quarter to nine he was announcing to the hall attendant at the Appomattox that "Mr. Dannemeter" was calling upon Mrs. Lawrence Humphreys.

The hall attendant came back to inquire Mr. Dannemeter's business.

"Say that I have come at Mr. Humphreys's request, and that I have a message," said Demarest.

This explanation resulted in an invitation to ascend, and ascend Demarest did promptly.

It was never his custom to sneak in under cover of the night by the aid of dark lantern and mask and skeleton keys, protected by a loaded gun. He rarely carried a gun at all, though he was a crack shot.

He counted upon his intelligence to accomplish more for him than force or stealth or bluff or fright could possibly accomplish.

The last thing one expects a burglar to do is to arrive in a cab and send up his card. And Demarest had

reduced to a science the business of doing things that no one expected him to do.

His method, in this case, worked splendidly.

The man servant who ushered him into the drawing-room treated him not as a thief inclined to steal, but as a gentleman and a peer of his master's.

But of course these things Demarest was. The air is unmistakable.

He busied himself for the moment he had to wait by carefully scrutinizing his surroundings.

The servant had ushered him through the foyer into this front room. So he knew how near the main exit was, and which door led to it.

He knew, too, that Mrs. Humphreys's rooms communicated by means of the other doorway, for the man servant had disappeared that way with his card.

The arrangement suited him perfectly. Once the man servant was dismissed he would have Mrs. Humphreys's uninterrupted attention, and the rest of the household would be out of ear-shot, unless there was a maid with her in her own rooms.

He glanced critically at pictures, bric-à-brac, and furnishings. They pleased his discriminating eye.

He looked forward with some satisfaction to the coming of the woman who lived here among these things—the woman who had attempted to play such a strange game with Redway—the woman whom he had described as looking like a child, but acting like—very much like—an adventuress.

He was prepared, therefore, in a measure, for her youth and charm.

But the reality of her loveliness surpassed his expectations.

She looked no more than twenty-one or two. She was slim, graceful, wide-eyed, a child masquerading in woman's finery—a child playing "lady"—with soft dark hair dressed high on her head, and soft pink draperies floating about her.

As she advanced, with a faint questioning smile, he stood staring at her blankly.

"Mr.—Dannemeter?" she asked uncertainly, glancing at his card to be quite sure.

He offered her his hand, and fell into his rôle swiftly, recalling what Redway had hinted about her being able to take care of herself.

On the face of it, the idea was absurd. But he never made the mistake of underestimating his opponent.

"Mrs. Humphreys," he cried softly, "it's great luck that I have been able to find you in. Mayn't I talk to you for a moment, alone?"

She turned slowly toward the man servant, who was waiting near the door.

Then she glanced back at Demarest.

"I thought it was only a message from my husband?" she said.

"It is. But I think it was intended for your ears alone."

His voice—his expression—startled her a little.

She tore her eyes from his with an effort and cried:

"You may go, Durkin. I'll ring if I want you."

Durkin passed out, closing the door behind him.

As much for effect as to be quite sure that Durkin was going out of ear-shot, Demarest followed him to the door, threw it open, looked out into the foyer, and closed it again.

Then he turned to find Mrs. Humphreys pale—beginning to be frightened.

"What—is it?" she gasped.

"Is your maid in there? Is there any one about within ear-shot?"

"No," she whispered, "what—"

She caught hold of the back of the chair nearest to her, her fascinated eyes upon him.

"I will explain at once," said Demarest gravely. "You know my name, of course?"

She shook her head.

"You don't? You haven't heard

your husband mention me? Edwin Dannemeter? Surely—"

She shook her head again, unable to speak.

"I'm his lawyer," said Demarest, "or one of them. I suppose he has many. But—for really serious affairs he comes to me. I'm a consulting lawyer. No. 2 Rector.

"For ordinary cases he goes to practising men. That's why I'm sure this is serious."

"*What?*" she gasped, catching her breath. "Please—*please?*"

Her voice failed her there, and she stood gazing at him blankly.

"I don't know myself—exactly what," he admitted. "But I had a wire from your husband a little while ago. He urged me to come here at once and wait for him. He said life and death depend upon his seeing me instantly. So of course I came here directly.

"Or rather, I phoned first, and was told that he wasn't here. I asked for you, but somehow the wires got crossed or I was disconnected. After waiting a few moments I decided to come up directly."

She had advanced a step—was gazing up at him.

"My husband—wired you—to—to—"

"Come here at once."

"He said it was a matter of life or death?"

"Yes. I assumed it was something he could not say in a telegram!"

She sat silent, pallid, trembling, bewildered.

Gazing at her, Demarest knew that she must be wildly in love with Humphreys or a consummate actress.

And true to his theories he preferred the latter explanation.

"You've heard nothing from him?" he ventured.

"Nothing since morning. I'd a short note from him then, as usual. He just said he was well and would be home to-morrow. There was no hint of any difficulty."

"Something must have happened since he wrote that," said Demarest. "He must be intending to return to-night, for one thing. He wouldn't have asked me to wait here for him otherwise. You don't mind my waiting? You weren't going out?"

"No. I never go out when he isn't with me," she answered. "You must wait. You *must!* We mustn't disappoint him. If he spoke as if his need was urgent—"

"He did. I was led to assume, in fact, that he'd gotten into some sort of trouble—very serious trouble."

She nodded and caught her breath sharply, and began to rock herself back and forth on the low chair into which she had fallen.

Her eyes filled with tears.

"If we only knew!" she cried. "If we only *knew!* We could arrange to help him. He should have told you more. He should have told *me!*"

She threw up her hands suddenly, fiercely.

"It is my right to know. It is my right to share with him misfortunes as well as everything else—bad news and good news! He should have told me before you!"

"But I am his lawyer," protested Demarest. "Besides, he told me nothing but to come here and wait. He probably wants to tell us both. He probably wants to explain in person."

Her grief was beginning to impress Demarest. He was beginning to wonder if it could be all assumed.

"I thought you might help me," he added. "I thought you might be able to guess what it could be."

She shook her head wearily.

"Why should I?"

"Well, as his wife, you know," pointed out Demarest.

Her tears began to fall. She did not sob.

The big tears that had been in her eyes began to brim over and roll down her cheeks.

"His wife?" she whispered miserably. "Men's wives know less about

them than any one else, I'm beginning to think. If I were some *other* man's wife, now—"

She stopped, rose slowly, and stood staring at him, transfixed.

"Good God!" she gasped.

"What is it?" cried Demarest.

Her grief was gone now. She was plainly terrified.

"He *wouldn't!*" she cried. "He was trying to frighten me. He wouldn't *really*—"

"What? Who? Tell me!"

"There's a man," she answered swiftly, "who hates my husband. Hates him! He—he might try to harm him—if they met. Did you bring the wire? Please look. Maybe you misunderstood it. Maybe my husband is hurt. Maybe it's to make his will he wants you!"

"Surely not," cried Demarest. "You say there is a man who might try to kill him?"

"Yes," she whispered. "Yes, I think so. He was terribly angry—wild—crazed. I meant to warn Lawrence to-morrow. But I'd no idea he would try to follow him. I should have gone to tell him. I should have suspected. If he dies it will be my fault. I'll be his murderess!"

"Mrs. Humphreys!" cried Demarest, becoming alarmed, as she continued to work herself up into a state of hysteria.

"My fault, my fault, my fault!" she cried furiously. "I should have warned him. I should have tried to help him. He told me—he wanted to do better. He begged me to trust him. I wouldn't. I was jealous—exacting—cold. If he is dead, I killed him!"

"He is not dead," said Demarest anxiously. "The wire read as if he'd gotten into some kind of trouble—as if—"

He stopped. A ring at the bell electrified them both.

"Lawrence!" she whispered.

"Now we shall know," cried Demarest.

They waited in silence, heard the front door slam, heard steps approaching, saw Durkin appear with a telegram upon a silver tray.

Mrs. Humphreys held out her hand for it. Trembling, she opened it, signing for Durkin to go.

Then she opened the envelope, unfolded the enclosure, and read:

"In awful mess. Must leave country at once to escape imprisonment or death. Will explain when I arrive. Be ready to accompany me if you care enough. Keep Dannemeter until I come.

"LAWRENCE."

Her lips moved, forming the awful words; her eyes followed until they rested upon his signature.

Then, with one hand clutching her heart, she gasped out:

"*He's—killed him!*" and fainted.

Demarest did not stop to apply restoratives.

He did not bother to read the message she had dropped from her lifeless fingers, but plunged swiftly through the doorway into her boudoir. The lights were still on there.

He headed for the dressing-table and the jewel-case.

CHAPTER III.

The Female.

THE box was locked, as he had expected, but it was small enough to be purloined with ease.

He picked it up and dropped it into his coat-pocket.

His plans had not worked out exactly as he had arranged, so far.

He had sent the telegram signed "Lawrence," thinking that Mrs. Humphreys would begin to pack, on the strength of it, and that in the excitement he would be able to take the jewel-case without attracting attention.

He had not expected to be allowed time to open it and extract the letter. He counted on doing that later, and he meant to return the jewels and the case at the first opportunity.

However, he considered that the means to an end were never of so much importance as the end itself, and so long as he had accomplished his purpose he was of no mind to complain about the how and wherefore.

Turning hastily now, with the intention of returning to the drawing-room, he found his way blocked.

Mrs. Humphreys had really not fainted. She had simply yielded to a momentary attack of dizziness and had fallen back into her chair, closing her eyes.

Demarest's rush toward her boudoir had steadied her again almost instantly. Rising, following in order to reassure him, she had seen him drop the box into his pocket.

The evidence of her eyes was unmistakable.

She had thought he had rushed into her boudoir in search of restoratives. But he had made no attempt to seek restoratives.

He had instantly, deliberately taken her jewel-case as though he had known he would find it there.

She guessed instantly that he had come for the purpose of stealing it—that he was not her husband's lawyer at all—that even the wire was not really from her husband.

It all flashed through her head upon the instant—a sort of intuition, and noiselessly slipping the key from the inside of the door to the drawing-room side, she closed it and locked him in.

He turned just in time to see her doing it, but before he could reach her it was done.

He found himself in possession of the letter, surely enough, but—a prisoner in Mrs. Humphreys's room!

It is impossible to realize the hideous sensation of being trapped, of finding oneself closed into a certain limited space, walled in on all sides.

From the very beginning of his career Demarest had dreaded and abhorred such situations, not so much because he feared the prison sentence that they might lead to as because they symbolized prison sentence.

To him a term of imprisonment was the unthinkable horror. He feared it as he did not fear death.

At the hands of his Maker he knew that he would receive justice. He knew that God would see the strange twist in him that he could not overcome, and would pity him his weakness.

But he did not expect a like mercy from his fellow men.

And to be shut into a stone cell, with bars before the door! To be clad in prison garb! To be confined for years, perhaps, to the drab grayness, the routine, the sordid monotony of it all—

He could feel the life being crushed out of him by the very thought.

For an instant, as if he felt the door firm against him, he gave himself up to the horrors of his position.

He grew weak. Cold sweat broke out upon his brow. Shame and regret and remorse overwhelmed him. He repented his lawless life. He cringed.

He almost cried aloud his willingness to forsake it all—to pay any price—to meet any demands—just to regain his precious freedom.

But no sound issued from his dry lips—not then!

He caught himself in time. He controlled himself with a tremendous effort of will.

Confidence returned to him. He regained his faith in himself.

Without it he would have been lost, surely. Serene again in the belief that "Demarest conquers all obstacles"—he took careful inventory of the room.

It was a more or less ordinary bedchamber done in pale blue. Besides the door before which he stood there were two others—both closed.

Noiselessly, swiftly, he investigated them.

One led into a wide clothes cupboard. One led into a white-tiled bath.

There was no other exit from the room, unless the windows—

He crossed and looked out.

They fronted upon Fifty-Seventh Street, were on the fifth floor, and were not fitted with fire-escapes.

As a means of egress they were useless.

He turned from them to the room again.

This was not the first time he had found himself in such a predicament, and the fact that he had never once been jailed during the whole of his extraordinary career proved that he had succeeded before in extricating himself from difficult situations.

When ordinary means of escape had failed him he had won by strategy.

So now he began to examine his surroundings and to plot.

There was no telephone in the room by which he could communicate with the outside world.

But there was a desk!

Staring at it, his eyes lighted, and a faint smile flashed over his face.

An idea was born.

Slipping into the chair before the desk he drew out the jewel-case that he had purloined and placed it before him.

Then he arose, moved to the dressing-table, and found a case of hairpins.

One of these—a fine one—he bent several times in his deft fingers.

Coming back to the desk, he inserted an end into the lock of the case and began to manipulate it.

He had made a careful study of lock-picking, among other things.

When in early boyhood the strange inclination toward lawlessness had revealed itself, and he had gradually come to realize that it was too big to conquer, he had prepared to develop himself in a manner to succeed at lawlessness.

It had been his idea then—and still was—that if one cannot help being a thief, the next best thing to do is to become a great thief!

So, convinced, after many weary battles with himself, that he would never succeed in conquering the evil streak in him, he had set himself to study criminology—to read up the lives of other thieves and profit by their experience, their wisdom, and their folly—to prepare himself for his career, as men prepare themselves for ordinary, legitimate professions.

In this way he tried to safeguard himself.

He developed his charming manner. He learned to tell stories well. He learned to master the organ and the piano.

He went through college—the very best college here, then the best one abroad — and cultivated influential classmates.

And under cover, so to speak, he studied locks, and how to master their mechanism. He became a crack shot. He learned to fence.

He trained himself physically and mentally, so that he could think faster and move quicker and endure more than any other man of his build in the world.

It is a tribute to his strength of character to say that he succeeded in all this.

His dexterity at lock-picking now stood him in good stead. In the course of a few moments he had the jewel-case open.

At first glance no sign of a letter was visible.

There were jewels enough—emeralds, diamonds, pearls, rubies, sapphires, jade—every conceivable sort of stone—all tossed in carelessly together in an amazing tangle.

He lifted them out and dropped them in a glittering, scintillating heap on the pale blue blotting-pad before him.

And at the bottom of the case he came upon the letter.

A sigh escaped him. He was just beginning to think that he had followed a false scent and that the thing he sought was not in the box.

But it was, fortunately. He recognized it at once. It was written in a scrawling black hand on heavy white paper—paper embossed with the name of "The Settlers Club"—and it began "Dearest—"

His eyes grew brighter.

Drawing an envelope toward him—one of Mrs. Humphreys's own envelopes from the supply in the desk before him—he slipped the stolen letter into it, sealed the flap, and turned it over.

Then dipping Mrs. Humphreys's pen in ink he addressed the letter to:

Mr. Lloyd Demarest.

He added his address, and in the lower left hand corner this:

Please post! Most important!

Then he affixed a stamp to the envelope from the little gold stamp-box at his hand and, rising, crossed to the window again.

Below him stretched Fifty-Seventh Street—a busy thoroughfare.

Raising the window as softly as he could he leaned out and dropped the letter, aiming it for the pavement.

It did not fall straight, however. It was much too light for that.

The wind carried it round and round, whirled it, buffeted it, bore it along to deposit it finally on the edge of the gutter several doors on.

He marked the spot carefully with his eye. Then he drew in his head, closed the window as softly as he had opened it, and returned the jewels to their case and the case to the dressing-table.

This done, he threw back his head triumphantly and prepared for battle.

He was convinced now that Mrs. Humphreys had been amusing herself with him from the very beginning—that she had never been taken in by his story about her husband's wire; that she had pretended to faint just to lead him to "show his hand," and he was annoyed to reflect that he had done so.

In spite of Redway's warning, he had taken her at her face value—had believed her to be the rather simple, guileless, girl-woman that she looked.

He was not only annoyed at the ease with which she had trapped him, however. He was a little amused, too.

That it had taken a doll-faced girl-woman with big blue eyes and pouting lips to overreach Demarest!

How the world would laugh—that such a person had succeeded where the greatest detectives had failed!

But no one should ever know—that was his modicum of comfort. She had not yet won their tournament of wits.

The first encounter, perhaps—but not the battle. Indeed not—not by a great deal!

Already he had smuggled the letter out of her reach—under her delicious little turned-up nose. The next thing was to smuggle out Demarest.

He moved to the door and knocked softly—politely.

No answer came from the drawing-room beyond.

He knocked again, and called in a low, very amiable voice:

"Mrs. Humphreys—are you there?"

Still no answer came.

He knocked louder, and called in a voice that had lost some of its suavity:

"Mrs. Humphreys! I have waited as long and as patiently as possible for you to open this door and make me some sort of explanation. If you don't do it soon, however, I shall batter my way out of this room!"

No answer.

"And I'll use anything that comes to hand as a battering-ram. If your furnishings suffer, you've only yourself to blame!"

Still, if she heard him, she made no answer.

He reflected. If she was not there, battering down the door might be the best thing to do. He could not pick the lock because the key was on the other side and turned.

If she *was* there, a show of breaking out might induce her to parley.

He looked about him.

"This teakwood stand by the bed," he announced interestedly, "will make a commendable weapon! We'll begin with it!"

And removing the lamp and magazines he bore it across the room, swung it and brought it hard against the panel of the door.

A resounding crash was the result. The thin panel gave, cracked, but did not break. As he lifted the stand for a second blow she spoke.

Her voice was high-pitched and anxious. She spoke in some haste.

"*Stop!*" she cried. "I'm unlocking the door!"

"Thank you!" said Demarest.

He carried back the tabouret and replaced the lamp and magazines. The key turned in the lock meanwhile, the door opened, and he found himself facing Mrs. Humphreys—and a beautiful, shining .38!

Demarest gasped.

In a long and checkered career he had known many women—women of every conceivable type. And, in a way, he had studied them—attempted to classify them.

He flattered himself that he knew and understood them. But this one was a new species.

She *looked* like the sort that can think of nothing but clothes and jewels and furs; that will run from a mouse and faint at the sight of blood! She looked like a timid, shrinking, innocent, shielded, unsophisticated girl.

But very obviously her appearance was deceitful.

She had lead him on to betray himself before with astounding art. Delilah could have done no better.

And here she was now, brandishing a .38 with a resolute air, as though she would use it upon the slightest provocation.

"Come out—if you wish," she said. "But don't attempt to come too near me. And don't attempt to put your hands in your pockets, and don't attempt to get away. I'd use this without a second's hesitation. And I know *how!*"

Demarest smiled—and frank admiration gleamed in his blue eyes.

"I haven't the least doubt of it," he said, bowing. "Nothing that you might tell me would astonish me now. If you told me that you had killed eight men, I should believe you."

She did not smile. She kept her dark eyes fixed steadily upon him and answered slowly:

"I have never killed a man. I have never even shot at one. I've done chiefly target practise—but I should not balk if the necessity arose."

"It would be a dreadful weight on your conscience," said he.

"I should not do it if there were any other way out. If there were not, however, I should do it without compunction. One is permitted to shoot—burglars."

"Ah, burglars!" he admitted. "But you'd hardly expect any one to believe that I am a burglar!"

It did seem absurd, he was so distinguished looking, so handsome and well groomed. The formal black and white of his evening clothes threw his finely modeled face and white hair into relief.

"Quite another construction is apt to be placed upon my visit here," he added, "considering the absence of your husband."

"I can prove that I never saw you before in my life," she answered, frowning; "that you gained access to these rooms by trickery. I've even the telegram you sent me—signed with my husband's name. Oh, if I am compelled to shoot you or give you up to the authorities, I shall have ample proof of your guilt!"

"Do you propose doing one of those unpleasant things?" he asked mildly.

"I do. I intend summoning the police unless you return what you have stolen from my room!"

He smiled.

"Dear me," he said. "What a very disagreeable situation for me! You

are quite convinced that I am a thief, merely because I entered your bedchamber when you fainted. You have not considered the possibility that I might have been in search of restoratives."

"I did consider that possibility at first," she answered gravely, "until I saw you slip my jewel-box into your pocket!"

"I see? And that convinced you of my wicked intentions! Until then you had no doubt of me?"

"That would have convinced any one," she said. "Where is my jewel-box now?"

"On your dressing-table."

"And the contents?"

"On your dressing-table. If you doubt my word you can look!"

"And give you an opportunity to escape? I think not."

"You might back me in there," he suggested. "It is to my advantage to demonstrate that I am innocent, you know?"

She studied him curiously.

"If you've taken nothing," she said, "I'm sure it's no fault of yours. My speedy recovery is to blame for that."

He smiled.

"What are you smiling at?" she asked, frowning.

"This whole situation. It is quite extraordinary. It's quite the most extraordinary one in which I've ever figured.

"You are so small and slight—if you will pardon me—and so very fierce-looking with that gun! And I am so very much bigger and stronger. It proves the supremacy of mind over matter, doesn't it?"

"The situation may not amuse you so much if I fire—or if I summon the police," she said tartly.

"No," he admitted; "I dare say not."

"Precede me into the bedroom again!" she ordered thoughtfully.

"Certainly."

"And be careful. A bullet in the shoulder or in the stomach might not be comfortable. And I don't shoot well enough to take very reliable aim."

"Perhaps I'd better hold my arms up?" he suggested.

"Hold them still at your sides," she answered, and circled round him, keeping him covered.

Arrived at the dressing-table she reached out cautiously with her left hand and felt about for the jewel-case, without venturing to take her eyes from him.

"A little more to the left," he volunteered, directing her. "A little further back. There!"

She did not disdain to ignore his assistance, but speedily located the gold-box.

And in lifting it she discovered that it was open.

Her eyes flashed.

"*Unlocked!*" she cried triumphantly. "So I was *not* mistaken! Your manner almost convinced me that I was. I was beginning to feel like apologizing!"

"Didn't you leave it unlocked?" he asked.

"I did not!"

"Do you suppose I go about with keys to fit ladies jewel-boxes?"

"I don't suppose anything. I *know* that I left this box locked when you were announced—and now it is open. I assume that you opened it, since you were the only person in here; and I saw you slip it into your pocket.

"Get back, please! Farther! And don't move! I'm going to examine the contents—but if you so much as stir I'll shoot you!

"I'm not going to take any chances. I'm not going to give you the benefit of a doubt—so be careful."

She had him backed up against a wall now—and she was between him and the door.

Turning out the jewelry on the desk-top—as he had done once before—she discovered the absence of the letter—and caught her breath hard and raised her eyes to his.

"So," she said, "I was not mistaken

after all. It was for the letter you came. Redway sent you!"

He shrugged.

"Now you see I am not an ordinary thief," he said.

"To steal a letter is no better than to steal such things as these," she cried, dropping her hand to the glittering heap of jewels, "especially *that* letter—"

"But it is not yours!"

"It is as much mine as Redway's," she answered passionately. "More—much more. For I mean to use it well—for the happiness of several persons—and he means to destroy and kill! But I've balked him once—and I will again. Mr. Dannemeter—if that is your name—I am in earnest about this affair.

"You might have come here to steal my jewelry, and I might have let you go. You might have come to deprive me of anything that I own—and I might have let you escape with it—but you will *never* leave this apartment with that letter while I live to prevent it! I mean this as I have never meant anything before in my life.

"I'll kill you and face the consequences before I let you go with that letter!"

She was white, her eyes blazed, her faced was resolute and set. The change that had come over her was amazing.

Demarest gazed across at her, fascinated.

"What makes you prize it so highly," he asked curiously. "If it was not written to you—"

"It is *because* it was not written to me I must retain it!"

"But there are thousands of letters written every day—and not written to you!"

"Don't try to jest or to evade the issue," she said. "I will give you five minutes by the clock there to return what you've taken. If you haven't returned it in that time, I'm going to shoot you!

"I shall aim just to injure you and to disable you and to prevent your departure. But if I accidently kill you, I shall not regret it.

"Your life means nothing to me—compared with the happiness that that letter might jeopardize. So think well!"

"Suppose I have not the letter?" he asked.

"It is useless to suppose that."

"But I *haven't* it! I couldn't give it back to you if I wished."

She shook her head.

"Lying will avail you nothing!"

"I am not lying. I mean what I say. It would be ridiculous to try to lie to you, when you might easily call your servants and have me searched; when you would be certain to discover the truth, if you fired upon me. I haven't the letter!"

His persuasiveness, his apparent sincerity disturbed her.

But she was by no means convinced.

"Nonsense," she said. "It was locked in that box when you entered this room. It is not here now. You *must* have taken it!"

"How do you know it was locked in that box when I entered the room?" he asked.

She hesitated.

"I locked it there," she said.

"Yesterday. I know. But have you seen it since?"

"Yes—this morning," she answered triumphantly.

"Not since then?"

"No-o!"

"Well, then, it may have been removed during the day. Have you even looked to see if the jewel-box was locked or open since morning?"

"No-o. But—"

"Then I don't see how you can be so sure I took the letter!"

"I guess you did," she answered more tranquilly. "At least circumstances certainly seem to point to you!"

"Suppose I were to tell you," he said, leaning toward her frankly, "that I came here with the intention of taking it; that I planned the story of your husband's wire—and all the rest of it—in order to gain access to these

rooms; that I did take the jewel-box up in order to extract the letter from it, and that I found no letter there!"

"I should not believe you," she answered grimly. "And three minutes have passed."

"Consider your remorse," he pointed out, "when you shoot me, and then find out that what I have been telling you is the truth!"

"I'd rather risk the remorse than your getting away with the letter."

He studied her thoughtfully.

"Why does this letter mean so much to you?"

She shrugged.

"I have neither the time nor the inclination to discuss that with you now."

"I think it might be advisable, though. The letter is not on my person—but I may be able to help you to get it.

"You can accomplish nothing by making war upon me. You might accomplish a great deal by discussing this whole affair frankly."

"So you have hidden it," she said.

"Perhaps!"

"And it was in the box when you entered this room?"

"Yes."

"And the box *was* locked?"

"Yes. I opened it with one of your hairpins."

She gasped.

"You admit all this brazenly?"

"Yes—more. I *did* take the letter, too. But it is not hidden on me—neither is it hidden in this room. You can gain nothing by shooting me or turning me over to the police—nothing but notoriety.

"You can't even *prove* that I stole the letter. I can deny it. I can insist that I was looking for restoratives."

"But how will you explain that fiction about my husband's telegram?"

"I will deny all knowledge of it—and declare that I visited you at *your* invitation."

"I will deny it."

"But my word is as good as yours."

"I will have my servants testify that you said you had a message from my husband."

"I will explain that you asked me to use that formula in order that the servants might not suspect anything wrong about my visit during his absence."

She was wide-eyed, furious.

"This is infamous!"

"You can't expect me to allow myself to be killed or arrested without a protest or an attempt at defense."

"I'll not have you arrested. I'll shoot you!"

"You'll have to *kill* me, to prevent my publishing the story I've just outlined. And if you kill me, you'll be tried for murder. Think of the notoriety—the disgrace. Besides, I'll haunt you!"

He smiled charmingly, whimsically.

She felt the situation suddenly turned into broad farce—and colored.

"If this is amusing to you," she said, "it is very serious to me."

Her voice wavered, her eyes filled.

"Put down the gun," said Demarest, "and tell me all about it. I've heard the story one way from Redway. Tell me your version of it. Perhaps I shall side with you, after all."

Her dark eyes scrutinized him.

"Who are you?" she asked wearily, dropping the gun.

"Lloyd Demarest," he answered modestly.

"Lloyd Demarest?" She gasped out the name, her eyes wide and wondering.

He smiled.

"You've heard of me?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps, then, you've heard that I have a habit of keeping my word?"

"I've heard so—yes."

"And that I speak the truth, as a general thing?"

"Ye-es."

"Very well, then. You may be inclined to believe me when I assure you that I have not got your letter—and that it is not hidden in this room. I think I could get it, however, if necessary.

"Suppose you give me your version of this letter business."

He advanced toward her.

"How can I be *sure* you are Lloyd Demarest?" she asked.

"Look at me. Do I look like an ordinary thief?"

"No-o."

"Do I seem one of your own class?"

"Yes."

"Why not chance it, then?"

"But this story is confidential. It's a secret. I'd run a great risk in telling any one."

"Still, if there's a chance that I might help you?"

"Is there?"

"If you are trying to blackmail Redway—no, not a chance. If you are acting justifiably in holding back this letter—decidedly yes!"

She was crying a little.

"I've no desire to blackmail him. I tried to keep the letter from him because he meant to do great harm with it—not only to me but to others. Truly."

"Tell me, then?"

She drew a long breath.

"The letter was written by my husband to Mrs. Redway," she said. "He wants to use it as evidence in a suit for divorce. And I want to prevent that."

CHAPTER IV.

Another Story.

DEMAREST stared at her curiously.

Her dark eyes met his frankly, wistfully, appealingly. Her lips were curved and full like a child's. Her physical charm was undeniable.

And she was actually blushing with shame at the confession.

"Your husband wants to divorce you?" he asked.

"*No!*" she answered in horror. "Mr. Redway wants to divorce his wife, naming my husband as corespondent, and he wants this letter to introduce as evidence.

"My husband wrote it to Mrs. Redway. and it fell into *her* husband's hands by chance. You didn't read it?"

"No," he answered slowly.

"If you had, you would have understood why Mr. Redway was so furious. It makes it quite clear that more than a friendship has existed between my husband and Mrs. Redway."

"I see. That is why Redway is so anxious to recover the letter?"

"Yes."

"But how does it happen to be in *your* possession—or rather, how *did* it happen to be? How did you come by it?"

"I confiscated it," she admitted frankly. "But come into the drawing-room and sit down and I'll tell you the rest of it."

She broke off abruptly and lead the way. He followed. The gun remained lying upon the rugs unheeded.

She sank upon a broad davenport with a little sigh, curled one foot up under her and smiled at him faintly.

"Sit down," she said. "Draw a chair up, so that we can talk without being overheard, and find yourself something to smoke over there!"

"Thank you," he answered. "I have my own case. Will you?"

She shook her head.

"B-r-r-r! *No*, thank you! I loathe women who do!"

He smiled.

"Really?"

"Yes. I know it is old-fashioned, but I can't help it. I'm old-fashioned. I'm even an antisuffragist."

"Many of us still find the old-fashioned things best," he said.

She nodded.

"If I were a modern, up-to-date woman," she sighed, "I suppose I would be shrugging at my husband's disloyalty, closing my eyes and overlooking it, or preparing to divorce him.

"But I'm doing none of those things. I'm not going to divorce him, because marriage vows mean something to me—and I intend to keep mine. I don't believe in divorce.

"And I'm not going to overlook his lapses, because I believe that a woman should help her husband; should influence him; should do her best to make him what he should be.

"For women are naturally better than men. They don't sin so lightly."

"So what attitude will you take?" asked Demarest, studying her curiously.

"I shall forgive him this infidelity, but I shall not forget. I'll take the incident to heart, and find a lesson in it. If I had made him the right sort of wife, he'd not have strayed to other women.

"I'll try harder, in future, to hold him. And I'll try to make him see that he owes me his love.

"He's spoiled, you see. He's had too many women in love with him. He waited too long to marry, but that was because I didn't turn up sooner!

"While he was looking for me he fell into the habit of flirting with every pretty woman he met, and he hasn't unlearned the habit yet. This affair with Mrs. Redway was only a flirtation on his part. I know that."

"I don't doubt it in the least," said Demarest.

"So-o—what should any of us gain by divorce? I'd simply cast my husband off to go flirting about for the rest of his life—and finding no happiness anywhere. Redway would treat his wife the same way—only worse—for a woman comes out of these affairs badly scarred.

"I should be wretched alone, because I love my husband. Redway would be wretched because he loves his wife. No; the only thing to do was to prevent such a mistake; so I did it by confiscating the letter."

"How did you manage that?" asked Demarest interestedly.

"Easily enough. When he got the letter—it came in to him with his mail, address side down, and he opened it without looking at it—he came straight to me with it. He thought I would naturally want to join with him in bringing action against our erring mates.

"I think he believed it to be his duty to enlighten me, too.

"Well, fortunately he told me all about it before he showed me the letter. That gave me time to think. When he let me take it into my own hands to read for myself, I jumped up, whisked out of the room before he knew what I was doing, and locked it up in my jewel-case."

Demarest smiled.

"That must have surprised him. What did he do then?"

"He followed me. I think he had an idea I was going to commit suicide or something. When I explained, he was furious. He would have made a scene—if I hadn't rung for tea at just the psychological moment."

"I see. And in the end—what?"

"He went, vowing he'd divorce his wife in spite of me, and would name my husband, too. He said I was lucky he didn't intend to shoot Lawrence as some other husband might have done."

"So when I turned up—"

"I naturally assumed that one of them had shot the other. I hadn't had time to warn Lawrence, you see. He's been away for a week. I was meaning to show him the letter to-morrow and to have an understanding with him. Then I meant to burn it!"

Demarest sprang up decisively.

"I see. Your story is very different from the one Redway told me. He led me to believe that you were trying to blackmail him, and he told me expressly that he wrote the letter.

"If you have given me the true version now, he must have lied. I can speedily settle that point by examining your husband's hand-writing and Redway's. Have you any letters from your husband here?"

"Ye-es," said she. And then swiftly: "No, not here. They are in our Eighty-First Street house. I brought with me only actual necessities. We are here only temporarily."

"I'll hold the letter then, until you

or Redway produces unquestionable rights of possession. The fact that he employed me first shall not weigh with me."

"I can produce letters from my husband to-morrow. I can have him write for you, if you like. He returns in the morning."

"Very well. I will stop in to-morrow with the letter."

She sprang up eagerly.

"Then you have it?" she cried.

"Not yet; but I intend to get it before then. And that reminds me that time flies."

He held out his hand to Mrs. Humphreys.

"Good night," he said.

"You won't deliver it to him?" she begged. "You won't fail me?"

"If you have been honest with me, you may be sure I will not."

"I suppose I must trust you," she whispered wearily.

"Do," he urged.

She inclined her head and released his hand.

He moved toward the door; there he turned suddenly, unexpectedly.

But he did not surprise any expression of dismay upon her face, nor did he find her going for her gun again.

She remained exactly as he had left her.

"Mrs. Humphreys," he said slowly, "you are either the most remarkable woman I have ever met—the bravest and stanchest and truest, save one; or you are the cleverest actress the world has ever known.

"To-morrow I shall know which. Good night."

She lifted wide, dark eyes and gazed after him as he passed out.

Demarest descended in the lift and made his way speedily to the spot where the letter ought to have been lying.

It was not there!

He cursed beneath his breath and moved on farther, examining the pavement closely as he went.

There was just wind enough to carry it about, so it was entirely probable that the very important little missive had simply changed its position.

But careful search of the vicinity failed to reveal it.

The Appomattox was situated in the middle of the block between Fifth and Sixth Avenues.

Demarest went from Fifth to Sixth, on both sides of the street, looked into areaways, and even into doorways, without finding any trace of it.

So in the end he was forced to conclude that some one had picked it up.

Having arrived at this decision he grew more cheerful.

For if some one had bothered to pick it up and had not thrown it down again, the probability was that the same some one had been kind-hearted enough to post it.

In that event it would be delivered to him in the morning mail, for eleven o'clock had not yet struck.

He headed for the nearest cab station, pondering the matter.

If some one had picked it up, well enough. But if the wind had carried it off and it was still lying in some nook or cranny of the street?

What then? Might it not turn up at any time? Suppose some curious stranger had opened it and had read the letter? Suppose some one who could identify the correspondents found it?

He was not altogether pleased with the situation.

If it had happened that Mrs. Humphreys had told him the truth, and if the letter fell into Redway's hands, Demarest would feel himself responsible for the ensuing scandal.

For if he had not taken it from the jewel-case, it would be lying there still, safe and sound.

His reputation was at stake, that was the truth of the matter. Somehow, he must recover the letter and deliver it safely into the hands of Mrs. Humphreys or Redway. It was up to him to find out which deserved it.

That point, too, troubled him.

He was still in doubt about Mrs. Humphreys. There were moments when he was inclined to agree with Redway that she was "able to take care of herself."

Then, again, there were moments when she seemed a frank, sincere, stanch, devoted wife.

One moment it seemed impossible that she could care for a man like Humphreys—*really* care. Then he remembered how many other women had cared for him.

One moment he was inclined to believe Redway the jealous husband she made him out; the next he saw him as a troubled, worried, blackmailed man.

It was all very complicated and bothersome.

He went over it again and again going home in the cab. And when he reached his destination he found himself in no mood for bed. His suspense was too great.

The big house on the drive was apparently empty.

Mrs. Demarest had gone with the Treynes to the Long Island place, and they had taken most of the servants. The others had gone to bed.

Save for the dim lamp on the stairway, darkness was everywhere.

Demarest found his way to the keyboard of the big organ that Treyne had had installed for him. And sitting there in the darkness alone, he began to play.

Wagner was his favorite these days. His taste changed. But the Master of Baireuth was his most recent fancy.

He began "Tannhäuser" and played his favorite themes; drifted into "Lohengrin," then on to "The Rheingold" and "The Walküre," and finally "Tristan and Isolde."

He knew them all by heart, and loved them. He felt them. They expressed for him things that he could not express.

For though he had been blessed with many gifts, the creative faculty had been denied him. He thought, he felt, he dreamed, but he was denied expression save through the medium of some other's genius.

He played as Wagner might have played, but no divine melodies originated in him. He improvised and paraphrased, but could not compose.

Sometimes he wondered if he might not have been able to conquer his lawlessness if the gift of expression had been his.

For an hour or more he sat there in the dark, tiring himself with the heavy, masterly harmonies.

Then he rose wearily and made his way up to his rooms. And he fell asleep instantly.

Edwardes wakened him at nine, when his bath was ready for him. Demarest leaped up wide-eyed and gazed at the clock.

"Is that right?" he cried. "Is it only nine, Edwardes.

"Yes, sir," said Edwardes.

"The mail isn't here yet, I suppose?"

"No, sir. Nothing in the first mail, sir."

He lay back, staring at the ceiling.

"The next is at half-past ten as a rule, sir," added Edwardes comfortingly. "Will you have your shower now, sir?"

"Yes," said Demarest. "At once. And my breakfast as soon as I'm dressed."

"I will order it while you are in the tub, sir," said Edwardes.

Demarest stepped out. He wished that he had been allowed to sleep until mail-time.

The thought that an hour and a half must elapse before he should know whether or not the letter would come was almost unendurable.

He detested waiting for any one or anything. He hated suspense.

But there was no way out of it this time. He had taken a long chance in throwing the letter from the window; but he had done it on the spur of the moment, when it had seemed to him

unlikely that he could get it out any other way.

He had counted then upon getting off quickly in order to pick it up himself; but Mrs. Humphreys's story had interested him, and he had lingered. Now he wondered how he should set about recovering the letter if it did not come in the morning mail or in any succeeding mail.

He could advertise for it, of course. But that would entail a lot of publicity. His name had come to have a news value in the newspapers since his government connection.

No other means of securing it again occurred to him.

He made his morning toilet in gloomy silence, and breakfasted by himself, not even glancing at the morning paper. His eyes kept wandering back again and again to the dial of the clock.

But in the end he grew restless, and determined to wait at the door for the mail.

He got his hat and stick and topcoat and took up his position upon the steps before the door. From that point of vantage he could see a long way down the drive; could discover the postman when he first entered his territory.

He waited years, centuries, but not in vain.

The gray-coated figure finally hove in sight, whistling and making a very slow approach, halting at every door. Demarest decided to meet him half-way.

He was starting down the steps to put the idea into execution when Redway arrived.

Descending from his taxi at the curb Redway hurried toward him.

"Well?" he cried. "I couldn't wait any longer for news. I had to come up to see if you'd had any success yet. Have you?"

Demarest turned and regarded him.

"Oh," he said. "Good morning."

"Good morning," said Redway slowly.

For the moment the uncertainty about the letter was swept out of the ex-thief's mind, and he found himself pondering another question: Was Redway telling the truth or was Mrs. Humphreys?

Both could not be. One had misrepresented facts; but which one had?

Redway raised his eyebrows curiously at the other's scrutiny.

He did not look confused. He had evidently no idea that Demarest was inclined to doubt the truth of the story he had told about the letter.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Come in and wait," said Demarest. "I haven't any report to make yet; but I may have any moment now. I'm waiting for news."

They turned and mounted the steps.

Demarest saw the mailman still a block or so off.

Demarest's eyes still rested on his visitor curiously.

"This affair has upset you, I am afraid," he said. "You look done up."

"Yes," said Redway, nodding; "yes, you've no idea how it has knocked me out."

"The suspense, I suppose, is awful," said Demarest.

"Suspense?" repeated Redway.

"For fear you'll not get the thing; for fear this Mrs. Humphreys will succeed in bringing it to the notice of your wife."

"Oh," said Redway slowly; "yes, that is rather an uncomfortable situation. My wife would be terribly upset by it!"

He was ghastly white. He brushed his hand back nervously over his hair.

"You didn't go after the letter yourself?" he asked then, rather hastily. "You've agents, I suppose?"

"No. I went for it myself."

"I see. Of course. Then you must have met Mrs. Humphreys?"

"Yes."

Demarest remained quite calm, casual, indifferent.

But his blue eyes missed no change

of expression on Redway's face, and his ears were straining for the postman's ring.

"What happened?" asked Redway eagerly. "You don't mind telling?"

"No." Demarest's voice was almost absent-minded. "I managed to get into the place, picked the lock of the jewel-case, and got the letter."

"You *got the letter?*" cried Redway exultingly, his eyes flashing fire.

"I got it all right," answered Demarest; "but she appeared in time to see me and locked me in. I realized that I could never get out with it on me, so I took an envelope from her desk, enclosed the letter in it, addressed it to myself, stamped it, and threw it out of the window into Fifty-Seventh Street."

"*What?*" Redway was on his feet, excited, incredulous, horrified.

"I meant to go down for it afterward, but when I finally was able to, it was gone. It may be in this mail, and it may not. We will soon see."

Redway gulped and turned toward the servant who was just entering, a pile of mail upon his tray.

"The post, sir," he said, hesitating in the doorway.

"Bring it here to me, Jenkins," said Demarest.

"I did not know there was any one here, sir," apologized the servant, crossing.

"All right, Jenkins."

Demarest got his hands on the letters and began to run through them swiftly, nervously.

Redway was on his feet, staring down, clenching and unclenching his hands.

And then the telephone rang.

Demarest did not glance up.

He went on searching; suddenly he found it there among the rest—the envelope that he had addressed to himself.

But one end was ripped open, and across it in big letters was written:

"*Opened by mistake.*"

"It's there?" gasped Redway.

"The envelope," answered Demarest. "The enclosure—"

He stopped and blew into the torn end. The letter was there.

Evidently some one had found it and had opened it in search of money; but had left it undisturbed.

"Yes," he announced then, "it is here."

Redway reached out a shaking hand for it. Demarest smiled and slipped it into his inner pocket.

"One moment, please," he said.

He lifted the receiver of the telephone which was still ringing madly.

"Hello!" he called pleasantly into the transmitter.

"Hello!" came back in a woman's voice. "I want to speak to Mr. Lloyd Demarest."

"Who is this, please?" he asked cautiously.

"Mrs. Lawrence Humphreys."

"Oh, yes. Good morning, Mrs. Humphreys," he answered. "I am Lloyd Demarest."

Redway gasped at the sound of the woman's name and advanced a few steps.

There he stood clutching the back of the chair nearest him, his eyes fast on Demarest.

He made no pretense of being interested in something else. He frankly listened to Demarest's side of the conversation, and wished that he knew what the woman was saying.

"Oh, I didn't recognize your voice," was what he would have heard. "I hope I haven't disturbed you; but I'm so eager for news. Have you accomplished any thing yet?"

"Yes," he answered gravely.

"You have—you've got the letter?"

"Yes."

His replies meant little to the listening Redway; but that made him nervous.

"When will you bring it to me?" she cried. "I've just had a phone message from my husband. He was at the railroad station. He is on his way up-town now."

"I see," said Demarest.

"Could you get here before him, so that I can have it to show him when he comes?"

"I hardly think so; but I'll try," said he.

"Thank you," she murmured gratefully. "I shall be tremendously obligated to you, more obligated than I can say. You'll be assuring my domestic happiness, I think, if you give me this letter.

"I've not been awfully happy before, but I can be now—if you'll let me. And whatever I can do for you in return, I'll do gladly—gladly."

"That will be easily arranged," he answered.

"I can expect you then, soon?"

"Yes."

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

He hung up, and faced Redway.

"Well," cried Redway hoarsely, "What now? You seem to be great pals with her."

"She is a remarkable woman," answered Demarest, nodding. "A very remarkable woman. I admire her a great deal."

"You knew her before—"

"No," he smiled; "I never saw her before last night. But she displayed rather unusual traits then. I think you hardly appreciate her, my dear Redway."

"Perhaps," said Redway. "As a matter of fact, she is of no interest to me at all. If you'll give me the letter, I'll pay you out your five thousand in cash; I have it ready."

He produced a wallet and opened it.

"Five thousand?" repeated Demarest. "Was it *five* thousand you offered me yesterday?"

"Yes." Redway's tone was grim. It was clear he was annoyed at Demarest's tone. "I think the figure was decided upon."

"Mrs. Humphreys offers me ten thousand to return the letter to her," said Demarest.

"But you got it for *me!* You accepted the terms I offered you. It was settled that you would return it to me for the sum of five thousand dollars in cash!"

"But at the time I did not realize the value of the letter. You took advantage of my ignorance. It was really reprehensible of you. I would not have agreed to sell you the letter for five thousand if I had known I could get ten."

"A bargain is a bargain," said Redway.

"The price of the letter has gone up overnight," answered Demarest. "I am not in business for my health, Mr. Redway. Will you pay me ten thousand dollars in cash for this valuable and interesting epistle?"

"I—I haven't ten thousand in cash with me," growled Redway. "I've only five thousand and one hundred dollars."

Demarest sighed.

"That is really too bad. And Mrs. Humphreys *has* ten thousand on hand."

"Come with me to the bank and I'll draw the extra five thousand," suggested Redway.

"Right," agreed Demarest cheerfully. "We'll run right along in your cab. It's waiting, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered Redway briefly.

Demarest rose and stopped short.

"No; that won't do. I'm expecting a phone call here—an important one. I can't leave; but if you'll write a check and O. K. the signature, I'll send my man to get it cashed, and we can wait for him here. What do you say to that?"

Redway nodded.

"All right. Where is he?"

"I'll ring for him."

Demarest moved toward the bell.

"You'll find writing things on the long table," he called back over his shoulder.

Redway advanced to the long table and threw himself into a chair, drew out his check-book, dipped the pen in the ink, and began to write.

Demarest came up softly and waited.

"Five thousand," said Redway as he wrote. "Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"To Mr. Lloyd Demarest?"

"Yes."

Redway signed it and tore it off. Demarest reached out for it to examine it.

One glance satisfied him. He smiled down at Redway.

"On second thoughts," he said, "I will not sell the letter for ten thousand!"

"*What!*" roared Redway, leaping up. "You—"

"Will not sell the letter to you for ten thousand," repeated Demarest.

"You'll not get a penny more!" shouted Redway.

"I don't want any more. I wouldn't sell this letter to you for twenty thousand—or fifty—or a hundred! Shall I tell you why?"

He faced Redway grimly.

"Because," he added slowly, "you lied to me. You wilfully misled me. You made me believe you wanted it for justifiable reasons.

"Instead, you intended to play the scoundrel. You wanted to involve me in your unpleasant processes of revenge; but I am not any man's tool in such a matter.

"You did not write this letter. Your check proves that. You wanted to use it to wreck your own wife's life—her reputation—and the Humphreyses' home as well.

"You can do that sort of thing if you like, but not with my assistance. Jenkins, show Mr. Redway out."

Redway fixed his eyes upon Demarest.

"Be careful," he said. "You had better not begin with me. You're allying yourself against me in this. If you don't change your attitude, I'll settle my score with you when I've settled with my wife."

"Men who wreak vengeance on women are not the sort of enemies I fear," answered Demarest. "Jenkins!"

Redway turned slowly and went out.

Twenty minutes later Demarest was standing in the Humphreyses' home.

Mrs. Humphreys advanced with outstretched hands.

"He arrived first, after all," she said. "And I had to tell him—everything. But we've had our little understanding, so it only remains to burn the letter. You've brought it?"

"Yes," said Demarest. "But I should like to compare it with Mr. Humphreys's writing, if you don't mind, just for form's sake."

"Permit me," said Humphreys, coming forward and nodding, "to offer my signature."

It was a check that he extended, but with the line that should have carried the sum left blank.

The writing Demarest recognized.

However, he took out the letter and compared the two documents, and returned them to Mrs. Humphreys.

"Quite correct," he said.

She looked at him wistfully, gratefully, her dark eyes suspiciously bright.

"Won't you permit us to make you some acknowledgment of our gratitude?" she asked softly. "Redway must have offered you something. Allow us to protect you from loss, at least."

He smiled back and shook his head.

"But, my dear fellow," protested Humphreys, "you don't realize what you've done for me—what I owe you. You must realize that obligation irks me. I should like to make you some compensation."

"*You* are under no obligation," said Demarest. "I have done nothing for you. What little I have done, has been wholly and entirely to oblige a lady."

And taking the hand that Mrs. Humphreys impulsively offered, he bowed in Continental fashion, and kissed it.

(The end.)

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

WHAT is a triceratops? That's a frightful question to hurl at any one, isn't it? When I first read

MASK OF THE RED GARDEN

BY ROTHVIN WALLACE

next week's complete novelette, I met the word for the initial time. I consulted an encyclopedia to find out what it meant. And this is what the compendium of universal knowledge said in effect:

The triceratops was one of the largest mammals of the Cretaceous period, a prehistoric era noted for its large animals. In his day and age he must have been a mighty nasty customer to tackle, for he had three horns which he knew how to use to good advantage. In bulk he made the biggest elephant look like a dwarf.

I whistled in amazement.

Then I understood why *Thomas Bonaventure Rockford,* geological explorer of the Smithsonian Institution, the hero of Rothvin Wallace's tale, grew so intensely excited when, near the bleak eastern seacoast of Canada not far from the American line, he chanced upon the trail of a triceratops; and why he followed it into the red garden and a labyrinth of exciting adventures as totally inexplicable to the scientist himself as they were breathlessly entertaining to me.

When you pick up your ALL-STORY next week I want you to pay particular attention to the handsome picture of the red garden on the cover. If you can divine the reason why everything there is the one prevailing color—red—and why the gang with whom *Rockford* soon comes to grips is trying to keep its operations a dead secret, then you are a better guesser than I am. And you ought to join the Burns Agency.

Do you remember "A Broken Talisman" and "Serenade"? Rothvin Wallace was the author of those stories. Now you know what you have to look forward to in "MASK OF THE RED GARDEN."

"WHITE HANDS," by Frank Condon, tells about the oldest and finest and cleanest restaurant in New York, which is not largely known to strangers, and which shrills with no cabaret performances, concealed string bands, and other disturbers of digestion. This restaurant is located far down-town, a few doors west of Fifth Avenue, and there every noon and evening you may see New Yorkers of the blown-in-the-bottle type, cogitating over their finnan haddie or baked oysters.

It is exclusively not a restaurant for strangers, though strangers would be delighted with it, and Joe, the waiter, bows serenely to all who enter, as he has bowed to them for many years. No coarse display of food in the window lures in the stray wanderers, because wanderers are not particularly desired. This restaurant

and its all New York trade is perfectly contented, and therefore it is somewhat puzzling to know how a man from Kansas City came there.

But more puzzling still is his strange announcement to Joseph, the waiter. "What I'm looking for is a New Yorker who knows this town from Alonzo J. Soup to Frederick Nuts," he says.

Aren't you anxious to find out if the man from Kansas City finds the New Yorker he is looking for and what he wishes of him?

"TROUBLE ADRIFT," by Roy P. Churchill, is a story of the American Navy. Don't you think such a tale ought to be interesting when so much is being written about the necessity of arming ourselves against a possible invasion?

It concerns *Zeikle,* a gunner's mate on the U. S. S. Puritan, at anchor when the story opens in Hampton Roads. *Zeikle* was, perhaps, one of the homeliest men in the American navy. He was small of stature, with abnormally long arms, thick, stooped shoulders, and short, bent legs. He had a sharp nose, his face was scarred by smallpox, and in the middle of his forehead a blue star, the size of a dime, was tattooed. But put *Zeikle* behind a gun on the Puritan and he was invaluable — the equal of any marksman on his ship, or on any of the Atlantic fleet.

"TROUBLE ADRIFT" tells of a crisis in which *Zeikle's* splendid talent is called upon to save the day.

"A MASCOT JINX," by E. K. Means, introduces *Miss Coco Ferret, Skeeter Butts's fiancée.* The proprietor of the Hen Scratch saloon has decided to get married, and the object of his affections is a dumpy, simple-faced country girl who bears the remarkable monniker given above.

If you want to laugh until your sides are sore, make the acquaintance of this young colored lady whom *Hitch Diamond,* prize-fighter, appraises as being all "soft and puffed up and squeezy like a big balloom."

E. K. Means's Tickfall tales are absolutely unique—unlike any other stories appearing in any other magazine. That is because very few people understand the modern negro the way E. K. Means does. If you have not as yet read any of his stories, read this one and see if you don't agree with me.

"THE VILLAIN OF THE PIECE," by Frank R. Adams, is a story of— But honest, it would spoil it to tell you *what* it is about!

Outside the room a stair creaked. A slim, sallow young man with the look of a cornered rat in his eye, who had been waiting all night for just that sound, nevertheless started jerkily. In a second his nerves adjusted themselves to a higher tension level and he deposited his lighted cigarette on a tin tray on the table which was littered with half a hundred stubs.

Next he turned down the kerosene lamp on the table to a dim point of light, drew a revolver from his pocket and stepped back of the door as it swung slowly open!

That's the beginning; and take it from us, you don't want to miss this story!

ACHMED ABDULLAH SCORES HEAVILY

To the Editor:

I am a reader of your All-Story Weekly. I like "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms" series by Achmed Abdullah. They are good stories and deal with some very true facts. I am a Ghurka, African by birth, but raised in America.

"Abu, the Dawnmaker," by Perley Poore Sheehan, was written from my part of the country where I was born. Give us some more of the same kind.

H. Edward Bosby.
382 North Sixth Street,
Zanesville, Ohio.

To the Editor:

You asked for opinion of All-Story readers regarding "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms." I am enjoying it very much and look forward eagerly to next week's number.

No matter what scoffers may say, there is in all of us a love of the mysterious, the supernatural, bearing the flavor of the Far East. Even I feel the magnetism of *Hussain.*

Mrs. J. Amendola.
Glen Ridge, New Jersey.

To the Editor:

In the September 25 number of the All-Story you ask your readers to give an opinion of Achmed Abdullah's story "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms."

It is a marvel! I am fond of real Oriental stories and poems, and your new story is the strongest one I ever read.

Kipling's "Kim" gives us the best insight of Orientalism possible to be given by an Occidental writer, but Abdullah is giving us the heart of affairs in a way that is almost unprecedented.

His story is a warning to the Occidental nations. He is telling of what may come to the peoples of Europe and America.

Hussain Khan is too vivid not to be real. The men of my household are fascinated by the story and say they hope you will persuade Abdullah to write for you regularly.

Thank you for discovering such a brilliant writer.

CORINNE E. LILLEBRIDGE.

Lillebridge, Florida.

TO THE EDITOR:

"The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms" is a great series of stories, both entertaining and mystifying. I consider it as good as "Tarzan of the Apes," only a different type, which in my estimation was one of your best.

ERNEST LEO PIATT.

Bethel, Vermont.

TO THE EDITOR:

The stories that I have read by Mr. Abdullah are very interesting, but he makes the mistake of classing all Hindus with the devil worshipers in his stories (that is, if I understand him rightly). I am sorry to say that the horrors of that sect are scattered all over the world, and have been for ages. Asia is one of the nests of that worship, but we have splendid manhood and exalted ideals there. Also devil worship is often accompanied by phenomena well known to occultists. It is this which is the attraction for many, but the psychic manifestations present on such an occasion are corrupting, degrading, loathsome. It leads to the loss of all that is worth while, and results in either madness or else a long period of intense suffering, until the soul draws back nearer to the Way.

CHESTER FLINT.

665 Chetwood Street,
Oakland, California.

TO THE EDITOR:

The unusual title "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms," led me to buy an ALL-STORY magazine. It was the first one I had ever read (September 18, 1915), as I thought the magazine was filled with trashy stuff. I have just bought my second number and am patiently waiting for the next. That new series by Achmed Abdullah compels me to class him as the god of the invincibly strong set of authors you seem to have on your staff.

FRANK LYNN.

Boston, Massachusetts.

ARE OUR NOVELETTES POOR?

TO THE EDITOR:

I have read the ALL-STORY since January, 1913, and have never seen its equal.

Your best writers are Edgar Rice Burroughs, George Allan England, Rex T. Stout, Robert Simpson, J. Earl Clauson, Perley Poore Sheehan, Jack Harrower, William Patterson White, John Buchan, Stephen Chalmers, and Jacob Fisher. I do not like Fred Jackson, Hulbert Footner, Zane Grey, Jackson Gregory, or Robert Adger Bowen, though with the exception of Jackson they are fine writers.

As a rule your novelettes are poor, and you do not seem to use the same care selecting them as you do in selecting the serials, which are either excellent, good, or passable, but very seldom "cheap." Give us some more of the good old ALL-STORY sort of fiction. The best stories I have ever read in your magaine are the Mars stories, the *Tarzan* stories, the Pellucidar stories, and the *Barney* and *Victoria Custer* stories.

Fred Jackson wrote one good story, "The Biggest Diamond." What about T. Bell. Is he dead? T. Bell, E. K. Means, Frank Condon are all good.

"The Spawn of Infinitude" and "The Strangler" were fine short stories. Give us more of Burroughs, Savage, Simpson, White, Stout, Buchan, Clauson, and Chalmers.

In closing, let me hope that your magazine will always be as good as it has been, and even better.

OSCAR A. GONZALES, JR.

In care of Master of Trains,
L. and N. R. R.,
Pensacola, Florida.

FEMALE FASHIONS—AND "HOUSE OF THE HAWK"

TO THE EDITOR:

Will you allow me a little space in which to ease my mind. I've been in a bad humor ever since I read in your issue of August 7 a letter from the roaring tiger. Oh, how shocked he was at the clothes *White Kate* wore! I can imagine the deadly pallor, succeeded by the flush of shame with which he gazed at the split skirt, and surely he would pass away entirely if fashion allowed us to wear the trouserette.

What would he have?

Could he find interest in a character that was not dressed—or undressed, as the case may be—to play its part. An author invents his characters; he must also dress them. How about an Indian guide in full-dress suit, or a pirate who didn't use slang,

chew tobacco, and wear a red bandanna? And how much would *White Kate* have accomplished if she had always dressed as a conventional Quaker person, ignorant of the world and the people with whom she associated?

I think there is nothing kills a story like language and dress out of keeping with the characters.

Are there any retired bandits among the many readers of the A.-S. W.? If so, there are quite a few of us, I'm sure, who would be glad if you would seize the editor and put him through the third degree until he promised, by coaxing, bribe, or threat, to procure a sequel to "The Mucker." Only please don't muss the editor up too much or we'll lose our best asset. Maybe the roaring tiger would lend a hand, only don't forget, sir, that to make the proper impression you must clothe yourself as a tiger.

Now, enough of this. I am not a kicker, but I would rather have more of the *Cavalier* writers.

AN INDIGNANT WOMAN.

Clyde Park, Montana.

LETTERETTES

Find enclosed P. O. order for two dollars for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY beginning with the August 21 issue. Be sure and send this issue as we are all interested in the stories and do not wish to miss any of the numbers.

We have been reading the ALL-STORY ever since it first came out. We always bought it on the news-stands as long as we lived in the city, but have just moved to this mining camp and do not want to give up the magazine. G. G. SHARPE.

Nauvoo, Walker County, Alabama.

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY for some time. I am especially hard to please in regard to reading-matter, but I like the ALL-STORY very much. Give us more soldier stories. Cowboy yarns are all right, but it's generally spread on too thick.

I have no favorite authors, but I think that good military fiction will help educate us to what is undoubtedly soon to come.

L. F. VOSBURGH.

U-7 Ranch,
Arnett, Oklahoma.

Enclosed find two dollars for six months' subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Kindly continue from September 25 issue, as I believe my present subscription expires on that date. I simply cannot do without the ALL-STORY. I read fifteen magazines each month, but the ALL-STORY leads them all.

MRS. O. J. LEMON.

Barstow, California.

I've got no kick coming from the stories in the ALL-STORY, but I do miss the old writers of my old favorite *Cavalier*. I am enclosing one dime for which send me the ALL-STORY for September 11, and please try and get the old writers back on the job.

S. S. BARD.

310 Pearson Street,
New Castle, Pennsylvania.

I noticed in the wrapper of the last magazine you sent me that my subscription ends October 16. That won't do. Enclosed you will find a dollar bill for which please renew my subscription. That *will* do.

"The Promise," "Blue Sky," "Doc!" "The Impostor," and many others are great. "Love in Fetters" starts well.

Don't forget to renew my subscription.

HERMAN FREYDBERG.

124 Claremont Road,
Ridgewood, New Jersey.

Find enclosed one dollar for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months, beginning with the September 25 edition.

We enjoy the magazine immensely and consider it one of our household necessities.

Hoping to receive the 25 number soon, and wishing you all success,

E. V. PROPST.

F. R. D. No. 3,
Hiawatha, Kansas.

Enclosed please find ten cents in stamps for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for September 11. Have not missed one since the middle of April, and I think it the best weekly published.

C. S. FELCH.

General Delivery,
Barre, Massachusetts.

I have never written to you before, although I have been reading your truly fascinating fiction for quite a while, and really do think that ALL-STORY is the best there is for interesting stories.

I read every story that appears in your magazine and enjoy them one and all immensely.

DALLAS GOURLEY.

F Troop, 15th U. S. Cav.,
Fort Bliss, Texas.

The War Horse

by Robert T. Shannon

BOOZE caused the falling out between Beelzebub and Tulsa Bill.

A range-riding bootlegger had sold a quart of the atrocious liquid fire he called whisky to Bill, and Bill foolishly thought he could handle the stuff. The man doesn't live who is able to hold his own with the hellish concoction they peddle down in Oklahoma under the pretense it is liquor. No one but the bootleggers know what it is made of, but the common belief is that it is a mixture of varnish, kerosene, and molten lead.

Bill got rid of a quart of it and forthwith became a roaring, shooting devil. About the time he got to firing through the walls of the bunk-house the rest of the boys rose *en masse* and disarmed him. Then they ducked him in the trough, tossed him sky high in a blanket, and deposited him, cursing weakly, in his rumpled bunk.

Justice satisfied, everybody retired.

Bill was too drunk to object seriously, and, since the boys acted solely for the protection of society, there were no hard feelings. In the morning Bill's throat and mouth were as dry as chips, and his head rang and throbbed. After he had soused his head in a bucket of cold water and drunk all he could hold he didn't feel much better.

The odor of frying bacon sickened him, and he viciously resented everything about him.

It was the first morning during their relations that he had neglected to feed and water Beelzebub. Usually he had a matin offering of brown sugar for the bay horse, but on this occasion he was in no mood for such a display of tenderness. There was hard work to be done that day, and Tulsa Bill was sullen and sick.

They usually are in such cases.

He threw the saddle on and tightened the girth. Beelzebub sniffed at the pocket in the breast of Bill's shirt, where he usually found the sugar. The action irritated Bill. There was no reason—except the booze—but he insulted Beelzebub then and there as surely as a range horse can be insulted. He snatched off his gray felt hat and cut the best friend a cowboy ever had across the face.

Physically the blow caused little pain, but it was the implied contempt that stirred the devil in the horse.

"Don't be nosin' around me, you varmint!" Bill snarled as he glared blear-eyed at the animal.

Beelzebub was not the horse to stand for that kind of treatment. His bronco blood leaped to fever-heat, but the only indication at the moment was in the way he narrowed his eyes and laid back his ears. But Bill was too addle-

headed to see. He thrust a foot into the stirrup and swung a gaunt leg over the saddle.

It was Beelzebub's turn.

The angered animal gave a pitch and a whirl and leaped high in the air, coming down with his head bent low and his forelegs as stiff as iron. It takes a rider of hard training to resist that maneuver successfully — and Bill wasn't expecting it. Besides, he was sick and sullen.

He plunged over the horse's head and lit, sprawling. As he regained his feet Beelzebub reared and came forward with his feet clawing the air. It looked as though he meant to kill. A leap took Bill out of danger, and the horse came down and stood trembling in his tracks. There they stood, battling with their red eyes, two wild and dangerous animals.

"I ought to shoot you down like a coyote, you critter!"

Bill's tones were hard and flat.

"You—you tried to put it over, didn't you? Tried to stomp me—and I thought you was a horse! A horse! Why, you ain't even fit to run in the lot with the hogs! And I made a pal out of you for five years — five long years, takin' care of you and trainin' you and tryin' to make somethin' outen you!"

Beelzebub was motionless.

"And I've put my own blanket on you many a night in the blizzard, and then you tried to do that to me—to me!"

Something in the eyes of the horse died down, and the ears began to straighten back to normal.

"No," said Tulsa Bill, "you can't square it with me — never! We're quits from now on! You know what I'm goin' to do with you? Well, I'm goin' to sell you to the English army! It's the war for yours—and you'll find somethin' over there that 'll cut you deeper than my spurs ever did. I wouldn't sell even a town nag into that hell; but you ain't a horse or a nag, either. You ain't nothin'!"

He turned and walked straight toward the big white house where old man Miller, owner of the ranch, was breakfasting with three horse buyers for the British government. Beelzebub started to follow, stopped, and looked after the striding figure, and then turned and walked squarely in the opposite direction with his head drooping.

Five years before, when Tulsa Bill joined the Miller outfit, he was a reckless, nervy adventurer. Beelzebub, just turning three summers, was the same sort. They met, and at the start Beelzebub knew he had found his man.

Tulsa Bill had found his horse.

Old man Miller was glad to sell the firebrand horse to the firebrand man who was crazy enough to work for nothing two months for the privilege of calling Beelzebub his own. In the years that followed the man and the horse grew to know each other as few human beings are ever acquainted. Each had too much fire in them to make them companionable to any one except themselves.

Some one once asked Tulsa Bill why he talked so much to Beelzebub, and he replied that it was because the horse had more sense than any one else on the place. And Beelzebub did have sense. He would fall down and play dead at a command from Bill. He learned high-school stepping after a fashion, and knew how to take care of Bill and himself when the herd stampeded.

He knew all a cow-horse is supposed to know, and a lot more besides. He knew everything Bill knew. Many a night out on the range Bill had told Beelzebub things he had never breathed to men—tales of adventures and larks, of hopes and plans, and of the dark-haired girl who used to live up in Butte long ago.

And when the stars came out and lit up the plain Bill had sung all manner of songs to Beelzebub as they cantered — and Beelzebub never complained. That was the real test. It is given to few horses to hear the

things that Bill poured into Beelzebub's ears.

"I'd like to sell Beelzebub along with the rest of the stock to-day, Mr. Miller," Bill said as he stood, hat in hand, in the doorway.

The wrangler men had been bringing in horses for the past week for the day when the British buyers would come. There were five hundred waiting in the corral. Old man Miller was going to make thousands of dollars that day.

"Well, here's the gentlemen that are in the market," the old man said. "Talk to them."

A corpulent Englishman with a military jowl eyed Bill.

"Bring the animal up, my man, and we'll see," he said. "We'll inspect him with the rest, and if he's sound we'll buy."

Twenty men from the ranch spent all the day saddling horses and riding them before the buyers. Each horse was ridden twice around a ring and brought to a stand before the little group, which included the old man and the corpulent person and two keen-eyed veterinarians from abroad.

The veterinarians were swift in appraising the horses. They noted the condition of the wind, the feet, and the general appearance at close range. Then they scribbled something on a card, attached it to the tail, and the animal was led away and turned loose in a corral across the road. The Englishman with the military jowl and the old man were constantly making entries in their books.

Few were rejected, for the range had been combed for the strong and fit. Horses roan and calico and brown and bay bucked and pitched all day long. Beelzebub had his turn with a strange rider in the saddle, and he made the double loop without misbehaving.

As soon as he had been ticketed and led away Bill touched the stout man's arm.

"That was my horse," he said; "the one I spoke to you about this mornin'."

"A hundred and forty dollars," the Englishman said. "He's a trifle light."

"Pay now?"

"Pay now if you want it." Bill held out his hand and received seven twenty-dollar gold pieces.

"Better take a check and let me deposit it for you, Bill," the old man suggested.

"Nope—cash," Bill answered as he dropped the money in a trouser pocket.

The coins tinkled with a soft, rich ring. Seven pieces of gold!

Bill stirred them with his fingers and they responded with more clinking. The balance of the afternoon their musical notes sounded in his ear.

After supper he rose from the long table and the soft jingle of gold reminded him again that Beelzebub was not his horse. He walked across the lot and coins sounded at every step. He had an impulse to throw them far away, but instead he knotted them in a handkerchief and put it in another pocket.

The lump pressed against his flesh and reminded him that there is such a thing as conscience. He rolled and smoked a dozen cigarettes one after another, and then went back to the bunk-house and hid the little bundle in his bedding.

The moon came up. Presently Bill found himself leaning against the rails of the corral across the road. The horses had settled into quietness and as his eyes roved over the bunch he caught sight of Beelzebub standing apart from a group fifty yards away.

Bill whistled soft and musically. The horse's head tossed up and he came galloping eagerly to the lonely figure of the man. Bill reached his arm over the barrier and Beelzebub licked up something brown and sweet.

"I knew you'd be wantin' it, old hoss," he said. "You won't be gettin' any sugar over there."

He climbed atop the fence and sat

with his feet resting on the rail below. Beelzebub's head was very close. Bill rolled another cigarette and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"You won't be smellin' any of my cigarettes after this. I've smoked 'em and you've smelled 'em a mighty long time, ain't we?"

Beelzebub laid his head along Bill's haunch.

"Maybe you don't know where you're goin'," Bill said. He ran his hand along the horse's neck. "You're a Western horse and you don't know about them things. From what I've been readin' I guess I sold you right straight plumb into hell, old boy."

The horse blinked.

"I'm a tellin' you I sold you down into hell, old boy. There's steel and lead and powder smoke over there—and hard pullin' like you never been used to. I suppose they'll take a blacksnake and cut the hide offen a horse. They wouldn't have any time to be civilized, I guess."

There was a long period of silence. Both were thinking deeply.

"I know you ain't goin' to shirk. It ain't in you—I'd bet my last dollar on that."

Seven pieces of gold!

"They don't have no Red Cross for horses. Some of that shrapnel's bound to come along and get you, and you'll fall down and waller in your own blood, and you'll be groanin' just like the men layin' all around you. And they'll come and take the men away and leave you out there by yourself some place alone—"

Beelzebub rested his whole head in Bill's lap.

"I wonder if you'll think back then about this old ranch—and me. I wonder what you'll be thinkin' about me."

Bill slid down into the corral and threw his arms around Beelzebub's neck.

"You'll be lovin' me after all I done. That's the kind of a horse you are. I just told you what kind of a man I am—I ain't fit to put a bit in your mouth, old boy. I don't blame you for what happened this mornin'. You're the only livin' thing that ever loved me. Even her up there in Butte—"

It was almost daybreak when Bill went to his bunk, but there was no sleep there for him.

At sunup the men were putting rope halters on the horses for the twenty-mile trip to the railroad where the cars were waiting. Bill met the stout Englishman in the corral.

"I changed my mind," he began to the latter. "I ain't goin' to let my horse go. I'll pay back the money now."

The buyer frowned.

"Can't do it my man. The horse belongs to the British government and I can't sell. I'm buying."

Bill paled a shade.

"He—he ain't fit. I didn't tell you all about him. He's half bronc and nobody but me can handle him. He's a man eater. I'm cheatin' you."

The Englishman smiled.

"Is that all?" he asked lightly. "Well, don't you worry. They'll take all that out of him with the lash. It doesn't matter anyway. Artillery horses don't last long. He's sound, isn't he?"

Bill admitted it.

"Then he'll do. Of course, if there was anything really the matter with him we'd have to turn him back."

"But—"

"Really, I haven't time to argue. They're starting now."

Bill turned and made his way down the long line to Beelzebub.

"I couldn't change it, old boy," he moaned. "They want horses too bad. If you was a crip or sick—"

He stopped suddenly. Then he pulled down Beelzebub's head and whispered something in his ear.

The Englishman came down the line and found Bill bending over a horse that lay flat on the ground.

"This horse's sick," Bill said. "Colic, I think."

Beelzebub's legs drew in and he moaned piteously.

"Sick, eh! Maybe we can get him up so he can stand the drive to the train. Up—up—up!"

The Englishman did a foolish thing. He kicked Beelzebub — a brisk, military kick.

An instant later a solid American fist crashed against the jaw of his majesty's representative and a bulky form hit the turf.

"Never kick a horse of mine!" Bill was seething. "Come on—get up—fight or shoot—come on—"

The buyer lay puzzling. It *was* an awkward situation. He rose and brushed himself deliberately, although his face was blazing. He had a half mind to pitch in and make a good fight of it.

"I don't know what to say to you—"

Bill, with a motion of disgust, threw seven pieces of gold to the ground.

"I know what to say to you though. There's your money. Take it or leave it. I'm goin' to take my horse. Up boy!"

Beelzebub, for a sick horse, showed wonderful recuperative powers. He scrambled to his feet as though a spring had been released. Tulsa Bill vaulted astride and they were off like the wind.

"If you want him, come and take him," was the cry that drifted back to the Englishman.

"I give you the signal to play dead all right, but who in hell learned you that groan?" Tulsa Bill asked after the last cloud of dust on the road that led to the trains had settled. "If you faked it up on your own hook you're a smarter horse than I been givin' you credit for."

He favored Beelzebub with a wink and — believe it or not — Beelzebub winked back.

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THE FIELDS OF SLEEP

BY MAZIE V. CARUTHERS

WARM springtide rain, fall gently there—
All graves are holy ground—
But shower most tenderly, I beg,
Upon one tiny mound!

Sweet summer flowers, shed your bloom
And perfume over all,
But 'round my wee one's grassy bed
Let whitest petals fall!

Chill autumn breeze, blow not too wild
Within this field of rest,
But croon for him a lullaby
Of dreams on mother's breast!

Pure winter snow, float softly down
Upon these sleepers calm,
But fold my baby close, lest he
Grieve for his mother's arm!

The Beloved Traitor*

by Frank L. Packard

Author of "The Miracle Man," "The Impostor," "Greater Love Hath No Man," "Madman's Island," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

THE greatest sculptor in the world has been found in the person of Jean Laparde, a fisherman of Bernay-sur-Mer. Henry Bliss, an American resident of Paris, was the discoverer. Bliss and his daughter Myrna hurry to prepare a studio in Paris against Jean's arrival. Jean loves Myrna; he also loves—but in a different way—Marie-Louise Bernier, the peasant to whom he is engaged. Marie-Louise releases him; the issue is now for him to decide alone. If he goes to Paris he will never come back to the solid virtues of Marie-Louise and the dull placidity of Bernay-sur-Mer; if he does not go to Paris he will fail of fame and his supreme genius will go for naught.

What will Jean Laparde do?

BOOK II

Two Years Later

CHAPTER I.

Father Anton's Ruse.

IT was early evening in Paris; an evening in winter — and cold. Father Anton drew his chair quite close to the little stove that, not without some prickings of conscience at his prodigality, he had fed lavishly with coals from the half-empty scuttle beside it, and, leaning forward, alternately extended his palms to the heat and rubbed them vigorously together.

The room, or rather the two small rooms, that comprised his lodgings in one of the poorest neighborhoods of the city were—since the windows were tightly closed and the sides of the stove a dull red—stifling hot; but Father Anton was not a young man, and the winter of Paris was not the balmy winter of his beloved south.

He took off his spectacles, polished them abstractedly on the sleeve of his cassock, replaced them, and picked up a book. He opened the volume, turned a few pages without looking at them, and, with a little sigh, laid it upon his knees. It was only in strict privacy that he permitted himself an indulgence in regrets and the somewhat doubtful solace of retrospection.

And now he opened the stove door. It always seemed that in the glowing

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for October 2.

coals and the little spurts of flames one could picture so much more clearly the blue of the Mediterranean, the sunny skies, the clean white cottages of Bernay-sur-Mer, the boats dotting the sea and beach, Papa Fregeau standing in the doorway of the Taverne du Bas Rhône, and Pierre Lachance trudging along the street with a great pile of nets slung over his shoulders.

Father Anton shook his head slowly. It was very strange, the workings of Providence. He had always thought to die in Bernay-sur-Mer. And now already he had been in Paris a year! But the sacrifice was very little; it mattered nothing at all; and if he had longings and dreams of the days that were gone, he was still very happy here, and should be thankful to God for the wonderful work that had been given him to do; only he remembered his dismay that morning when, unannounced, the bishop had come to Bernay-sur-Mer and had told him word had been received from Paris that M. Bliss, the millionaire American, would give the enormous sum of five hundred thousand francs a year to be distributed among the poor of Paris on the condition that he, Father Anton, would undertake its distribution.

And he remembered how the bishop had explained that it had been suggested to M. Bliss that perhaps he, Father Anton, would not care to leave Bernay-sur-Mer and his people there, and that there were others, younger men, nearer at hand, who, under the guidance and direction of the ecclesiastical authorities, would willingly and gladly undertake the work. And, above all else, he remembered what *monsignor* had told him had been the reply of M. Bliss.

"No; it isn't because Father Anton is a clergyman that I want him; it's because he's the man I've been looking for," that most astounding American had said. "There isn't any creed or religion or sect, or anything like that in this—or any supervision. What I'm after is practical results, nothing else. I just want a piece of bread to go where it is needed and no questions asked. I've always had the idea, but I didn't have the man. I've got him now.

"Father Anton might not care to leave Bernay-sur-Mer, eh? H-m! There's five hundred thousand francs a year at his disposal for the poor of Paris—ask him if the thinks he can do any good with it!"

And so Father Anton had come to Paris. It was magnificent. that—the generosity of M. Bliss! And M. Bliss was amazing! He had found a most beautiful little apartment, most beautifully furnished, in a very fashionable part of the city, and with two servants already installed, awaiting him. Imagine! It was impossible! How could one reach the poor unless one lived among them! And to maintain an establishment when — Father Anton sighed again—when even the enormous sum of five thousand francs was all too little!

He glanced around the room. Even as it was, his quarters must seem ostentatious compared with the poverty about him—the Widow Migneault, for example, in the rear room of the *troisième étage* above him. But what could one do? There was no arguing with those Americans! They had insisted on furnishing the place to their own satisfaction.

Father Anton's eyes returned to the glowing coals in the stove. He was very happy, because his work was the work that he, too, had dreamed of; but one could not help thinking sometimes of Bernay-sur-Mer, and all the life-long friends, and the people who were so close to his heart. And if he loved to picture them in his mind, and if there was, perhaps, a little ache at the thought that he had left them, he was none the less thankful to the *bon Dieu* that he could do so much now with what was left of his life.

What were they all doing in Bernay-sur-Mer to-night? What was Marie-Louise doing? It was two months

now since she had written him. She did not write as often as she used to write. He shook his head sadly. She had had her sorrow, poor Marie-Louise! What a boundless store of love there was in that brave little heart! If only it would be given to some worthy young fellow now—Father Anton wrinkled his brows in deep thought, as if he would decide the matter on the spot—say Amidé Dubois, who was a fine, honest lad; they would both be very happy, and Marie-Louise would forget the sooner. Yes, certainly; Amidé Dubois would do admirably.

A clatter of hoofs, the rattle of wheels over the cobblestones on the street, and the sudden cessation of both in front of the house, broke in on the *curé's* musings. He rose slowly from his chair, and going to the window, peered out. His curiosity was rewarded only to the extent of seeing a fiacre driving away again.

It was rather strange, that! Fiacres were not in the habit of stopping before any house in that section of Paris. It would be some one for him then, undoubtedly. M. Bliss, perhaps. No, not Mr. Bliss; for was there not the grand reception to-night that the Société des Beaux-Arts was tendering to Jean Laparde? — for which M. Bliss had sent him a card, but to which he was not going. It was to be a great affair, at which the president of the republic was to be present, and a rusty cassock would be not a little out of place there—and besides, the Jean of Bernay-sur-Mer and the Jean of Paris were not the same. Perhaps one should not let such thoughts come—but it was true.

Father Anton listened. Yes; he had been right. Some one was knocking.

"Yes—come!" he called, and hurried hospitably across the room as the door opened — stopped in stunned amazement — and ran forward again, holding out his arms.

"Marie-Louise!" he cried.

Half laughing, half crying, she was in his arms, her own around his neck.

"Oh, Father Anton! Dear, dear Father Anton!" she was repeating over and over again.

"Well, well— But, but— Well, well," was all he could say—and kissed her and pressed her face against his shoulder and patted her head.

And then he held her off to look at her. It was the same Marie-Louise, with the same bright eyes, even if they were glistening now with tears — the same Marie-Louise, just as if this were Bernay-sur-Mer and not Paris at all; for there was no hat to hide the great black tresses of hair, and there was just the same simple style of loose blouse and ankle-skirt that she always wore in the little village, and it might well have been that he and she were there again, there in Bernay-sur-Mer— only on the floor, where she had dropped it as she ran to meet him, was a neatly tied-up little bundle that spoke of the long journey.

"Well, well!" he ejaculated helplessly again and closed the door, and drew her to a chair and sat down, while she knelt affectionately on the floor at his knees.

"Oh," she said excitedly, "I did not think Paris could be so big a place! And there was such a crowd in the station, and such a crowd outside, and so many streets, and all the people I spoke to only shook their heads when I asked for Father Anton, and—and then I began to be a little frightened. And then, what do you think? Imagine! Was I not grand? For a franc-fifty a *cocher* said he would drive me to the address and — *me voici!* Did I not do well?"

"Splendidly!" he agreed approvingly. "But, Marie-Louise, I do not understand. It is a great surprise. You did not write; you said nothing about coming to Paris. Why did you not tell me you were coming?"

She looked up at him merrily.

"Must I answer that—quite truthfully?"

"Of course!" he said with an indulgent smile.

"Well, then," she said demurely, "I was afraid you would say I should not come—and now that I am here you cannot say it."

"Ah!" he exclaimed with mock severity. "That is a serious confession you are making, Marie-Louise! So! And you thought I would not approve, eh? What then has happened in Bernay-sur-Mer?"

"Nothing has happened," she answered—but now she looked away from him as she spoke. "I have sold my house there."

"Nothing! Sold your house!"

Father Anton began to take alarm. He took Marie-Louise's face between his hands and forced her to look at him. Yes, yes! The gaiety, the lightness of spirit, was only make-believe; the tears were more genuine than the smile that came tremulously to her lips.

"Marie-Louise," he asked anxiously, "what is it?"

"Nothing!" she replied again. "Only — only I could not stay there any longer."

And suddenly, in a flood of tears, she buried her face on the old priest's knees.

"But, Marie-Louise — Marie-Louise!" he protested in helpless dismay, and laid his hand soothingly on the bowed head.

She looked up in an instant, dashing the tears away angrily.

"I am a baby!" she cried, trying to laugh. "It was the journey, and the new things, and seeing you again—but it is over now."

Then a little hesitantly:

"Tell me of Jean."

"Jean?" repeated Father Anton, startled. "Jean?"

He looked at her closely. Could it be that! And then, with a little gasp as he seemed to read the truth in her eyes:

"It—it is Jean, then, Marie-Louise, who has brought you to Paris?"

"Yes," she answered in a low voice.

The *curé's* face grew very grave.

"You have heard from him?"

She shook her head.

"I have never heard from Jean since the day he left Bernay-sur-Mer."

She was plucking with her fingers at the skirt of the priest's cassock.

There was a long silence, broken at last by the old priest's deep sigh.

"You still love Jean, my child?" he asked gently.

"I have always loved him," she said simply.

Father Anton fumbled with his spectacles. His heart had grown very heavy. It seemed that the cruelest, saddest thing in the world had happened.

"Tell me about him!" she demanded eagerly. "You see him every day, father."

"I have not seen Jean in many months," he replied sadly.

"Not seen him!" she echoed in consternation. "But he is here — in Paris—isn't he?"

"Yes; he is here," the *curé* said slowly. "But Paris is a big place, and —and even old friends sometimes do not meet often."

"But tell me about him!" she persisted. "He has become a great man —a very great, great man?"

"Yes," said Father Anton gravely. "He has become a great man — the greatest perhaps in all of France."

Then suddenly laying his hands on Marie-Louise's shoulders:

"Marie-Louise, what is in your heart? Why have you come here?"

"But I have told you, and you know," she said. "To see Jean."

The *curé's* hands tightened upon her shoulders. What was he to say to her? How was he to tell her of the danger she in her innocence would never guess, that lay so cold and ominous a thing upon his own heart? How was he to put into words his fear of Jean for this pure soul that was at his knees?

As wide as the world was the distance that lay now between Marie-Louise and Jean—but it was not that,

not even that Jean was openly attentive to Myrna Bliss; that was only a little thing. Jean was not the Jean of Bernay-sur-Mer. The man was glutted now with power and wealth. And swaying him was not the love of art that might have lifted him to a loftier plane; it was the prostitution of that divine, God-given genius for the lust of fame. And for fame he had exchanged his soul.

What was there sacred to Jean now? It was a life closely approximating that of a roué that Jean lived. And for Marie-Louise, with her love a weapon that might so easily be turned against her, to come in touch with—No, no! It was not to be thought of!

"Marie-Louise," he said hoarsely, "you must go back. You do not understand. Jean is very different now—he is not the Jean—"

"I know," she interposed with a catch in her voice. "I know—better than you think I know. It is you who do not understand. He is of the *grand monde;* I understand that; and I—I am what I am, and it must be always so.

"But I love him, father. Is it wrong that I should love him? I will never speak to him, and he shall never know that I am here; but I must see him, and see his work, and — and — Oh, don't you understand?"

"And after that?" asked the old priest sorrowfully.

"What does it matter—after that!" she said tensely. "I do not know."

"No, Marie-Louise," he said earnestly. "No, my child; no good can come of it. You must go back to Bernay-sur-Mer."

She drew away from him, staring at him a little wildly.

"But do you not understand!" she cried out with a sudden rush of passion. "But do you not understand that it is stronger than I—that I could not stay in Bernay-sur-Mer because I was always thinking, thinking—that I could not go back there now any more than I could stay there before! I *must* do this! I will do it! Nothing will stop me! And if you will not help me, then—"

Father Anton drew her gently back against his knees. Yes; he was beginning to understand—that the problem was not to be settled so easily as by the mere expedient of telling Marie-Louise she must go back to Bernay-sur-Mer. Those small, clenched hands, those tight lips were eloquent of finality. It became simply a matter of accepting a fact.

He might insist a dozen times that she should go. It would be useless. She would not go!

The old priest's brows furrowed in anxiety. This love for Jean was still first in the girl's heart. Words, arguments were of no avail against the longing that was supreme with her, that had brought her on the long journey across all France.

But her love was the love that pictured the frank, strong, simple fisherman of Bernay-sur-Mer. If she should see Jean as he really was! If she should see for herself the change in him, the abandon of his life; and, too, see the glittering circles in which he moved! The first would dispel her love for him; the second would show her in any case the utter futility of it.

As long as she held this love, which Father Anton had hoped and prayed she had forgotten, it spoiled her life. It could only bring her misery, unhappiness, and sorrow. It would hurt cruelly, this disenchantment; but it would save her, this poor child, whom he loved as he would have loved a daughter of his own.

Yes; if she should see Jean as he really was; see him intimately enough to realize the truth of the life he was leading! But how could that be brought about—and at the same time protect her and keep her *safe?*

She rose slowly to her feet and stood before him, her hands still tightly shut at her sides.

"I was so sure—so sure that you would help me!" she said miserably.

And then, in pleading abandon, she flung her arms to him.

"Oh, won't you, Father Anton? Won't you? Won't you try to understand? It can do no harm, only—only it is all my life—just to see him, to be near him for a little while, to know that it has all been a wonderful thing for him—and he will never know; I will not let him know."

The *curé's* hands clasped and unclasped nervously.

"Would you promise that, Marie-Louise? That you would not speak to him, that you would not let him know you were here in Paris?"

She drew herself up proudly.

"Oh, how little you understand!" she cried. "Do you think that my love is like that? Do you think that for anything in the world I would force myself into his life? Yes; I will promise that."

"Well, well," said Father Anton soothingly, "we will see. But first—eh?—a little supper? You are tired, my little Marie-Louise, and hungry after the long journey. Come now! You will help me! We will make a little omelet and boil the coffee and pretend that we are in Bernay-sur-Mer—eh?"

He began to bustle around the room, setting out bread and cheese from the cupboard and putting the coffee-pot upon the stove—and presently they sat down to the simple meal.

Marie-Louise ate very little; and finally when she pushed her plate away the tears were in her eyes again.

"I cannot eat any more," she said. "I— Oh, Father Anton, you said that you would see! You meant that —that you *would* help me, didn't you?"

It was plain, it was very plain that nothing would distract her for a moment. Father Anton sighed again and got up from his chair, and began to pace the room. He had been turning a plan over and over in his mind while he had watched her so anxiously during the meal. It was strange how readily it had come to him, that plan! A monitor within whispered the suggestion that perhaps it had come readily because it was deception.

The *curé* passed his hand in a troubled way back and forth through his white hair. He had seen little of Jean—it was, perhaps, because he reminded Jean of Bernay-sur-Mer and the past, which Jean was anxious to forget, that Jean had gradually come, in manner more than words, to intimate that the old friendship was distasteful

But if latterly he had seen little of Jean, at least when he had first come to Paris, his visits to the studio had been frequent enough to enable him to form an intimate acquaintance with Hector, the red-haired *concierge* of Jean's studio and apartment, and with *madame*, Hector's wife. Nor had he permitted this intimacy to wane. He could not forget that he had loved Jean, and through these good people he still kept his interest alive.

It was but a few days ago that Hector had complained that the work was too much for his wife alone; that after some nights at the studio with a gay company the morning presented a *débâcle* to clear up that was a day's work in itself. It was too much for her; and they came often, those nights.

Father Anton glanced at Marie-Louise. She was still watching him, a sort of pitiful, eager expectancy in her face. His eyes fell to the floor as he continued to pace up and down.

It could be arranged. Jean rose very late. Marie-Louise could go early in the mornings to tidy up the studio and the *atelier*. He could tell Hector she was a charge of his, an honest girl to be trusted, who would do the work for a few francs; and Hector in turn could obtain Jean's consent. Marie-Louise would see for herself the life Jean led—and, besides, Hector and his wife were not tongue-tied.

But it was a terribly cruel thing to

do. The old priest's hands clasped and unclasped again in genuine distress. It was terribly cruel! But it was little Marie-Louise, whom he loved so tenderly, whose future was at stake. It must not always be as it was to-day—sadness and hopelessness for the brave young heart that should be so full of joy and life.

He halted before Marie-Louise. Yes, it was the right thing to do; there was no other way; she must be disillusioned; she should see Jean's life at the studio; and to-night at the great reception she should see Jean himself. Only his heart was very heavy—it was so hard a thing to do.

"Listen, Marie-Louise," he said abruptly. "I will help you, but it is on the condition you have promised—that Jean is in no way to know that you are here. I will arrange with his *concierge* that very early in the mornings, before Jean is up and when nobody is there, you shall have the care of his studio and *atelier,* so you will be able to see all you want to of his work; and to the *concierge* you are simply a charge of mine who is in need of the few francs you will earn."

"Oh, Father Anton, how good you are!"

She had jumped up joyfully from her chair, and was in his arms again. "But I do not want the money. I have plenty—from my house, you know."

"But if you took no money they would not understand why you would work," explained Father Anton.

The depth of his duplicity was very great. The gentle soul of Father Anton was conscience-stricken at her gratitude, her innocence. If he had not gone so far he would retreat. She was crying in his arms. Never before had he known what it was not to be able to look another in the eyes. He was glad that Marie-Louise's head was hidden on his shoulder, for he could not have looked at her.

Father Anton felt himself a criminal. It was not a rôle that lay lightly upon him.

"And Jean himself," she whispered. "When shall I see Jean?"

Father Anton coughed nervously.

"There—there is a reception to-night," he said hesitantly.

He coughed again.

"For Jean. You might see him there, perhaps—from the gallery. I—I have a card."

She sprang away from him with a quick exclamation of excitement.

"Oh, come then!" she cried impulsively, and caught his hand to pull him toward the door.

Father Anton turned away his head. Tears had sprung to his eyes. He was indeed a criminal—the criminal of the ages! But if it would save Marie-Louise! Oh, yes! He must keep that thought always before him. He looked at her again as he fumbled once more with his spectacles.

"Yes, yes; at once!" he said mechanically. "But"—he was staring at her now in sudden consternation—"but you cannot go like that. Have you no other clothes?"

She pointed at the little bundle on the floor.

He shook his head.

"No hat? No coat?"

"No-o!" she said tremulously, as if she sensed an impending tragedy.

"But this is not Bernay-sur-Mer, Marie-Louise," he said in concern. "You cannot go about dressed like that in Paris; and, besides, you would freeze, my child."

She looked at him in silence—a sort of pitiful despair, mingling bitter disappointment and helpless dependence, in her eyes, in the expression of her face.

"Tut, tut!" murmured Father Anton, pulling at his under lip.

And then quickly:

"But wait—wait! We shall see!"

And he ran into the other room.

There were always clothes there—for his poor. The rich people, the friends of M. and Mlle. Bliss, were always sending him their old things for distribution among his poor. Mlle.

Bliss had sent him a package that afternoon. He remembered that there was a long cloak and a hat among the other things.

Ah, yes; here they were! He held them up to look at them in the light from the doorway of the connecting rooms. They had strange notions about "old things," the rich. These, for example—he turned them about in the light—were as good as new. They bought clothes one day, the rich; wore them the afternoon, and gave them to him the next morning—because overnight there had been created a new style.

Father Anton smiled at his little conceit. But it was almost literally true. He had seen Myrna Bliss wearing these very things only a few days ago—the same black velvet cloak and the same black velvet turban with the little white cockade. At least he supposed it was a cockade. Ah, well—he shrugged his shoulders—his poor were the gainers!

"Here, Marie-Louise!" he called out, returning into the front room. "You may have these, child."

"Oh!" she exclaimed as she took them.

Her eyes widened.

"Oh — they are pretty! But—but, Father Anton, where did you get them? They are new."

"No, not quite," he smiled; "but new enough, I think, to last you all the winter. They were—"

He stopped suddenly in gentle tactfulness. Marie-Louise knew Myrna Bliss—it might cause her diffidence if she were aware that the cloak and hat had been *mademoiselle's.*

"They were sent to me by the rich people among many other things," he amended, "to be distributed where" — he smiled again — "where I think they will do most good. So now they are yours. Put them on and we will go."

"Oh, Father Anton!" she cried again in wonder at the sudden luxury that was hers.

She slipped on the cloak and ran to the *curé's* shaving-glass, which was the only semblance of a mirror in evidence, to set the turban daintily upon her head.

"Dear, dear Father Anton! How good you are!"

But Father Anton did not answer. He was brushing his threadbare black overcoat and making a very poor business of it. There was a great lump in his throat that refused to go either up or down—and he brushed continuously at one sleeve, because that was all he could see through the sudden mist that had come before his eyes. And then as he caught her gazing at him he put on the coat hurriedly.

"Yes, yes!" he said hastily. "But we are all ready; are we not—eh? Come, then, Marie-Louise; we will go."

And presently they were on the street; and somehow to Father Anton the crisp cold of the night was very grateful, preferable for once to the soft warmth of his far-away South, since the hot flushes now kept coming and burning in his cheeks as he walked abstractedly along.

And they were silent for a little while, until a pressure of her fingers on his arm aroused him, and he turned his head to look at her. Her cheeks, too, he could see, even in the murky light from the street lamps, were flushed, and the dark eyes were very bright.

"Couldn't—couldn't we hurry a little, M. le Curé?" she suggested timidly.

"Hurry? Ah—you are cold!" he said contritely, and quickened his step.

"No," she answered. "I—it is only that it might be over—that we might be too late."

The words brought an added twinge to the already sore and overburdened soul of Father Anton. It was the heart of Marie-Louise that spoke—the heart that had no room but for Jean. Ah, yes; but did he not understand that already? Had she not come across all France for Jean?

But that was not all! How ignorant of this great world-city, its life, its customs, its fineness, its sordidness, her words proclaimed her to be—how dependent they proclaimed her to be!

But did he not know that, too? How great, indeed, had been his own bewilderment and confusion and dismay when he had first come to Paris a year ago—even he who was accustomed to journeying; for had he not gone almost once a year from Bernay-sur-Mer to Marseilles? How well he remembered it; but, tut, tut! of what avail was that?

This was a vastly different matter—a very serious matter. Marie-Louise was a woman, so young, so beautiful, and in her ignorance, in her ingenuousness, which was so marked a trait because she was so purely innocent, she— Ah, he found himself asking the *bon Dieu* to watch very carefully over Marie-Louise; and very earnestly, with sad misgivings, as a corollary to that prayer, to forgive him if he were doing wrong in betraying the very innocence, the trust and simple confidence for which he asked protection for her from others.

"Father Anton, shall—shall we be late?" she ventured, evidently alarmed into the belief, since he had not replied, that so dire a misfortune was even more than a possibility.

And then he answered her very gravely:

"No, Marie-Louise. You need have no fear. It will only have begun; and even if it were midnight, we should still be in time. Affairs like this are for all the evening, you see. Indeed, before going there, now that I come to think of it, perhaps we had better see about finding lodgings for you first. I know several very estimable families in this neighborhood who would be glad to give you a room for a small sum, and you would be quite close to me, and—"

"But could we not do that afterward?" she interposed quickly.

"Why, yes, of course; afterward—if we do not stay too long at the reception," Father Anton acquiesced. "You would rather do that, Marie-Louise?"

"Yes!" she said—and the word came tensely—and she pulled impulsively upon his arm.

And so then they hurried along, and after a little time the streets grew brighter, better lighted, and from streets became great boulevards, and from an occasional passer-by they were in the midst of many people, where one must needs elbow one's way to get along. But Marie-Louise, save in a subconscious way that brought no concrete sense of meaning, saw none of this. She saw only Jean again, the sturdy, rugged figure that seemed to stand so clearly outlined now before her, so real, so actual, so living, as he had been that night when he had borne Gaston up the path in his strong arms; and the roar of the traffic upon the streets was as the roar of that mighty storm and the thunder of the sea breaking so pitilessly, so unceasingly upon the rocks.

And Father Anton spoke to her, pointing to this and that as they went along; but she did not hear the *curé*. She was listening only to another voice.

"In just a little minute I shall see Jean. I shall see Jean. I shall see Jean," her soul said. "I shall see Jean!"

And then she was standing before a great building, and the building was ablaze with lights, and carriage after carriage, automobile after automobile, was drawing up before a strange sort of canopy where even the street itself was laid with crimson carpet, and out of the carriages and the cars poured a constant stream of wonderfully dressed, fur-clad women and their escorts.

And suddenly she drew back with a start. What had she done? She had stepped upon the soft carpet and in under the canopy—and a man bewilderingly covered with gold lace, who could be no less than a marshal of

France, though he seemed so effusive and polite as he opened the carriage doors to welcome each new arrival, was fixing her sternly with his eyes.

"Come, Marie-Louise," prompted Father Anton.

She felt the blood leave her face, and drew very close to Father Anton, clinging tightly to his arm. How fast her breath came! There was laughter, merriment around her; they pressed against her, they touched her, these wonderfully dressed people.

How soft the carpet was! How one's feet sank into it! It was a sacrilege that she should walk upon it! How that constant murmur of voices rose and fell, rose and fell!

What were they saying? It seemed that she should know. What was it? Yes, yes!

"Jean Laparde! Jean Laparde! Jean Laparde!"

From in front, from behind her, on either side, on every tongue was the name of Jean Laparde. And it thrilled her, and her soul, in a clarion echo, caught up the refrain:

"Jean Laparde! Jean Laparde! Jean Laparde!"

And it seemed as if a thousand emotions surging upon her were welded together and massed and made into one, and that one was comparable to none she had ever known before, because it was too great and overpowering and bewildering to understand. Only now she could lift up her head, and the blood was rushing proudly to her cheeks again.

And now they were in a great marble vestibule, and Father Anton was handing a card to an attendant and speaking to the man.

"But M. le Curé has full *entrée*—to the floor," the man replied.

She did not catch Father Anton's answer, but the attendant was bowing and speaking again:

"But certainly, *monsieur*—as M. le Curé desires. To the right, *monsieur.*"

And then there were stairs, beautiful wide marble stairs, and the press of people was left behind, for there seemed to be but few who climbed the stairs; and then—and then—she was in a balcony, and below her—ah, she could not see—it was all blurred before her — and there seemed a great fear upon her, for her heart pounded so hard and so fiercely.

And then strangely, as a mist rises from the sea, it began to clear away, that blur from before her eyes, and myriad lights from a massive chandelier which was suspended from a great dome overhead played on the bare, flashing shoulders of women on the floor below her, played on the jewels that adorned coiffures and necks, played on glittering uniforms, on a scene magnificent and splendid — and focused, as her eyes fixed and held, on that one outstanding figure, the figure that was like to the figure of a demi-god, the only figure, the only one that she saw now in all that vast assemblage, who stood erect, strong, and massive-shouldered, the black hair, a little longer now, flung in careless abandon back from the broad white forehead. It was Jean! It was Jean!

"Jean!" she whispered — and her hand stole into Father Anton's. "Jean!"

And he was not changed—only that short, pointed beard that seemed to add a something, that made him more imposing. It was Jean, the same Jean—only there was a grace, an ease, a command, a kingship in his poise as he stood there, and — yes — yes — they came—one after the other—the men, the women—and bowed before him.

"Do you remember M. and Mlle. Bliss?" Father Anton said gently. "See — they are there beside Jean. And that tall man to whom they are talking is a very famous statesman for one so young. His name is Paul Valmain."

They did not interest her. There was only Jean. And she could not look long enough at him. There was music playing somewhere, softly, very softly, scarcely audible above the sound

of so many voices all talking at once—voices that ascended in a subdued roar like the sound of a shell that one held to one's ear. She tried to think, and she could not. Afterward she would think. Now she could only look.

Father Anton touched her arm. Was it already time to go? No, no — not yet! Not yet—for a little while! She had come so far, so long a way, just for this—to see Jean.

"It is the president of the republic coming, Marie-Louise—see! Listen!"

There was tumult about her. Those in the gallery around her were clapping their hands, waving their handkerchiefs; and the music she had heard playing so softly crashed suddenly into the strains of that song of glory, immortal, undying, that was cradled in the very soul of France itself — the Marseillaise.

And as it fired the blood, that melody, martial, stirring, that men had died for—aye, and women, too—the outburst around her rose to hysterical heat, and thunders of applause rolled and reverberated through the room that was bigger than any room she had ever seen or dreamed of. And they were calling Jean's name again—and the president, the great president, was there with Jean.

"Jean Laparde! Jean Laparde! *Vive* Jean Laparde!"

She could not see any more. Her eyes were blinded with tears now, and they were proud tears, and they were glad tears, and they were wondering tears that she could not comprehend herself.

Jean's beacon! Had the *bon Dieu* permitted her to be that in a little way, given it to her to have helped just a little, to have had just a little share in bringing Jean to this great moment, this wonderful triumph?

Jean's beacon! How vividly that scene of the years ago came back when she had told Jean he did not belong to her—and reliving that scene here in the presence of its great fulfilment she spoke aloud unconsciously.

"It is true! He does not belong to me. He belongs to France!"

And Father Anton, because he did not understand, because it seemed that the disillusionment must have been so much more complete and so much more cruel and hard to bear than he had feared it would be, and because her renunciation was accepted so bravely, turned away his head and did not answer.

And Marie-Louise's fingers closed in a tense, involuntary pressure over Father Anton's hand—and she spoke again.

"He belongs to France!"

And then, after another moment:

"Take me—back now—Father Anton, please."

CHAPTER II.

No. 26 Rue Vanitaire.

MYRNA BLISS tapped petulantly with the toe of her small shoe on the floor of the limousine, glanced at the diamond-encircled bracelet-watch on her wrist, remarked more or less abstractedly that it was a minute or so after five o'clock, and stared through the plate-glass windows at the backs of her liveried chauffeur and footman. The reception of the night before had, so far as she was concerned, been marked by two incidents, which, at the present moment, were very fully occupying her thoughts.

It had required all her tact and ingenuity to avert a declaration from Paul Valmain, which would have been a disaster, because any declaration was a disaster until that moment arrived when one reached the point where one began to fear that horrible word *passée* and it became necessary to accept the inevitable—and marry. A declaration, as any one could see, whether it was accepted or refused, had its consequences — one's proprietorship in a man became either restricted to that one man alone, which in turn was very

like locking one's self in a cage and handing over the key, or else it was lost altogether.

And Paul Valmain was almost as much run after by her set as Jean Laparde! Fancy! Only thirty, a bachelor—and already the leader of his political party! Yes, decidedly; besides being amazingly handsome and amazingly brilliant, Paul was a figure in France!

The man was passionately, madly in love with her, and so was Jean—which went without saying! Imagine! The two lions of social Paris! Nothing, not an affair, was complete without them—and she had only to lift a finger as to two slaves! Therefore social Paris was utterly and completely under her domination. She literally was Paris.

It was very plain! So long as she exercised a proprietorship over both of them Paris was at her feet. It was not a question of choice between them—not at all. Jean was *the* lion, so much so that she could even hold court with Jean alone; but with both her position was impregnable.

The trouble was—her brows puckered into anxious little furrows—that at the first opportunity Paul would renew the attack. It was very nice to have Paris at one's feet, but it was quite another matter to keep it there.

Paul, of course, was the more difficult of the two to keep in hand. Jean, because he had never seemed to shake off entirely that diffidence toward her born of Bernay-sur-Mer, she had so far been able to manage quite simply; only—her eyes shifted from the chauffeur's back to the toe of her shoe, and her foot ceased its petulant tapping on the floor—that was the other incident of last night.

It had happened just after the arrival of the president. Jean had sought her out. She remembered the heightened color in his cheeks, the sort of nervous brilliance in his eyes. He had been drunk—drunk with the wealth, the glamor, the power that was his; intoxicated with the fame, the adulation, the triumph of the moment.

He was a glutton for that—for fame. There was very little else that mattered to Jean. He was the supreme type of egoist. She could dissect Jean very coolly and with precision, she thought.

"The studio to-morrow afternoon at five, Myrna—don't fail," he had said—and had passed on.

There had been a certain air of authority in his tones—to which she had promptly taken exception, and to which, in an annoying and persistent way, she still took exception. Furthermore it conveyed a possible and alarming hint that his docility perhaps was wearing thin.

Well, that would never do at all! She was going, of course, to the studio now—but she would take care of Jean! Five o'clock, he had said. She would be a little late—as she intended to be. At half past five she had asked Paul Valmain and a choice circle of the younger set to drop in at Jean's studio at 26 Rue Vanitaire, as a graceful little courtesy, so to speak, to congratulate Jean on his triumph of the night before!

The gray eyes held a smile in which mockery and merriment were mingled. One's defenses should always be in order!

The small shoe began to tap on the floor of the car again. What a short time—what a long time those two years had been since sleepy, anesthetized Bernay-sur-Mer! Jean had attracted her then because he had been a "new" sensation—and he had attracted her ever since because he continued to be "the" sensation.

But attraction and love were quite different, were they not? Success after success, triumph after triumph, had been his. It had been astounding, stupefying, magnificent! At first it had been the inner circle of devotees of art, such as those who had gone to Bernay-sur-Mer, who had hailed him; then, in furious and bewildering se-

quence, Paris, then France, then Europe—and equally, so her letters told her, he was the rage in America.

None made comparisons — there were no comparisons to make. The man towered, stood alone, without rival, as the greatest sculptor of the age. And in a sense he had not begun. Critics like old Bidelot and her father said that, stupendous as it already was, his genius had not yet attained its full development; that, marvelous as were the power, force, and realism of his conceptions, the exquisite beauty of his execution, there still remained an intangible something yet to be achieved.

Myrna shrugged her pretty shoulders. What critic had ever denied himself that critic's birthright, the one birthright that had never known its mess of pottage, of ubiquitous reservation upon even those things he stamped the most graciously with the seal of his approval? But then otherwise, of course, one would not really be a critic—since that was the one distinguishing characteristic — the hallmark, as it were—whereby the genuine article might be known.

"Ah, just that *tout petit chose!*" old Bidelot called it. "So fleeting, so evanescent, so—so—"

And he would wave his arms like a grand-opera conductor.

"Soul," her father called it in his turn. "The boy hasn't lived enough yet. He'll get it, and then — well, there's only one word to describe it—immortal!"

Myrna made a wry grimace. What was the use of all that? What did they want? And what rubbish! A man whose work was incomparable, that all the world was going crazy over! Why was it that critics were so often people who couldn't do the things that they criticised? Old Bidelot, for example, couldn't make a piece of clay resemble a doughnut, except for the hole, if he tried for a thousand years. And as for her father— Myrna choked a laugh.

She glanced at her watch again—and then quickly out of the window. It was ten minutes past five; the car was slowing up in front of the studio. In twenty minutes the others would be here—she had told *them* to be prompt.

Some day, it was very possible, she might marry Jean—but not yet. She was far too well contented with her life as it was. She had managed Jean and his tentative outbursts—for his docility, as she dubbed it, had not been mere tameness — with perfect success for two years; and now if, as she was somewhat inclined to surmise, his actions of last evening presaged another she was quite capable of managing that—for twenty minutes.

She alighted from the car and, instructing her chauffeur that he need not wait, ran up the steps of the sort of low stoop over the *concierge's* door and apartment beneath. Hector's red head and doll's-blue eyes for once, a little to her surprise, were not in evidence at the arrival of a car.

The front door, however, was not locked. She pushed it open, entered the hallway, crossed to the door of the *salon,* and knocked. There was no answer. There was, however, nothing strange about that—Jean probably was in the studio proper, the *atelier* beyond. Well, she would surprise him!

She opened the *salon* door softly, closed it softly, stepped into the center of the large, magnificently appointed room, whose decorations and remodeling she and her father had planned; and, calmly unbuttoning her long glove, stood looking around her. And then her fingers held quite rigidly on a glove-button. She had not seen him as she had entered.

Jean was rising from a divan behind her near the door. Her arm still extended, the other hand still on the glove-button, she turned her head and shoulders like a statue on a pivot to watch him in amazement. Without a word he had stepped swiftly to the door, locked it—and now he was putting the key in his pocket.

"Jean, what are you doing?" she exclaimed sharply.

He laughed a little in a low way. It was the first sound he had made. She stared at him, a thrill upon her that she could not quite define. It was not fear; it was more an uncomfortable disquiet, in which surprise and bewilderment were dominant.

But now as he faced her she noticed that the same high color was in his cheeks, the same nervous brilliancy was in his eyes as had been there the night before—and he was not even dressed, he who was so punctilious in the late afternoons in that regard! It was as if he might have but thrown aside his big sculptor's overdress, for he was in loose white shirt with flowing tie and belted trousers. Usually she liked him like that; it seemed to accentuate, bring out, unfetter the splendid physique of the man; but now—

She shrugged her shoulders with well-affected composure. Myrna Bliss was too self-poised to be swept from her feet by any situation. Jean was acting very strangely. What was the matter with him? She stripped off her gloves coolly and tossed her outer wraps onto a chair.

"You have been working long hours to-day perhaps, Jean."

Her voice expressed cold disapproval.

"You are not dressed yet."

Jean's hand swept the great shocks of hair back from his forehead. Again he laughed in the same low way.

"I have not been working to-day. I have been waiting—for five o'clock."

What did he mean? She was genuinely disturbed now. Had he been drinking—after the reception—through the night—and since? He was certainly not himself. It was outrageous if it were not in fun that he had locked the door. She walked across the room to the bell-cord and pulled it. The bell rang clamorously in the *concierge's* apartment below.

"I will have Hector prepare some coffee while you are up-stairs dressing, Jean," she said imperiously. "Now go and dress. You are behaving in a most peculiar manner."

He made no answer—only stood there looking at her, his head thrown back on his powerful shoulders, his eyes still abnormally bright, though the flush was receding now from the strong, handsome face, which as it grew white grew very set.

Where was Hector? She pulled the cord again. Again the bell jangled in the *concierge's* below.

"Hector and Mme. Mi-mi, his wife, are on a holiday — with five francs apiece in their pockets—at the Bois, I think—to celebrate last night."

He jerked out the words in a colorless, even way.

She noticed that his lips twitched, that his knuckles were white because his hands at his sides were so tightly clenched. He had sent Hector and *madame* away—she was quite alone in the place with him. What did it mean? Jean had never been like this before.

But she was at least quite mistress of herself. She drew herself up, walked back across the room, picked up her gloves and wraps, and returned to the door.

"Open that door!" she commanded levelly. "What do you mean by acting like this? How dare you act like this? Are you mad — have you lost your senses? Do you realize what you are doing?"

He laughed outright now with sudden harshness, bitterly.

"Mad!" he repeated in a choked voice. "Yes; I am mad! I have been mad for two years—and I have been a fool. I am mad now—but I am no longer a fool. I am going to know now—I am going to have an answer now — this afternoon — before you leave this room. When are you going to marry me?"

"Marry you!"

She started back.

"Don't do that!" he flung out pas-

sionately. "Don't *act!* It is no surprise, that — eh? You know! Your soul knows! I love you — I have loved you since that first time on the bridge— You remember, don't you— that bridge — when your eyes turned my blood to fire? You knew it then— you know it now!"

Once she had told herself, once in those early days before familiarity— intimacy, perhaps — had blunted the eager edge of curiosity and interest with which she had studied her new sensation much as one might study a specimen under a microscope, that the man was a smoldering volcano, the soul of him elemental and turbulent. It had grown dim and hazy, that little mental note of classification—but she remembered it now.

It was true! Why had she ever lost sight of it? What would he do? She was not afraid, only—only—he must not have the mastery even for a single instant.

There had been eruptions before— little ones. She had always controlled him—he was just like some great big animal — one must never let go the leash! And, besides, some day probably she *would* marry him!

She laughed now in her turn, shortly.

"And do you think, do you imagine, M. Jean"—her voice rang sharply through the room—"that you will attain your object any the more readily by acting like this?"

"Yes, I think so!"

Jean was stepping toward her, reaching out his arms to grasp her.

"*Jean!*"

She retreated backward with a startled cry. The man's face was positively livid; the eyes were burning into hers.

"I love you!"

His voice was hoarse, shrill, out of control.

"I love you! *Mon Dieu,* I love you! Do you think that you can own a man's soul and not pay the price? You made me love you! In a thousand ways you asked for my love—in a thousand ways you—"

"Jean!" she cried at him again, half running now back across the room.

"Yes, you did!" he shouted passionately, following her. "Yes, you did — or you have been playing with me! But if you have been playing with me, the playing is ended now; do you understand? It is ended! And whether you have been playing or not, you have made me love you, and you are mine—you belong to me—you shall be mine!

"That is how much I love you! You are mine—*mine!* You shall tell that cursed Paul Valmain to go about his business! Do you understand that, too? I saw you last night!"

She caught at the straw as, flinging aside the portières in her retreat, she backed through the archway into the *atelier.*

"Ah! It is that, then!" she retorted, and forced a mocking laugh. "It is Paul Valmain, then, that is the cause of this! Well, at least Paul Valmain is incapable of such actions!"

"There is much that Paul Valmain is incapable of!" he answered furiously. "And one thing is that he, or any other man, shall never have you!"

She glanced hurriedly over her shoulder. It was a large room, the *atelier,* larger even than the *salon,* but she was almost across it now, and the huge statue of Jean's "*Fille du Régiment*"—his "Daughter of the Regiment"—his newest work, which was nearing completion, blocked the way.

"Jean!" she burst out desperately. "What is it? What do you mean? There is no need for this! There— there was no need to lock that door, to send Hector away!

"Do you know what you are doing? Have you lost your reason to treat me like this? Have you forgotten what— what you owe to my father — that— that I am his daughter?"

"Ah! You will twist and wriggle, and you will not answer, eh?"

The words seemed to scorch and burn on his lips.

"It is always like this! You evade, you elude, you ask other questions. You know why I have done this! I have told you.

"I owe your father nothing—nothing! Do you hear? Nothing! It is he who owes!

"Ask him! They are his own words come true. Ask him what the name of Jean Laparde has done for him! He is not merely a paltry millionaire to-day; he is a famous man! The debt is paid a thousandfold — even to the money, franc for franc, that he has spent.

"You know well enough why I have done this! It is not like the days of Bernay-sur-Mer, when the poor fisherman dared only dream and smother the passion in him like some mean, crawling thing and thank Heaven, and hold himself blessed for the crumbs that were flung to him—a smile from those lips of yours—a finger touch upon the sleeve, when it seemed all creation could not keep my arms back from you!

"I have waited! I let you put me off until—until the hour should come when no man or woman in the world should put off Jean Laparde! Until—yes, *'Cré nom d'un nom!* — until I should be able to forget, forget, forget —do you understand? *Forget*—that I was once a poor fisherman when I looked at you.

"Well, it has come — that hour! What tribute in all the history of France was ever paid to man such as was paid to me last night? *'Cré nom!* It is no fisherman that speaks to you now! It is I—Jean Laparde, the sculptor of France!

"I am rich! Kings, princes, the nobles, the world comes to my door and begs—do you hear? *Begs*—the *entrée!* What more do you ask? *Mon Dieu!*"—he was clutching at his cravat, loosening it from his throat as if it were choking him — "you shall no longer put off my love!"

She had halted, because she could retreat no farther. The face of the statue—a life-size figure of a girl in tattered uniform, the corsage torn, the hair disheveled, the form crouched a little as if pressing forward in the face of mighty stress, the hands beating at a drum that was slung from the shoulders—looked down upon her. And it seemed to bring, quick, instant, another weapon to her hand.

That *something* in the face, those lips! It was in every piece of work he had ever done. All talked of it; all saw it—and wondered.

A strange exhilaration was upon her. She was not afraid. In his passion—passion like this—Jean was superb. To have aroused passion such as this in a man was as to have drunk of wine!

But to yield? Never—until the day when she was quite ready to yield. To master him, hold him, curb him—yes, a thousand times!

His face was close to hers; his breath was hot upon her cheeks; his hands were stretching out for her again. She pushed him away violently.

"You talk of love!" she flashed out. "What do you know of love? What *kind* of love could you have for me?"

She swept her hand around, pointing to the statue.

"Who is this secret model that all Paris talks about—that everybody has been talking about for months — that lives in the face, and always in the lips, of everything you do? That though the face of one statue is like the face of no other one, yet she is there!

"You talk to *me* of love! At what strange hours does she come here that no one sees her? How does she come? Where do you keep her?"

For an instant Jean drew back, staring at her wildly—but only for an instant. The next he had caught her arm in an iron grip.

"You are clever!" he whispered hoarsely. "You are *too* clever! You

are at it again, eh, to side-track me? It has been like that for two years now —always in some way, by some trick, you put me off!

"But you will put me off no more. You can play no trick here. We are alone, and I will not be tricked.

"It is not true what you say! There is no model like that! It is a lie!"

His voice swelled until it rang out in a strong, vibrant note.

"The model is here — here in my heart—in my brain! That face and form are the face and form of France! It is the womanhood of France, the glory of my country! No man before has ever conceived it. It was for me—for me—Jean Laparde—to do! Do you hear? It is the face and the womanhood of France!

"You do not understand—you are not a Frenchwoman. And you do not understand me—who am a Frenchman!"

His voice dropped low again, hoarse in its passion.

"You have gone too far!"

His grip on her arm tightened.

"You love me, or you have played with me—it is all the same! The two years have made you mine! You *are* mine—now—now! You would starve my love, would you, you wonderful, beautiful, glorious woman?"

He was drawing her closer and closer to him. Passion, loosened, freed, rocking the man to the soul, was in his eyes and face, in the half-parted lips, in the short, quick, panting breath. And for a moment, fascinated, she was lifeless; then with all her strength she wrenched and strove to free herself.

"You would not *dare!*" she gasped. "You would not—"

"Dare!"

The word was a wild, hollow laugh.

"Dare! Does a man *dare* to save his soul from torment? See—your lips! Your lips! Ah, *Dieu*—your lips!"

She was his—*his!* She was in his arms, crushed to him! His — as his mad desire had bade him crush her in his arms long since in that other life in Bernay-sur-Mer; his—as he had dreamed of crushing her in his arms, of crushing her ravishing form close to him in the dreams of the days and nights, every day and night since then! It was all blind madness, a delirium of ecstasy.

How warm and hot those lips of hers from which his soul was drinking! *Dieu,* how she struggled!

But her lips—her lips were his—his to rain his kisses of passionate thirst upon — and upon her face, and upon her eyes, and upon her hair. If only she would not struggle so, that he might smother his face, bury it in the intoxicating fragrance of that hair!

She beat at him with her fists. He could not hold her still. She was strong—strong as some young lioness. They were swaying around the room, now this way, now that—and now through the portières into the *salon.* She made no cry—how could she cry? He strangled the cries unborn upon her lips with his kisses!

Ah, he had her now—she was passive at last—her head was bent far back in his arms. Yes, now — now! To feel the life, the heart-throb, the pulse of that lithe form against his own—to hold his lips to hers in a kiss long as all eternity—to—

And then in a numb, blank way he was standing back and staring at her. Footsteps, laughter, voices were coming from the street outside, coming up the steps — and where it had seemed that her strength was gone in a paroxysm of terror, of desperation, she had torn herself away from him.

And now — yes — her face was as white as death itself. What made it like that? What had happened? He passed his hand dazedly across his eyes.

"Quick! That door!" she breathed frantically. "They must not find it locked!"

She snatched up her outer wraps, slipped them on, and with a most marvelous display of composure assumed

a languid attitude in a chair. Outwardly Myrna Bliss was quite calm and undisturbed again.

"Quick! The door—quick!"

The door! Some one was coming! Yes, of course! His brain was reeling, stupefied.

The door! He fumbled in his pocket for the key, and in a mechanical way turned it in the lock. And then they were trooping into the *salon,* a dozen of them, men and women.

"Wasn't it a charming idea!" some one exclaimed in effusive greeting. "But the credit is all Myrna's, of course. We've come, you know, to—"

Jean did not hear any more. With a start he raised his head and glanced down the room. Myrna's idea—this!

A little twisted smile of understanding came to Jean's lips. Self-possessed, animated, she was already the center of a group where everybody was talking at once.

And then Paul Valmain's pale, aristocratic, esthetic face came before him. The man was bowing, murmuring polite conventionalities; only somehow the man's eyes, instead of meeting his, seemed to be set with peculiar fixedness upon some object. Automatically Jean followed their direction with his own—to his own hand hanging at his side.

The door-key was still clasped in his fingers!

CHAPTER III.

In the Dead of Night.

THE temptation was very great. But what would Father Anton say? What would Mme. Garneau, with whom she lodged, *think?* To go out at this time of night!

It was very late. It was long after midnight, because it was very long ago when she had heard some distant church-clock strike twelve—and since then it had struck many times — the quarters, the half-hours—only she had lost count.

Marie-Louise drew her cloak a little more closely around her as she leaned on the casement of her open window — and then remained quite still and motionless again.

Irrelevantly it seemed, her thoughts turned on Hector, the *concierge.* How very blue Hector's eyes were, and how very red his hair, and altogether how very droll a figure he made with his absurd self-importance; and how fat his wife was, whom he so ridiculously called Mi-mi! And then that conversation between the *concierge* and his wife in Jean's *salon* early that morning, at which she had been present, began to run through her mind.

"*Tiens!*" Hector had said to his wife. "But will she not make the thrifty wife for some lucky fellow, our little Louise Bern, here—eh? She is already waiting an hour in the mornings to be let in. An hour, mind you, *ma belle* Mi-mi—and we who think we rise so early! It is a lesson, that! Would you have her standing out in the cold? Why not a key that she may come in and do her work?"

"But M. Jean," *madame* had objected mildly, "might be angry if he knew."

"M. Jean," Hector had replied fatuously, folding his arms with an air, "is very well content to leave such matters to me. I do not pester M. Jean with details. On the night after the reception, even in the exceedingly bad humor in which I found him, when I told him that I had thought the matter over, and that the work was too hard, and that you were wasting away—you see, *ma* Mi-mi, how I lie for you — and that I had decided — 'decided' was the word I used—that I must have some one in the mornings to help with the work, did he not say:

"'But assuredly, Hector, assuredly; whatever you think is right. I depend upon you, *mon ami.*'

"And does that not show that we understand each other, M. Jean and I —eh?"

"It was Father Anton, not you,

whose idea it was," *madame* had corrected with conscientious earnestness. "It was Father Anton, that evening after we had returned from the Bois and before you had seen M. Jean, who suggested it, and spoke of Louise here. And that was not what M. Jean said, for I was listening outside the door. He said you were a red-headed buffoon, and to go to the deuce and not bother him."

"And what then!" Hector, though slightly disconcerted, had rejoined with acerbity. "Your tongue is forever clacking! Do I ever recount an event but that you must put in your word? But that is not the point. It is Father Anton who says Louise is an honest girl and to be trusted—and that is enough!"

It was not so irrelevant after all. She was twisting the key in her fingers now—the key to Jean's house in the Rue Vanitaire. How still the night was! It seemed so strange that in so great a city where there were such multitudes of people it could be so still.

It was almost as still as that other night when she had sat at her window in Bernay-sur-Mer; that night when the *bon Dieu* had made her see that for Jean's sake their ways lay so very wide apart. She was glad, very glad that the *bon Dieu* had helped her then to put nothing in Jean's way, because Jean had done so very much more even than any one had dreamed of.

But it was so strange, so strange! To hear everybody talking about Jean—on the streets—little snatches of conversation—even here among the very poor—even Mme. Garneau, who that afternoon had stopped in the scrubbing of the floor, and, waving the scrubbing-brush excitedly to point the words, must needs tell her, Marie-Louise, all about the great Laparde! How proud they all were of Jean, because Jean had brought such honor upon their beloved France!

But it was so strange, so strange that they did not know—that they did not know that, oh, for so many, many years it had been just Jean and Marie-Louise, and glad, glad days, with the blue sky above, and the strong arms upon the oars — and — and that she loved Jean; that all her life she had loved him; that all her life until she should come to die she would love Jean.

It was strange that all these people did not know, because it seemed that she knew nothing else; because it seemed to be the only thing in all the world.

But it was good that they did not know, because otherwise she could not even be here as she was; she could not even be Louise Bern for a little while, and be near Jean, and see the work that she loved because it was Jean's work, and because—and because those marvelous figures that he fashioned seemed somehow now to mean everything that there was in life for her—as if her own life were wrapped up in them, given in exchange for them, as if indeed she were a very part of them and they were of her blood and flesh.

She pressed her hands very tightly together over the key and then opened them and let the key lie in her palm to look at it in the moonlight. She had been so little in the studio—so very little. In the three mornings she had been there, there had always been Mme. Mi-mi to fuss around her, to instruct her in her work, or, failing that, as an excuse to gossip. And if it were not *madame*, then it was Hector—and often it was both. And she had so wanted to be alone there—it was not very much to ask, that—just to be alone there for a little time with Jean's things around her—to be very quiet—to be alone.

Why should she not go now? It was not a sin that she would commit. It was only that if Father Anton knew or Mme. Garneau knew they would not understand; but they would never know. No one would ever know. Jean would be up-stairs asleep, and Hector and his wife would be down-stairs in bed. That statue, that

wonderful statue of the girl with the drum, would be more wonderful than ever with the bright moonlight pouring in upon it through that glass roof of the *atelier*. She had seen so little of it, because when she was there it was always wrapped up in damp clothes; she had seen it only when that absurd Hector had exhibited it to her with a patronizing air, as if he had modeled it himself, making use of a flood of technical expressions which she did not understand a word, and of whose meaning she was quite sure he was equally ignorant, but, having heard the words around the studio, repeated them like a parrot. She had seen so little of it, when her soul cried out to see so much.

It haunted her, that statue—why, she did not know. It was before her always—in her dreams, which were always dreams of the *salon* and the *atelier,* the figure with the drum always stood out above everything else, even though the very smallest things and details there, were so dear and intimate, too. Was it a sin to go and stand and look, when her heart was so full of the longing that it would not be denied? Who was there to say: "You went to Jean's studio at two o'clock in the morning," when, in the quiet and the stillness there, there would be only herself and that great figure with the drum and the *bon Dieu,* Who made Jean do such wondrous things, you know?

She turned from the window and tiptoed across the little room, and took the little black-velvet turban, with its white cockade that Father Anton had given her, down from where it hung upon a nail on the wall, and fastened her cloak tightly about her for fear that it might brush against something and make a noise, and stole then to the door and out into the hallway and to the front door of the tenement. Yes, she would go; but no one must know, only herself and that great figure with the drum and—and the *bon Dieu,* Who would understand.

And so she went out into the night and across the city, and to the Rue Vanitaire, and to Jean's studio; and all the way her heart was beating quickly, and she was a little frightened, and avoided the people that she met, for no one must know; and even at the last when the goal was reached, and she stood before the house and saw that it was dark in all the windows and she had only to enter, there came even then a little added thrill of fear.

The street, she had thought, was deserted; but suddenly as she stood there it—it seemed as if some one hiding across the way had stepped out of concealment and as suddenly had disappeared again. She caught her breath and stood for a long, tense moment gazing in that direction. And then at last she smiled a little tremulously. It—it was only a shadow. Yes, she was quite sure now that it was only a shadow—she could see the flickering of the street-lamp on the wall of the building where she thought she had seen something else.

It was very foolish of her to be like this. She had never been afraid in Bernay-sur-Mer; only everything here was so strange—and it was very late—and—and she was going into Jean's studio—and no one must know. And then she mounted the steps very cautiously and unlocked the door and closed it softly; and in another moment, slipping across the hall, past the foot of the stairs that led to Jean's sleeping apartments above, she had entered the *salon* and shut the door behind her.

It was quite dark here—too dark almost to distinguish anything. The only light was a tiny, truant moonbeam that strayed in from the *atelier* between the portières of the archway. It was in there—the great figure with the drum. But she would not go there for a moment yet.

It was here, too, that Jean was present in everything about her. It was here that his friends, those that he cared for now, the people of the *grand monde,* came to see Jean.

She could not see the things around her, but they were very clearly pictured in her mind—the beautiful rugs, so soft and silky to the touch, that hung from the walls; the queer, spindly furniture that did not seem made for use at all, that she had been afraid to touch at first for fear it would break, it looked so fragile; the dark, glossy floor, like a mirror, that she had polished only that morning; the— Her thoughts were suddenly disturbingly flying off at a tangent.

That morning! It brought a quick twinge of pain to Marie-Louise's heart. The *salon* had been—had been— Oh, she did not know how to describe it; only Mme. Mi-mi had said it was often like that, that Jean led the gay life; and why not, since he had the sous to pay and was rich? There had been broken glasses, and confusion, and callous ruin of things that were priceless, and cards strewn over the floor; and—and somehow, she had not been able to keep her eyes from being wet all the time she had been cleaning up the room. It—it made her heart very heavy and very sorrowful.

And yet, too, in a way she could understand — because she understood Jean. Long, long ago she had been afraid—afraid of his success for him, even while she had prayed for it. If Jean had only a mother, only some one whose love would hold him back! If he were married—if he had a wife—it would change all this sort of life that he led now.

Yes; if he were married! She could think of that quite calmly, in a perfectly impersonal way. Why should she not? Some day Jean would marry —marry some one out of this new world in which she had no part, which to her was so very strange and foreign and hard to understand; but to which Jean was so natural, and which, henceforth, could be the only life he would know.

Yes; she could think of his marrying quite calmly. And why not? She had no longer part in that; she had passed out of Jean's life long ago—that day in Bernay-sur-Mer. Perhaps it would be Mlle. Bliss—Hector had hinted at it and winked prodigiously. She found her hand clenching very hard at her side.

It seemed very, very strange, and it was very, very curious that while she could think quite calmly of Jean's marrying some one because it would be very good for Jean to marry, a pang came and her heart rebelled when the "some one," instead of being vague and general and indefinite, became a particular some one that was very definite and was not vague at all! It was so strange.

Marie-Louise sighed a little. She did not understand. Everything was so hard to understand. She sighed again; and then, walking slowly across the room, she parted the portières and stepped into the *atelier*.

Here for an instant she stood hesitant just inside the archway, looking about her. How bright the moonlight was, and how it poured in and bathed everything in its soft, luminous glow, except that, strangely, there seemed to be a shadow on the white-wrapped statue of the girl that puzzled her for a moment— Ah, yes. It was the door of the dressing-room, the room where Hector said the models prepared for their poses, that was wide open and kept the bright moonlight from the statue.

She moved forward, closed the door quietly, and went then and uncovered the clay figure and stood before it. She could look her fill now; yet it seemed that she could never do that, for her craving and longing were insatiable. All other things in this life of Jean's, in this life of hers that she was living for a little while, filled her with dismay and confusion; but this, this work of Jean's, this figure before her, was real; it seemed somehow to bring her closer to her own world, to those things she could understand. She did not know why—only that it was so, and it was, perhaps, because of

that that the girl with the drum had been haunting her so constantly.

She sat down at last on the little platform that served Jean to stand upon for his work. It thrilled her, made her pulse leap—this strong, magnificent figure of womanhood; this torn and tattered soldier-girl; and one sensed and felt and lived, it seemed, the battle-rack around the figure; one saw, it seemed, the stern, set-faced, shot-thinned ranks that followed to the beating of the drum; one listened to catch the tramp of feet, the hoarse cheers, the roar of guns.

It seemed to be the call of France, the call to victory and glory — or to death, perhaps—but to dishonor never; it seemed to breathe the love of country that was beyond all thought of self, fearful of no odds; it seemed to mean that in the heart of France itself lived the courage that had never measured sacrifice; it seemed as if those clay lips parted, and above the din of conflict, of battle, and of strife she could hear the voice ring out in deathless words:

"Forward—for France!"

But it was not only that alone that held her enthralled. It was the face with the moonlight full upon it now. It was beautiful, it was glorious—but there was something more. There was something in the face that seemed to stir a memory, a world of memories within her. There was something familiar in the face—there seemed to be something there that she recognized and yet could not define. She had seen that face all her life—all her life! It belonged to every one that she had ever known in Bernay-sur-Mer — and yet it belonged to no one at all that she could name.

But then — it was not finished yet. Perhaps when it was finished she would know. It would be done now in a few days more, Hector had said; and he had said, too, that it would be the greatest work Jean Laparde had ever done.

If she could only watch it until it was completed! If she could only do that — afterward she would go away. It was only for a little while that she had come to Paris — only for a little while. If she could do that! If she could come to-morrow night and the nights after that until that beautiful figure was all finished, just as she had come to-night!

Yes, yes — *yes!* Yes, she would come! She would watch it grow, and watch so eagerly and so tensely the face that was so well known yet so elusive now!

"La Fille du Régiment!"

Her hands cupping her chin, she sat there as motionless, as silent as the statue itself—sat there absorbed, unconscious of the passing time. It was strange that the face should be familiar! It was strange that there, too, had been something familiar in the face of that figure in the park that Father Anton had taken her to see, in the face of every other figure that the *curé* had pointed out to her as Jean's work! She had gone back to look at them alone; but they, although they were finished, had not answered her question, had not told her who they were.

But this one, this one was *almost* telling her now—there was only to come a touch, just a touch from Jean's hand—which would, perhaps, be there when she came to-morrow night—and then she would know.

And so she sat there and the hours passed, and the moonlight faded and the gray of dawn crept into the room — and Marie-Louise roused herself with a start. And at first dismay was upon her. It was morning—too late to go home! And then she shook her head and smiled happily—happily, because she had spent glad and happy hours, and there was no need to be dismayed.

Presently she would go about her work—to which she had come early; that was all. And at her lodging Mme. Garneau would find the bed made because it was always made before she

left there in the morning, before Mme. Garneau was up.

CHAPTER IV.

Accusation.

THERE was a sullen, angry set to Jean's lips, a scowl on his face that gathered his forehead into heavy furrows, as at his accustomed morning hour, a little after nine, he entered the *atelier*. He had not slept well the night before—nor for the nights before that—not since that afternoon here with Myrna. How could one sleep with things in the mess they were? To say nothing of the night before last, when he had not tried to sleep, and had held high revel with a few choice spirits in a sort of daredevil challenge to the premonition that promised him a reckoning for those few moments in which he had sought to quench the passion that raged in his soul, that set his brain afire!

He crossed the room, mechanically donned his sculptor's blouse, or overdress, threw off the wrappings from the *Fille du Régiment,* picked up a modeling tool, stepped on to the platform — and stared into the face that looked back at him from the high-flung, splendid head of clay. He snarled suddenly, clenching his fist. They prated to him of secret models! Bah! It was too much for them! They could not understand—it was beyond them—that was all.

It was there, all of it—the courage, the resolution, the purity, the strength, the virility of the womanhood of France—all—all—it was all there—and they thought it wonderful, incomparable—only they prated of a secret model—*nom d'un nom*—when it was themselves, when it was France that was the model—and they had not grasped the apotheosis of their separate individualities in the sublime glory of the composite whole! Ha, ha—perhaps it was because they were modest!

His lips curled into a contemptuous smile. They prated of a secret model; they applauded; they cheered; they showered him with wealth, with fame; the world knew the name of Jean Laparde—and because they were unable to comprehend they asked for something more, something that, no doubt, should label his work like raised letters for the blind — and then, perhaps, it would be only to find that they had still to acquire the alphabet! Bah—it was sickening, that! But it was also maddening!

There was old Bidelot, who came each day to the studio. Bidelot was a fool — a senile old fool who sat and wept weak tears because the statue was so beautiful, and wept weaker tears because, like a spoiled child, he cried for something that he wanted without knowing what it was!

"You talk—you rant—you whimper — you bemoan!" Jean had flared out angrily at Bidelot yesterday afternoon. "Well, what is it? Do you find it a pitiful affair, then, my '*Fille du Régiment*'?"

"Ah, Jean! Ah, no! Ah, no!" old Bidelot had cried. "It is not that! It is exquisite; it is magnificent; it is superb; it transcends anything the world has ever seen! It is so great that if only there were a little something—ah, *mon* Jean, a little something — it would be the work of a god and not a man!"

"And that something? What is it?" Jean had demanded.

And old Bidelot had wrung his hands, and the tears had coursed down his cheeks.

"I do not know! I do not know!" the famous critic had answered almost hysterically. "If I knew I would tell you. It is but a touch—but a touch."

Old Bidelot was emotional—an ass! Old Bidelot was fast approaching his dotage! Jean shrugged his shoulders wrathfully. It was not true, of course! It lacked nothing, that face—and yet—and yet that sort of thing disquieted him, irritated him. It was a masterpiece—and its only fault was that it

had not been made by a god! *Ciel!* Was there ever anything more absurd than that?

Well, in any event, it was to bring him one hundred and twenty-five thousand francs; and his next commission, which was for the government of France, would be for double that amount. Old Bidelot and his "touch"! For France, when this was finished, he would do that dream statue, if—Confound that dream statue!

Jean snarled again. What was the matter with him? The cursed thing was always in his mind; but never would it come and appear before him, lifelike and actual, that bronze figure of the woman, as once it had done. Instead, it seemed to have faded more and more away until it was as invisible as the base of the statue, which he had never been able to see at all, and yet at which the passers-by in his dreams had gazed with the same rapt attention as at the woman's figure—it had faded until the whole existed simply as an indistinct blur upon the memory.

If he could visualize that figure again, get the detail, he could supply a base of some sort that would go with it; that would come simply enough once he got to work. *Would* it? He had thought until his brain was sick, for hours on end, trying to imagine a fitting subject, big enough, splendid enough to harmonize with what he remembered was the majestic beauty of the woman's figure—and the hours had only made the task seem the more beyond him, his each succeeding imaginary design the more inadequate and pitiful.

It made him angry now; it increased and inflamed his already irritable and savage mood. Why had he started in to think of that? Why, in Heaven's name, should he think of everything that morning that he did not want to think of? Why, when nothing else would come, should the cold, enigmatical face of Paul Valmain, staring at that confounded key, come so readily before him, and— Jean hurled his modeling-tool suddenly, savagely, into the far corner of the room; and, stepping down from the platform, pulled viciously at the bell. He was yanking his blouse off over his head as Hector appeared.

"Get my car, Hector!" he snapped tersely. "I am going out."

Hector's eyes widened in amazement. The car in the morning — the morning that was sacred to work!

"The car, *m'sieu'?*" he repeated, as if he had not heard aright.

"Yes, imbecile—the car!" Jean snapped again.

"But, *m'sieu'!*"

It was unheard of! It had never occurred before!

"But is *m'sieu'* not going to work this morning, and—"

"The *car!*"

"But yes, *m'sieu'* — instantly — instantly, *m'sieu'!*" Hector stammered—and retreated hastily from the room.

Jean followed him, spent a few impatient moments kicking at the sidewalk while he waited; and then, at the wheel of his big, powerful machine, went tearing up the street. Work! It was worse than useless in the vile humor he was in. The car had been an inspiration; he would go nowhere in particular, but he would drive — fast. That was what he wanted—some excitement, some exhilaration. He would go out into the country — anywhere, with the whole day before him, and— No! He would go first to Myrna's house! Why not?

He scowled heavily again. It was getting beyond endurance, that sort of thing! There had been three—no, four—days of it now! The decision quite fitted in with his mood—whatever might be the result. Yes, *nom d'un nom!* He would go there—and at once!

It was but a short way. At the expiration of a few minutes Jean stopped his car in front of the magnificent residence that Henry Bliss maintained in a style almost regal, jumped out, and ran up the steps.

"Mlle. Bliss," he said to the liveried automaton that answered his summons.

"Mlle. Bliss is out, M. Laparde," replied the man.

"Very well, then—M. Bliss," returned Jean a little grimly.

"M. Bliss is not at home, M. Laparde," replied the man.

Jean bit his lip. That Henry Bliss might still be away, since he had gone to London some days before, was probably true; but that Myrna was out at ten o'clock in the morning— The man, under instructions, was lying, of course! Jean stood hesitant, his rage increasing, half-inclined to reach out and twist the neck of this bedecked functionary — and then, with a short laugh, he swung on his heel, went down the steps again, and climbed back into the car.

The car shot forward in a savage bound. She was probably watching him from behind the curtain of a window! His hands clenched fiercely on the steering-wheel—he flung the throttle wide. It was enough! This had lasted long enough! It was her idea of punishment perhaps!

"Mlle. Bliss is out, M. Laparde!" He mimicked the colorless-voiced flunky viciously. To telephones, personal calls, the same answer; to notes no answer at all. Well, she would answer—and soon! He would take care of that, and— He jammed the brakes frantically on the machine as a figure, barely escaping disaster as the result of his reckless driving, jumped wildly away from in front of the car, while a voice shouted in sharp protest:

"Hey, there — where are you going?"

"To the dogs!" snarled Jean—and chuckled the next instant with sudden malicious delight as he recognized the other. It was Father Anton—on his way to the Bliss residence, probably.

"You are traveling fast, my son!" Grave and quiet, the note of protest gone, Father Anton's voice came back from the curb—and then the old priest was blotted from sight and the car was speeding down the boulevard again.

Hah! Father Anton! Father Anton — the grandmother! Father Anton, who had thought on arriving in Paris to lecture him, Jean Laparde, on how he should live, and sermonize on the pleasures of the flesh, and the dangers of power and wealth and position, and to haunt the studio with a sanctimoniously grieved expression everlastingly on his face!

Ha, ha! Father Anton! Father Anton was the man who once had preached so fatuously on the nothingness of fame! Well, Father Anton, if he were not blind, could— Again Jean checked the car violently, this time in response to a harsh, strident, authoritative command.

And then a gendarme was running alongside, gesticulating furiously — but the next moment the man was touching his cap.

"Ah! It is Mr. Laparde! *Pardon! Mille pardons,* M. Laparde!"

The man's voice dropped to a low tone as he leaned in over the side of the car.

"But if *monsieur* will be good enough to have a care. It will get us into trouble if we do not do our duty, and *monsieur* would not like that to happen. Ah, *monsieur!*" at Jean's five-franc piece. "Ah—"

The car was off again. But now Jean laughed aloud. Fame! Who was there that did not know Jean Laparde—from the president of France to the gamin of the gutters? It began to salve a little his irritation, his ugly mood. To the deuce with Father Anton—as he had just now had the pleasure of intimating.

There was little that was empty in the fame that was Jean's. Wealth had been poured upon him; there was nothing — nothing that was beyond his reach — nothing that he could desire and be obliged to refuse himself; and, yes—*'Cre nom!* one could say it, for it was true—throughout all France he

was worshiped as if he were a demi-god. He had only to enter a café anywhere, and in a moment from the tables he would catch the whispers:

"Look! This is Jean Laparde, the great sculptor!"

And position! What man in all of France, or in Europe, occupied a position comparable to his? None! There was none! He would change places with no one! He owed allegiance to none; he received it from all. He received the cheers, the acclaim of the populace, the decorations of governments and royalty! And none could take this from him. It was his!

And there were to be years of it—all the years he lived! He was young yet. Years of it! He was Jean Laparde, Jean Laparde, Jean Laparde—the man whose name sent a magic thrill even to his own soul. *Dieu,* how he loved it all with a passion and a desire and an insatiability that was rooted in his very breath of life!

The car was speeding now out through the suburbs of the great city—on—on—on! His thoughts were bringing him exhilaration in abundant measure; something in the sense of freedom, in the swift motion, brought him elated excitement. His blood was whipping buoyantly through his veins. There would be a day of this—to go somewhere, anywhere — without plan or predetermination, this road or that; it mattered not at all—a day of it—prompted no longer by the sullen, disgruntled mood that had caused him to set out, but by a more potent and saner spirit of almost boyish vagabondage that bade him keep on.

Myrna! He smiled now. He was a fool to have spoiled the last few days for himself just because he had not seen her! Let her have her way for a while, if it pleased her. No doubt she was trying to discipline him. It was delightful, that!

Discipline Jean Laparde! It was he who would play the rôle of disciplinarian before he was through—not she! He loved her, wanted her — and, by Heaven, he was Jean Laparde! And what Jean Laparde wanted was his! She belonged to him, and his she would be, and no other man's!

Paul Valmain, eh? Next time he would deal with Paul Valmain, and not with Myrna. The poor fool—who ranted and raved and screamed like a cockatoo on the floor of the chamber of deputies and dreamed that it was impassioned eloquence! It would be well for Paul Valmain to take another road than that of Jean Laparde. The poor fool—that did not know the power of Jean Laparde! He held Paul Valmain, as he held every other man in France, between his thumb and forefinger—to pinch if he saw fit. A whisper in the ear of this one and that, and Paul Valmain was as dead politically as if he had never been born.

And now Jean threw back his head and laughed boisterously. All that was no exaggeration; it was literally true. He even held Myrna in exactly the same position. He could break her socially—as readily as he could break a twig from a tree. It was even ludicrous, it was so simple.

Imagine Myrna in such a state! Imagine what would happen if he let it be known that Jean Laparde would attend no function at which Mlle. Bliss was a guest! It was too funny, too droll! And she had dreams, perhaps, of disciplining Jean Laparde!

His face flushed a little. She was his! He had felt those warm, rich lips against his own. He would feel them there again a thousand times—aye, and soon again! He would not wait this time—as he had waited, fool that he had been, before! But for a day or so, if it pleased her to ride upon a high horse, let her go fast and furious—afterward, that was quite another matter. Afterward those lips would be his again—that glorious, pulsing body would be in his arms again; and in the mean time—here was a great, level stretch of road before him—and the day was before him—and the to-morrow could take care of itself!

And so Jean rode far that day, and lunched at a quaint little village near the Belgian frontier, and quite lost himself, and dined in a farmhouse, and finally, set upon the road again, reached Paris after midnight, where he alighted in front of his club. He was in a "humor" now, as he put it himself. A little supper and a hand at cards would complete, round out, a day of rare delight. He was even humming an air to himself as he entered the club.

"*Pardon,* M. Laparde!"

The doorman was bowing respectfully.

"M. Valmain is in one of the private writing-rooms—the one at the head of the stairs, *monsieur.*"

Jean stopped his humming and stared at the man.

"Well—and what of that?" he demanded.

"But, *monsieur!*" murmured the man, a little abashed. "*Monsieur* expects to meet M. Valmain, does he not? M. Valmain left word."

Jean scowled and passed on. Paul Valmain! Paul Valmain! Paul Valmain! What demon of perversity had seen fit to drag Paul Valmain upon the scene? Was his day to be ruined by a bad taste in his mouth? What did the man want?

He went up-stairs, knocked upon the door indicated and, without waiting for an answer, opened it rather bruskly, stepped inside, and with an exclamation of angry surprise gazed at the man, who seemed literally to have rushed across the room to confront him. Paul Valmain's face was positively livid; the eyes burned as if consumed with fever; the hands shook, and the tall form quivered in the most astonishing fashion. Was the man mad?

"Ah, M. Jean Laparde!" the other cried out. "You have come at last! You saw fit to absent yourself to-day! I have been five times to the studio! But you thought it better to answer my message finally, eh? You did well! I should have gone again in an hour to dig you out!"

Jean eyed the other for a moment, contempt struggling with bewilderment for the mastery at the man's actions and incoherent outburst.

"You have perhaps been drinking," he said coldly. "I received no message until I entered the club here an instant ago. And I am not to be 'dug out,' M. Valmain! You are using strange language. If you are drunk, apologize; otherwise—"

"Otherwise!"

The word came like a satanic laugh from Paul Valmain; and before Jean could move or, taken by surprise, guard himself, the flat of Paul Valmain's hand had swung in a stinging blow across Jean's mouth.

"You—*hound!*"

The blood came surging into Jean's face. With a bound he had the other by the shoulders, and then, somehow, he found himself laughing—not merrily—laughing in a sort of contemptuous rage. He could take Paul Valmain with his own great strength and do with him what he pleased. But that was not the way a blow such as he had received was to be answered. And, anyway, what was the matter with the man? He must have lost his senses.

"You—hound!" Paul Valmain was repeating hoarsely, his lips twitching in his passion. "I watched last night outside your studio. I watched and—oh, *Dieu*—I saw her enter!"

Jean's hands dropped from the man's shoulders in blank amazement. Yes, certainly! The man was either drunk or mad! Certainly, he was not responsible for what he was saying.

"No one entered my studio last night," he said almost pityingly.

"You liar!"

Paul Valmain was like a man beside himself, demented.

"You liar—you liar—you liar! I *saw* her! I know now who this secret model is whose divine form you desecrate, you black-souled libertine! I saw her go in at two o'clock in the

morning—*and at daylight she had not come out again!*"

Jean shrugged his shoulders intolerantly. The man was quite out of his head, but that was no reason why he should be called upon to endure the other's irresponsible ranting.

"You poor fool!" he exclaimed irritably. "So you know who it is, do you? And what then? If it brings you such poignant, personal grief, why did you let her go in? Why did you not tell her that—"

"It was too late!"

White to the lips, Paul Valmain raised his clenched fists.

"It was too late—after months of it! I could save her only one thing—the knowledge that I knew her shame. I was across the street—I saw her—Heaven pity me!—I loved her—the black cloak and hat she wore only a few days before when we were together! I have lived in torment and fear that it might be so since that afternoon—did you think I did not see the key in your hand?—and—"

"What do you mean?"

There was a sudden blackness curiously streaked with red before Jean's eyes; the blood was sweeping in a mad tide upward in his face to pound like trip-hammers at his temples. Paul's words could bear only one interpretation—one that outraged his soul and roused in him a seething fury.

"What do you mean?" he said again between his teeth.

"I mean," Paul Valmain answered—"I mean— Curse you, you know what I mean! I mean that from two o'clock in the morning until daylight Myrna Bliss was in your rooms, and—"

"You lying dog!" Jean shouted—and leaped at the other's throat.

If the man struggled, he did not realize it. The man was only an impotent, powerless thing in his grasp—Jean flung him away, flung him crashing to the floor.

"I will kill you for that!" he whispered. "To-night— You can find a friend down-stairs to act for you—I another."

Paul Valmain staggered to his feet.

"I have waited all day for the same purpose!"

The satanic laugh was on the gray lips again.

"It is *à l'outrance,* M. Valmain—you understand!"

Jean choked in his fury.

"*À l'outrance*—to the death!"

"As you shall see!"

"And the studio—if it suits you. We shall not be disturbed. There is room there, and you will find it as pleasant a place as any to die in."

"Where you will!" retorted Paul Valmain. "Where you will—so there is no delay!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

RECOMPENSE

BY JANE BURR

THERE is no love-word spoken,
There is no joy so gay,
That will not leave you broken
Before the end of day!

And all the bitter aching,
And all the stifled cries—
But turn to merrymaking
Before the sunset dies!

A Particularly Good Letter From One of Our Readers

I GIVE this letter a full page for the reason that the writer points out the one feature of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY that accounts for its popularity, namely: Variety.

When we amalgamated *The Cavalier* and the ALL-STORY there were some questions in the minds of the reading public as to whether or not the marriage was a wise one. I feel that it was, and from the correspondence it is evident that the majority of our readers do. Of course there will always be an issue, and there will be sides to this controversy; but uppermost in the mind of its editor is the hope that some day the ALL-STORY will be the one magazine upon which all readers can unite.

The letter follows:

To the Editor:

* * * I was a spasmodic reader of both magazines until January, 1914, when I became a steady reader of the ALL-STORY. In my mind the present edition surpasses both magazines as they existed before the amalgamation.

A worthy feature is the miscellaneousness of the contents of the present ALL-STORY. Take the issue of September 25th for example:

"Love in Fetters," a romance of England and continental Europe.

"The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms," a tale of Asiatic intrigue.

"Captain Velvet's Farewell," an interesting serial involving the destiny of Captain Velvet, three crooks, and a small South American republic.

"The Fatal Gift," a scientific attempt to create man-made perfection.

"Blue Sky," a story of the White Mountains and New York.

"On the Edge of the Barrens," a novelette of the Northwest Mounted.

Very truly yours,

M. R.

Meriden, Connecticut.

An Unwritten Story

by Charles Belmont Davis

IT was high noon on a pleasant day in late September when Porter Eyre bade farewell to the firm of Hooker & Eyre and, with his good-looking face wreathed in smiles, was dropped some twenty stories to mother earth. When he had reached the sidewalk he stopped at the doorway of the big office building, threw back his shoulders, and drew in a long breath of the bracing air.

For the first time after ten weary years which he had spent in a business that was wholly distasteful to him he felt that he was his own master. His life was his own, to make or mar.

The very thought so exhilarated him that had it not been for the throngs of pedestrians that crowded the sidewalk and the endless lines of surface-cars and automobiles moving slowly up and down the broad thoroughfare, he would have cried aloud his happiness to the high heavens. And why, indeed, should the young man not have wished to cry aloud his happiness.

For Porter Eyre had youth and health, as much money as any young man should need, and, besides all these, a secret ambition to do good and worthy work in the world.

That Eyre was quite sincere in his desire to begin his quest for peace and happiness may be gleaned from the fact that he started that very evening for the Madison Springs, which he had decided was the best possible place in which to develop his ambition. In a word, the young man had determined to be an author.

He had the desire, a sound knowledge of the classics, and a taste for only the best in literature. All he needed was the ideas and the trick of putting them into words.

Whether he was to gain fame through short stories, novels, or plays he had not decided, and as, unlike most embryo authors, he had time and money to spare, he was quite content to let his talent develop along its most natural lines. During the previous summer he had spent a week at the Madison Springs, and at that time and ever since the old-fashioned Virginia resort had appealed to him as the best possible environment in which to carry on his literary labors.

When Eyre had first visited the Springs it had been during the month of August, and the social festivities were at their height, but now he found the place almost deserted.

Perhaps half a dozen old ladies and half as many old men remained to enjoy the crisp, cool days of the early

fall. The little string-band had flown north, the doors of the big ballroom were locked, the children and their laughter had been bundled off to school, and, indeed, no gaiety of any kind remained.

The old ladies and the old gentlemen gathered every morning on the broad verandas and basked in the warm sunshine; disappeared after the midday dinner for their afternoon nap, and at night gathered about the big, open fireplace in the hotel office. But Eyre was not at all displeased with the change, for his avowed intentions were to look for peace, and here he already had found it.

He settled himself in a small cottage but a few hundred feet from the hotel, where he could write undisturbed. Great spreading oaks and poplars surrounded his little cottage, and although the lawn was strewn with dead leaves, the cannas and geraniums still bloomed before his door.

Clematis vines trailed over his porch and, from the window where he had placed his writing-table, he could see the mountains take on their autumnal plumage and turn from walls of deep olive-green to brilliant yellows and warm browns, and here and there patches of screaming scarlet.

On the very morning of his arrival he promptly began his new career by starting out in search of a stenographer. During the tedious journey from New York he had completed a rather lengthy and very complete scenario of his first story—one which had long been simmering in his brain.

It was the story of a young girl who was the last descendant of a fine old Virginian family, although one greatly reduced in worldly goods. The heroine, of course, was compelled to seek honorable employment, and through some devilish machinations of her employer, was about to be forced into an unhappy alliance with him.

At this point the hero, in the form of a rich and handsome Northerner arrived, and after overcoming many difficulties, carried off the Southern beauty to his luxurious home situated somewhere on Long Island and where, through her wonderful riding, the bride became the envy and delight of the entire hunting set.

Even if the central idea was not a novel one and the construction still not wholly convincing, Eyre was rather pleased with his first effort, and wished to have the work transmitted to typewritten form at the earliest opportunity.

The search for a stenographer was not very difficult, as it so happened that there was only one in the neighborhood of the Springs — a certain Nancy McClurg, who was employed by Morris Cryder, the leading lawyer of the county. Cryder lived in the village of Clark's Mills, which lay about half a mile down the valley from Madison Springs.

His office was on the second floor of the court-house, and here Nancy McClurg divided her days equally between pounding out very dull legal papers on her typewriter and gazing out of the window at the jagged ridges of hills that seemed to rise up like some great black fortress and shut her out from the big world that lay beyond.

In winter a large drum-stove in the center of the room gave out a tremendous amount of heat, and all day long Cryder's male clients gathered about it, smoked bad cigars, spat into the box of sawdust, and in no way added to the comfort or happiness of Nancy.

During the summer months it was not very much better, because although the windows were open, the office was covered by a tin roof, and the heat from the midday sun was quite as unbearable as that of the drum-stove.

The girl's dull, drab life was spent between Cryder's office and her little bedroom over Borden's store in the village where she lived. Her only friends were the people who existed rather than lived in the valley the year round, and even among them there

was scarcely any one, with the exception of old man Borden and his wife, whom she could call a friend.

For the good people of the valley no more understood Nancy than Nancy understood them. And what man or woman was there at Clark's Mills who had forgotten the night, ten years before, when Mother McClurg and Nancy had fled from their home on the other side of the mountain and had eventually fallen half dead at the door of Borden's store, begging shelter and protection from old man Borden? Nor how McClurg himself, crazed with drink, had appeared in the village the next day and demanded his wife and daughter.

Nor how he had half led, half dragged his wife through the village street; nor how Mrs. Borden had hidden Nancy from her father, and had afterward educated her and brought her up as she would have brought up and protected her own child.

When Porter Eyre first saw Nancy McClurg's big, sympathetic, blue eyes, and her bronze-red hair, and the brilliant coloring of her oval face and her white, soft, swelling throat, he was surprised beyond words, and the fact was in no way lost to Nancy's observing eyes nor to her imaginative mind, Eyre had formed no particular idea of how the stenographer of Clark's Mills should look, but in no case would he have been prepared for Nancy.

The long flight of dirty stairs, the close, dusty office, lined with its cases of calfskin-bound law-books, the rows of letter-files, the fly-specked map of Virginia, and the framed portrait of Thomas Jefferson hanging on the whitewashed wall, were what he might have been expected to find. But he did not expect to find the girl who rose to greet him.

For Nancy, notwithstanding the stock from which she came, had real distinction and rare beauty of a very delicate but brilliant type, and a poise that one would hardly look for so far from the worldly world. She wore a short cloth skirt and a simple shirt-waist—just the kind of a dress a girl in such a position should wear, Eyre remembered afterward.

It was with great distinctness that he also remembered the quiet, amused glance with which she returned his first, almost rude look of astonishment.

In her low, pleasant voice, with just a suggestion of the Virginia-bred in her accent, Nancy asked him to be seated.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but Mr. Cryder is out just now. Is there anything that I can do?"

Eyre having quite recovered his own agreeable poise by now, carefully laid his hat and cane on Cryder's desk.

"Oh, that's all right," he said cheerfully.

"I think it's you I want to see. Are you Miss McClurg, the stenographer, by any mistake?"

The girl's sensitive, scarlet lips wavered slowly into the same amused smile with which she had first greeted him.

"I am," she said; "but how did you know it was a mistake? You haven't seen my work, and you don't know anything about me."

Nancy's heart fluttered and suddenly stood still at the daring of her own words. All of her starved life she had been rehearsing scenes and dialogues with imaginary people — usually with the kind of young men who spent the summer at the Springs, and who wore flannels, and baggy tweed knickerbockers.

As yet, the romance of her life, and Nancy was of a rarely romantic disposition, had been confined to these imaginary folk and to the heroes of any and all of the novels on which she could lay her hands.

Over and over again she had rehearsed these dialogues, scintillating with their witty epigrams and brilliant sallies, delightful conflicts of mind and word, and of which she always came out the victor. But now

she was actually talking to one of these heretofore nebulous youths—no longer a dream hero, but a good-looking hero of flesh and blood. And, so, although she gave the impression of a young woman of unusual poise, her heart fluttered and it fluttered violently.

"I beg your pardon," said her hero of flesh and blood. "I'm sure it's not a mistake, especially if you can find the time to do some work for me."

"You're a lawyer, then?"

Eyre smiled and shook his head.

"No, I'm not a lawyer, I'm an author."

Nancy's big, blue eyes opened wide with admiration. "An author," she exclaimed; "how wonderful!"

Porter pressed his lips into a straight line, glanced at Nancy's adoring eyes, and was painfully conscious that he was about to blush.

"Well," he said slowly, "yes and no. I'm not a regular author. In fact, I've never really written anything."

For a moment he looked steadily into Nancy's lovely face. Her interest was so convincing that he decided to hesitate no longer, but make her his confidante.

"You see," he began, "it's like this. I've always wanted to write, but I've been tied down with business. Now I've chucked the business and have come down to the Springs for a few weeks to give the writing game a try."

He clasped his hands together and leaned far forward on his chair and much nearer to the girl.

"You know," he said with great earnestness, "you could be a lot of help to me. I don't mean that you could help me just by typewriting for me. You could give me ideas, and the local color, and all that. I want to write about the people down here, and you could tell me all about them—how they live and how they talk, couldn't you?"

He pulled the rough draft of the scenario from his pocket and gave it into the girl's eager hands.

"That's just the outline of my first story," he said. "Read it for me, won't you, and tell me where I'm wrong."

But before she could put her willing answer into words, the conversation was suddenly interrupted by the return of Nancy's regular employer. In a few words Eyre explained to Cryder the object of his visit, and, as the country lawyer did not have need of all of Nancy's time, it was agreed that the stenographer should give her morning hours and three afternoons each week to Cryder, and devote the remaining three afternoons to advancing the literary labors of Eyre.

It so happened that that particular afternoon was far spent when Cryder went home and left Nancy alone and free to work on the scenario of Porter's first effort in fiction. And when the moment had at last arrived, instead of beginning at once to copy the manuscript, she sat in a chair before the open window, and, by the pink and silver lights of the fading day, read, and then twice reread Eyre's simple, conventional story.

But Nancy did not read the tale with technical eyes, and she did not know that it was either simple or conventional. As she slowly turned the pages all she saw was herself as the well-born Southern girl, and Morris Cryder as the wicked employer, and Porter Eyre as the handsome hero who came to rescue her.

Save for a few unalterable facts the story might have been her story, and, when she had read the manuscript for the third time, she was not quite sure that it was not her story, or, at least, that she would not make it so. That she was a Southern girl in reduced circumstances and compelled to work for her living was all too evident. Eyre knew nothing of her past or of her family, and, during the few weeks that remained before the hotel closed for the season, he would have little opportunity to learn anything about her.

All of her life she had craved for a

real romance, and why should she not take the chance that was finally thrust out to her ready hands? For years she had been imagining and playacting that she was some one else.

Now the rehearsals were at an end, and she would really act a part. Hastily she put the scribbled scenario of the story before her, and while her fingers flew over the keys, her mind was busy weaving the romance of her own youth.

Early the following afternoon she carried the original manuscript and the copy which she had made to Eyre's cottage. The day was clear and warm and filled with golden sunshine, and when at Eyre's suggestion they were seated in the shade of his little porch, he asked her to be quite honest and to tell him just what she thought of his first story.

"I think it's splendid," she said. "I liked the idea and I liked the young man; I mean that kind of young man."

"And the girl?" he asked. "Did you think that she was interesting—that is, so far as I had tried to draw her character?"

"Very," said Nancy, and turned her eyes away from Eyre and let them rest on the big, white hotel across the lawn. "I'm sure that she'd be interesting to any one, but, of course, she was particularly interesting to me."

"Why?" Eyre asked.

Once more the girl turned her eyes back to him. "Because," she said, "the story of your girl is so like my own story. I mean all but the last part."

Eyre noticed that her cheeks were colored with the suggestion of a blush.

"You mean all that about your youth?" Eyre said.

Nancy nodded. "I never knew my mother at all," she said. "You see, she died at the time of my birth. She was only a girl-bride. You know how young the women used to marry in the South."

"Then you were the only child?" Eyre asked, his eyes full of sympathy.

Once more Nancy glanced in the direction of the deserted porches of the hotel.

"Yes, the only child; and I think that next to my mother's death, that has been my greatest regret. It has always seemed to me that the relation of a girl to her sisters or to her brothers is one of the most wonderful things in life."

"And your father?" Porter asked gravely.

"Dad?" she said. "Dad brought me up. He and his sister, a sweet, wonderful old lady; and then there was Ellen, my colored mammy." Nancy leaned her elbow on the arm of her chair and rested her chin in her palm. "But they're all gone now—all of them, just as the old home is gone. A wonderful home—at least we all thought so. It was up in the mountains near the Greenbriar, a part of a grant left one of my ancestors by George the Third. There was a great, big, rambling old house, with a wonderful garret full of trunks filled with old dresses and bonnets.

"When I was a child I spent hours there every day, playing with my dolls and trying on the old dresses.

"Many of them were quite lovely, as I remember them—silks with big, flowered patterns and scented with lavender. There was a great lawn in front of the house, and at the back a hedge of box and a rose garden, and beyond the garden a meadow and a stream where Ellen used to take me to wade. The bottom of the creek was covered with white sand and little pink and white pebbles; and I remember that the water was just like crystal and the sloping banks were lined with swamp-willows, very soft and gray and silvery."

"But the stream and the meadow, at least, must still be there," Eyre said. "Who knews but that some of these days you may go back and build up another home on the old place."

Nancy shook her head, and as she glanced up at Eyre her delicate, sensi-

tive lips quivered into a pathetic little smile.

"I'm afraid not," she said. "Is there anything in my life at Morris Cryder's office or the hall bedroom over Borden's store that would lead to my buying back the old home. I'm afraid not."

She got up and slowly smoothed out the wrinkles of the short, linen skirt that but scantily concealed the lines of her trim, pretty figure.

"I must be going now," she said. "You remember to-morrow was to be your afternoon. I only intended to leave you your manuscript to-day; but here I've been staying on forever telling you the story of my youth."

"I'm so glad you did," Eyre said, and held out his hand. "I think it's wonderful that your life was so like the girl in my story. Now you can help me a lot, can't you?"

Nancy smiled and laid her hand in Eyre's. "I hope so," she said. "I hope so, so very much."

But as the days passed Eyre's work, so far as actual accomplishment went, proceeded very slowly. Nearly every day he would tear up his work of the previous day and start again, but although disappointed, he was far from discouraged.

He knew that he was only at the first rung of the ladder that sometimes leads to fame, and that there was infinite drudgery and hard work before him. On the afternoons that Nancy did not come to his cottage he took long walks over the country roads, but whatever his destination he found that the pleasantest road, if not the shortest, was the one that led past the courthouse.

He could easily see Nancy sitting at her desk by the open window, and in a short time she came to look for him. When he had reached a certain place on the road she would raise her handkerchief to her lips as a signal that she had seen him. Nancy had arranged this signal with Eyre, because, as she explained it, if Morris Cryder (in reality a most kindly soul) saw her wave to him every afternoon that he passed, the lawyer would become suspicious of her friendship with Porter and put her out to starve on the highways.

But even if Nancy could only grant him this discreet greeting, Eyre came to regard the girl's signal and the glimpse of the straight, pretty figure at the window as much the best part of his lonely walks. However, after a week, it was only on alternate days that his walks were lonely, for now Nancy went with him on long tramps that led them over the broad, hard country roads and narrow mountain trails.

Every afternoon that she came to Eyre's cottage they would make a fresh start on the story, and every afternoon Porter would decide that he was altogether barren of ideas or that he was not in the humor for work, and they would start out on their rambles.

There were times when they would walk on for great distances in silence, and at other times Eyre would tell her amusing stories of his life in town and of his experiences as an unwilling man of business; and Nancy would give her imagination full play and relate startling incidents of her own past and the royal home in which she had spent her happy, aristocratic youth.

But as the days wore on of this happy companionship—much the happiest days that Nancy had ever known—the girl found less pleasure and less pride in this fabric of fanciful tales that she had created in order to hold Eyre's interest.

There was a constantly growing fear that before he started for the north he would know the truth, discover who her people really were, from whence she came, and, in consequence, he would leave her, hating her for having deceived him. There were moments when she would like to have thrown herself at his feet and have told him all the truth, and have begged his forgiveness; but for this no reason or excuse ever offered itself.

The end of October was at hand;

the following day the Madison Springs would close its doors, and, according to his original plans, Eyre would return to the north.

Nancy had come earlier than usual to Porter's cottage, and as they had a long afternoon before them, he suggested that they walk to a famous rock on the ridge of a mountain a long distance from the hotel. It was a much longer walk than any they had as yet taken; but Porter had often heard of the view from this particular point, and wanted very much to see it before he left the Springs.

When he made the suggestion to Nancy that they explore this new country, the girl seemed to hesitate, and then, after a moment's thought, nodded her head in assent, and they started forth.

The sun shone from a cloudless sky, and the soft, cool air was filled with a wonderful golden haze.

For hours, side by side, they walked briskly over the hard roads; then, in single file, slowly clambered up a narrow trail, and gradually reached the summit of the mountain. The rock itself was too steep to climb, but at its base there was a small plateau—an oblong of green grass dotted with a few pine-trees and sheltered at its two ends with the thick foliage of the mountain forest.

On either side, far below them, lay broad valleys of tilled fields and pasture lands, and beyond these ridge after ridge of heavily wooded hills. The sun, a great flaming ball, was fast dropping behind the jagged line of western hills, and high in the east hung a young moon—a beautiful, pale, silver crescent against a cloudless, turquoise sky.

Tired and almost breathless from their long climb, the two young people dropped exhausted at the foot of a lonely pine-tree that stood at the near end of the grassy plateau. For some moments they sat in silence, looking down from their high point of vantage on the twin valleys below.

"Isn't it wonderful?" he said. "Have you ever been here before?"

Nancy glanced about her, and then at Eyre. "No," she said, "I've never been here before—never."

For a moment she closed her eyes and leaned her head against the pine-tree. In that moment her thoughts flew back to the time when barelegged, with only a slip of a dress to cover her starved body, she had played day after day on this very plateau with her young brother and sister. Had she ever been there before?

She knew every rock and stone and the limb of every tree.

On the darkest night she could easily have walked from where she now sat to the narrow trail that led from the other end of the plateau down the mountain to the miserable hut that had once been her home and where her own people still lived. Why, the very pine against which she now leaned bore her name and her initials that she had carved there years before.

With a slight shudder and a sudden return to the consciousness of the fact that she was not alone she opened her eyes and saw that Eyre was gazing intently at a part of the tree where the bark had been cut away to the bare trunk.

"Why, see," he said, "there are your initials and the name Nancy. If you have never been here before some lovelorn Orlando must have been carving your name. Isn't it curious that we should have found the very tree? Look!"

But Nancy did not look, for her eyes were fixed on the barrier of trees and heavy brush that guarded the far end of the plateau. From the narrow opening to the trail that led down the mountain the figure of a woman had suddenly appeared, and, with frightened, unseeing eyes, she was hurrying directly toward them. The woman's unkempt hair was streaked with gray, and her wan, tired face was drawn and creased with wrinkles born of care and labor.

Her feet were bare, and with one hand she held a dirty calico wrapper about her stooping, flat-chested figure.

With a sudden, short cry, Nancy leaped to her feet and, running toward the woman, seized her in her arms, and held the frail, trembling form close to her own warm, childish breast. A moment more and Eyre was at her side, but Nancy motioned him back. From sheer exhaustion the older woman almost slipped to her knees, but the girl held her tight in her young, strong arms.

"Mother," she said, "don't you know me? I'm Nancy. I'm your daughter Nancy."

The woman shook herself free from the girl and, through her dull, scared eyes, looked steadily into the clear, frank eyes of her child.

"Of course," she said, "hit's Nancy, an' whut a big girl ye air."

At arm's length she held Nancy before her, and the hard mouth of the girl's mother softened into something like a smile. But the smile faded as quickly as it had come, and, suddenly pushing Nancy from her, with narrowing eyelids, the woman glanced stealthily back at the woods from whence she had just come. When she spoke again it was almost in a whisper:

"I reckon I can't stay hyeh no longer, honey!" she whimpered. "Your pap is on the rampage agin, and I better be a goin' whar he can't find me. I tell ye I'm askeered o' your daddy! He hain't himself no mo'!"

Once more she glanced back at the opening in the woods, and this time she gave a sudden shriek of fear and, dropping to the ground, seized her daughter about the knees and buried her face in Nancy's skirt.

"I hain't done nothin', honey! I swear I hain't done nothin' wrong!"

The tall, gaunt figure of a man, carrying a rifle in the crook of his arm, emerged from the woods and, with his eyes fixed on the woman at Nancy's knees, slowly crossed the little plateau. The color of his face and hair and stubby beard seemed all of one color—a reddish-brown.

He had eyes like Nancy's—big and childish-looking, but a mouth as hard and merciless as a steel trap. Slowly he swung his way across the oblong of grass and rock until he stood above the kneeling woman. For one moment he looked into Nancy's eyes and, then recognizing his daughter, nodded curtly to her.

"What is it, father?" Nancy asked.

The man shook his wife roughly by the shoulder. "Git up," he said, "and git up quick!"

But the woman still clung to Nancy's knees.

"What is hit?" he went on in his low, soft voice, turning to his daughter; "hit's Parsons — that damned drunkard! Your mammy's tryin' to run away!"

Once more he shook his wife by the shoulder and, either his action or his words, seemed to have suddenly turned the woman's cringing fear into a frenzy of rage. Her eyes ablaze, her face livid, she leaped to her feet and shook her clenched hand in her husband's calm, unruffled face.

"Whut ef I am runnin' away with Dave Parsons?" she cried. "Whut ef I am? Whar's the difference to yo'—fo' Dave's goin' to git yo'! Dave's goin' to git yo' sho'! He's promised hit."

"All right," the man said, still unmoved. "Dave kin git me, if he kin!"

He hesitated for a moment and glanced from his wife to the gun that lay in his arm. "But jest now," he went on, "yo's goin' to leave hyeh and go home with me."

With his eyes fixed on his wife he nodded in the direction of the trail that led down the mountain. Her sullen face still twitching with impotent rage the woman silently obeyed and slowly started back across the plateau. A dozen feet behind her her husband followed, and thus they disappeared behind the fringe of pines.

Her eyes shining, her face flushed

scarlet, Nancy stood for some moments silently looking after them. Then slowly she turned to Eyre and held out her hand.

"I think I'd better say good-by to you here!" she said, "I'm going home now. Perhaps I can be of some help to mother."

Eyre took her hand and held it closely in his own. "Can't I go with you?" he begged. "I can't leave you now. Please, please!"

For a moment Nancy looked into his earnest, eager eyes and then shrugged her shoulders in assent.

"All right," she said, "but you're liable to see trouble. You don't know the kind of people my people are."

Slowly they made their way along the rough, steep trail and, after they had gone about half a mile down the heavily wooded mountain, came to a clearing in the form of a circle a few hundred feet in diameter. In the center of this clearing of untilled, rocky land, made hideous with piles of refuse and charred tree-stumps, stood a low two-roomed cabin of rough-hewn logs.

Nancy's father, his rifle resting across his knees, sat in the doorway, his bare feet resting on a soap-box which served as a doorstep.

On one side of the doorway a half-grown boy, Nancy's brother Steve, leaned against the wall of the cabin, and, on the other side of old McClurg, stood her sister who looked a few years younger than the boy. Both of them had the unlovely, sandy hair of the father, and their faces were pasty and unhealthy looking.

Such clothes as they wore were in rags and filthy, and plainly showed their poor, half-starved bodies. As Nancy and Eyre approached the door the girl slunk away and disappeared behind the house, but the boy remained. The father glanced up at Nancy, and he regarded her with his big, blue eyes as if he had never seen her before.

"Whut fer did you come hyeh," he said, "and tote this stranger along with ye? This ain't yo' home no mo'. Air ye' afeered fo' yo mammy?"

Nancy nodded. "Yes, father," she said, "I am afraid. Is there nothing I can do?"

The man looked his daughter fairly in the eyes. "Yes, ye' kin," he said. "Ye kin git away from between me an' that timber. Yer mammy's fren' air hidin' thar, mebbe, an' yer mammy says as how he's goin' to git yer pap."

The man's face broke into an ugly grin and he gently ran his calloused hand along the smooth barrel of the rifle. Once more he glanced up, and finding Nancy still standing before the step, with a violent gesture waved her away.

"You git away quick," he snarled.

Nancy's face flushed scarlet, and her arms dropped impotently to her side. Slowly she walked away from the door and joined Eyre who was waiting for her at the end of the cabin.

The sun had sunk behind the mountains and left a great band of scarlet that gradually faded into a delicate pink and then was lost in the stretch of lavender sky. From the cover of the surrounding woods a pheasant called to its mate, but, to Eyre, this only accentuated the awful stillness of the place.

Never before had he seen or dreamed of such isolation as this mountain home of the McClurgs, surrounded by its circle of pines and tangled brush that seemed to shut it out from the sight and sound of all living things. The boy, still leaning lazily against the cabin, glanced up at the darkening sky.

"Ye better be gettin' in, pap," he drawled. "Hit's gettin' late, an' that durned drunkard might be hangin' round."

Heedless of the boy's warning, old McClurg remained where he was, and his eyes continued to shift uneasily along the fringe of trees. Once there was a sound of breaking twigs and the calloused hands tightened about the rifle.

"Whut's that?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"Hit were a chestnut bur a fallin', I reckon," the boy said; "but, Pop, I think yo' crazy to stay sittin' out hyeh and night a fallin'. That drunkard 'll git yo' sho'."

"Shet up," the old man said; "whar's yo' mammy?"

The boy remained motionless, his hands stuck in his trousers-pockets.

"In the ketchen, I reckon," he said, "a gettin' supper."

At the same moment that the drawling words left the boy's lips his sister suddenly appeared at the corner of the cabin. Half running, half stumbling, in her haste she reached the door-step and fell at her father's feet.

"Mammy's run away," she cried. "I seen 'er go."

Old McClurg glared into the girl's frightened eyes.

"Gone whar?" he shouted.

"Into the timber, I seen 'er. I tried to foller 'er an' I lost 'er, and then I come back to tole yer."

With an oath McClurg leaped to his feet. As the old man's tall gaunt body reached its full height there came from the distant underbrush the crack and flash of a rifle. The loose-jointed, angular frame of the mountaineer sprang high into the air and then crumpled up and fell to the ground an inert, lifeless mass.

Nancy started for her father's side, but the boy sprang between her and the body, and, with all his strength, pushed her back. For a moment the young savage glared at his sister with angry, merciless eyes.

"Ye ain't got nothin' to do with this," he said. "Ye belong in the valley. I reckon we ain't good enough fer ye. Sis an' I kin take care o' dad."

The little girl knelt on the ground by her father's body and buried her face in his breast.

"All right, Steve," Nancy said; "what are you going to do? Tell the sheriff?"

For a few moments the boy was silent. He glanced at Nancy and then at the body, and then at his sister weeping softly at her father's side.

"What's th' use," he said. "Pap's dead, and hit'd only git mammy into trouble. I reckon sis an' me 'd better bury 'im to-night by the crick whar they kint find 'im." The boy hesitated and for a full minute stood immovable, his unseeing eyes fixed on the dark circle of trees. "That's hit," he went on at last, "that's what we'll do, an' then nobody 'll know." His eyes suddenly shifted to Nancy, "an mind thet furrner ye' brung along with ye' doan' never tell. Now ye better be a goin', and ye better be a goin' quick."

Nancy walked to her brother's side and laid her hand on his shoulder, but he angrily brushed it away.

"Where will you and sister go?" she asked. "I mean afterwards?"

Her brother nodded curtly over his shoulder. "Cross the mountain to gran'mammy's, I reckon. Ain't ye ever be a goin'?"

"No," Nancy said firmly. "I'm going to stay, Steve, and help you bury dad."

She stepped to her sister's side and gently touched the mass of tousled hair, but the girl did not look up. With a glance at the gray face of the dead mountaineer, Nancy turned back to Eyre.

"You must be going now," she said.

Eyre looked into her calm, unruffled eyes and shook his head incredulously.

"You don't mean to say that you're going to ask me to go away and to leave you here alone with only those children and—and that?"

"Yes, that's it. *That* is murder, and we are going to hide it. It's our trouble—not yours. I tell you you must go away!"

"And you?" Eyre asked. "What is to become of you?"

Nancy glanced about her vaguely, and then into Eyre's anxious, eager eyes.

"What is to become of me?" she repeated slowly. "Oh, I don't know!

I expect I'll go back to Cryder's to-morrow. No one will ever know about this."

"Then I'll see you again"—he asked—"to-morrow?"

Nancy glanced up at him and shook her head.

"No," she said, and her voice scarcely rose above a whisper. "I must never see you again—never again after to-night!"

"Good-by, then!" Eyre said, and held out his hand. "But you will see me again—some time."

But Nancy was looking straight into his eyes and apparently did not see the outstretched hand.

"Would you mind," she said, "if I walked with you as far as the trail? There's something I want to tell you in case—that is, just supposing that I never should see you again."

In silence they walked side by side slowly across the clearing, and when they had reached the woods Eyre turned to look for the last time on the scene of his first tragedy.

The young moon shone down from a pearl-gray starless sky. It bathed the hills and the little clearing in a soft, white light, and brought into sharp relief the lines of the cabin and the charred, ugly stumps.

He could see the body of old McClurg lying before the doorstep and the figure of the little girl kneeling at his side and of the boy standing erect, unafraid and waiting for the moon to rise still higher so that he might hide his dead!

The night seemed to have turned very cold, and Eyre suddenly put his hand on Nancy's shoulder and turned her toward him so that the moon shone fairly into her eyes.

"I can't leave you here," he said; "I can't!"

But Nancy only smiled at him and shook her head.

"Yes," she said, "you must. But before you go I want to tell you why I—well, why I lied to you!"

"Why did you lie to me?" he asked.

Nancy nodded her head in the direction of the hut surrounded by all its filth and squalor. "For twelve years," she said, "that was my home. For ten years — summer and winter — I have lived down in the village and at Cryder's office. You can guess what kind of a life that is. And all of that time I have been dreaming romances and praying that something beautiful might come into my life! I was hungry for just a little happiness—and then you came. I'd never met any one like you before, and I thought that I would play that I was like the girl in your story. I thought that perhaps it would make you like me, and I felt that if you knew who I really was that you might hate me. I had hoped that you would never know, and then—"

For a moment Nancy closed her eyes.

"After all," she went on, "it was only a harmless little romance, and I had my month of happiness. Nobody can ever take that away from me." She suddenly clasped her hands together and turned her blurred eyes away from him. "Oh, can't you see—can't you understand? I tell you I was starving for just a little happiness."

Eyre put his arms about the girl and drew her closely to him.

"I was looking for happiness, too," he said. "I thought I'd find it in my work, but I found it in you. When may I come back?"

"You may come back," Nancy said, "in the spring, when the mountains are green again, and — and we have forgotten to-night." For a moment she hesitated.

"And, Porter," she went on again; "when you come back, don't tell me the day that you are coming. Just walk by the court-house as you used to do, and when I see you I will make the old signal and you will understand. You won't forget, will you, that every day I will be sitting at the office window, waiting and watching the mountains turn green and looking for you coming up the road?"

Wind, the Untamable

by J. Tannus Ritter

IT was back in the days when the denizens of Jumping Rock still piled out of their shacks and the two saloons to enjoy the then unfaded sensation of watching the trains go by—in short, when the iron horse was in its infancy there. And as Jumping Rock was new to the railroad, so were they new to other amenities that go to make up civilization.

For be it said that here was strictly a cow country, and the inhabitants were not above using force to discourage the entrance of the homesteader, or to use that same force to oust him if he chanced to get his roots in the soil. And broad-minded though the cattlemen be at most times, they were still narrow enough to think of checking that vast human tide that flowed across the plains.

One of these cattlemen was Jase Hamil, owner of the Rattlesnake Ranch, a rather youngish man, cold of eye and lip.

From long possession of free acres, he had come to look on them as ever and irretrievably his own. It is not strange, then, that he had been instrumental in the leave-taking of several settlers who had come in high hope and departed in dull despair.

Nor did he ever feel compunction in laying down his kingly law to them. In the dozens had they come; in the dozens had they gone again, except for a sturdy few here and there who were only aroused to do battle for their homes.

Of these last, Morris Werton was, perhaps, youngest of all, and, unlike most of the rest, he lived alone. Early and late, he worked his fields in the abundant seasons. For sixteen months his cabin and fences had stood within five miles of the Rattlesnake ranch-house, with only a wooded, rolling hill between.

Werton had already felt the claws of the king.

Once, at night, his fences were partly torn down; and a weary week of search elapsed before he regained his few wandering stock again. Then, another night—in winter, this time—his feeding-shed burned down, burned before he could carry water from the spring to extinguish it, after shattering the ice cover of the spring with an ax. And there on the spot, while watching this symbol of his weary labor go up in smoke, he clenched his hands, and swore he would stay and fight.

The day after the burning of his shed he rode Wind over to the ranch-house to give his ultimatum. Straight to the porch he rode, and without a look to right or left, had entered into the small room where Hamil sat at a

desk. His face was black with rage; his hands quivered.

"My barn was burned last night," he announced briefly. "I've come to serve notice on you. Keep sending your hirelings over onto my property and something's going to happen. Get that?"

Jase looked tranquilly out of the window. "That's sure a fine devil of a horse you've got there. I'd like to own him; what's your price?"

Morris eyed him fixedly. "You heard what I said. Remember. If any of your men steps on my land again, I'll shoot—and shoot to kill! I only ask to be left alone. I'll do what I say."

"If you decide to sell him," yawned Hamil, "let me know. I'll give a good sum for him."

Morris knew that the king was trying to anger him beyond control. The thought made him calmer. He stepped toward the door, turning an instant with his hand on the knob.

"You can take this warning of mine, or you can take the consequences," he said quietly. "I've never kicked even when some of your men cut some of my fences to make a short cut, if they fastened them up again. But now that doesn't go, either. Remember."

He stepped out of the door, not knowing that the king was really boiling over, for all his apparent boredness. Hamil could read men; and he knew the young homesteader was in a position where he would welcome war; red-handed, bloody war.

Hamil watched the black through the window as Morris mounted him with keen admiration on his face. The splendid animal reared on his haunches even as Morris rose to the saddle, whirled about with a wonderful agility, then, as he felt his master shake out the reins, he was off into the trail like a falling star.

"Gad, what a piece of horseflesh!" muttered the king. "There isn't his equal on four legs. I'd give a thousand dollars for him now." A look of contempt crossed his face. "What does a homesteader need with a horse like that?"

The five miles home were covered by Wind within a very limited time.

He was restless with bounding energy as soon as he halted, and when Morris had jerked off the riding traps he shot down into the ravine behind the stable, where he could paw the ice from the brook and quench his thirst. The young homesteader looked after him half-wistfully; for with all the creature's docility to him, there was still some elusive element there that could never be tamed.

He seemed a fit king for the untrammeled wastes, and this expression was not modified in that he condescended to be ridden. Every motion, every breath of him was superbly wild and free.

Morris satisfied the wants of his stock, which had passed the night in the stable. Then he started to build a rude shelter where the feeding-shed had been, contriving by dusk to get the roof and one side in place. It was only intended for a makeshift, and he would enlarge it later.

As he picked up his tools he heard a snort, and Wind bore down on the stable.

In the yard, the animal stopped with a thunder of hoofs and nosed open the unfastened door of his box-stall. Morris stepped to it after the animal had entered and swung the upper half open. Wind whirled about in the stall, and his head came through the opening in rough friendliness, nearly shoving his master over.

Morris did not stroke him, for Wind was not an animal to crave petting.

He was an equal, and wished to be considered so.

So with a word of tenderness the homesteader greeted him, his eyes meeting the great soft orbs that were turned to him. Then he gently closed the upper part of the door again, though he was careful to leave it un-

fastened. Once, many months before, Wind had taken the door with him when he roamed forth at night.

It was at Jumping Rock, whither Werton had gone for supplies, that he first made acquaintance with Swabert, a few days later.

Nothing had happened in that period except the straying of a calf, and he had not connected the Rattlesnake with the affair. It was while he loaded a few necessities in the wagon that he was conscious some one was behind him, and he looked over his shoulder to see a thick-set, mild-faced man astride a rangy sorrel.

He must have approached on the grass beside the hard street, for his coming had been noiseless.

"Howdy?" nodded the stranger, his eyes roaming from Morris to the wagon and back again. The homesteader acknowledged the greeting, and his eyes took in the odd position in which the other's gun was strapped at his belt. He had known of only one man who carried a weapon that way.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Swabert," he added smilingly.

The stranger returned the smile. "I see you've placed me."

"Yes, I've heard of you." The homesteader placed the last package in the wagon. "When did you arrive?"

"Just now," retorted Swabert. Both laughed. The rider flicked the dust from his clothes with his neckerchief. "You don't know any one about here by name of Hamil, do you?"

For the breadth of a second Morris's breath stopped. What did this man want of Hamil? Was it possible the cattleman had hired him to come and do his killing? He returned carelessly:

"Yes; Hamil's ranch, the Rattlesnake, is about fourteen miles due north of here. You can't miss it."

"Fourteen miles?" reflected Swabert. "Well, I reckon I'll put up here in town to-night. Me and Rally has come a few miles already to-day; ain't we, red-head?" He patted his horse's neck, then stiffly dismounted, as one who had spent long, unbroken hours in the saddle. "We've come from Talking Springs since an hour past sunup this morning."

He spoke meditatively.

"Talking Springs!" echoed Morris. "Why, I didn't think there was a horse in the country could do that—except possibly Wind." He murmured the last words, but Swabert was keen of ear.

"Who's Wind?" he demanded bluntly. "Considering the kind of country I passed through, I don't believe there's another horse but Rally can do it."

"I own Wind." To save himself, Morris's tone could not conceal the pride he felt. "That is, I own him more than any one else does," he hastily qualified. He laughed ruefully. "Sometimes I get the notion he's just staying with me out of kindness."

Swabert looked puzzled. "I don't quite get you, pard."

"Oh, I can't tell it! If you'd see him you'd know."

"Well, I'll try to git around," said the newcomer. "Where'd you say you lived?"

"'Bout five miles east of the Rattlesnake—just around the hill that lies between."

"All right; I'll try to make it. Now, so-long." He led his horse off across the broad street and entered the door of the only hotel in the town. Morris climbed to the wagon-seat and drove away.

The next afternoon, as Morris was mending a fence that had looked weak, he heard the clatter of hoofs, and with a "Hello, pardner!" Swabert swung Rally to a halt beside him. Morris shot a furtive look at the rider's face, to determine if he was still friendly, but the impassivity of it baffled him.

"See Hamil yet?" he asked carelessly.

"No; I wanted to look around a bit first. My business with him kin wait. God!"

Startled, Morris looked quickly up, followed the direction Swabert's glance had taken, and smiled.

"God!" said Swabert softly again. There was wonder, admiration, awe, in that one word.

Wind stood looking off across the level stretches by the small clump of trees behind the stable, motionless, his head up, and his mane and tail stirring slightly in the breeze. His bearing was superb and kingly.

"And that's Wind?" said Swabert softly. "What a hoss! Where'd you get him?"

Morris answered, but Swabert did not attempt to hear. For Wind now swung around, eyed them with a manner at once friendly and aloof, then stepped daintily behind the cover of trees again.

"No wonder you said you didn't own him," commented Swabert briefly. "That hoss ain't your property—he's your friend. Yes, you'd better take a squint, Rally," he approved. "You've looked on your better today."

Morris sensed it that his caller had come to stay for a time, and he walked with him to the stable yard. Here Rally was relieved of his saddle harness and put in a stall. The two men went on slowly to the house, talking.

Swabert did not tell till that evening, however, why he had come to that section.

He said he had come from the northeast, which was unnecessary in him, since Morris had known that. They sat before the log fireplace in the two really comfortable chairs that the house boasted. It was then Swabert stated his errand.

"I come down here to kill Jase Hamil," he said.

His tone was not angry; he spoke as one might speak of eradicating an unnecessary evil. But Morris could not help shrinking a little. He was possessed of an ages-deep respect for human life, and this bald statement momentarily shocked him. And he knew that this man dealt in no idle words.

Swabert seemed interested in the hot log in the fireplace, but he had observed Morris's start. A faint blotch of red mottled each of his wind-whipped cheeks. He had long been looked on as a conscienceless killer, but he had never denied that it hurt.

"You remember Tom Haller?" he drawled on gently. "Well, he was a friend of mine. Fact is, 'twas on my advice he first come here, for I'd seen this country wunst before, and knowed it was pretty good for homesteading. Well, Tom wasn't young when he come here; he wanted to have a place where he could take it easier in his old days."

Swabert filled his pipe and lighted it before he resumed:

"It wasn't till two months ago I learned Tom had been shot and done for. Met his wife up at Range City, where she's keeping an eating-house, and she told me she'd been there nearly two years then. She broke down when she told me of it. Said Tom was sniped one night when he was out feeding stock. So I come down."

"How do you know Hamil did it?"

Swabert's jaws locked. "It wasn't him done it. *He* hired it done. I've got everything tidy. He's throwed on the board, now he's got to stand the deal."

Morris looked long in the fire, silent. Swabert took a few reflective puffs at his pipe.

"Folks what come out here from the East don't always understand these things, boy." His eyes were on Morris's face, and the young man flushed. "Back East you don't run much risk of getting nipped by your enemies when you ain't looking, or, in fact, any time; you settle things by law. Here, though, the law can't reach into every pocket in the hills yet; every honest man has to back it up. That's why we sometimes make our own justice. If the law's handy, we use it; if it ain't—well, we're the law."

His face looked old at that moment,

old in what it had seen of lawlessness and sudden death.

"I ain't trying to make you different, kid." The killer's face, at that moment, seemed to Morris the saddest he had ever seen. "I ain't trying to change you. Keep your high ideals, and—don't spill blood if you can save your own without. You're coming in now while the West is changing; maybe you can get through without it. But—I've lived here when she was all bad if a man couldn't protect himself."

"I'm beginning to understand a little," assented Morris slowly. "It's horrible, I know, and you've known it, too. I—was mistaken in you at first. I've heard stories— But let's forget it. You early folks had a lot to buck against. I can see that much."

Swabert was not demonstrative, but they shook hands warmly; as only those who understand each other can. Then the elder man rose and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"If you can put me away, kid, I'll hang up with you a while," he announced. "I kin help around the ranch here a bit, too."

So it was the killer became a member of the homestead, and he soon proved that he was an invaluable ally in many ways. He could mend a fence or wagon as easily as he could rope a steer. In the evenings they lazed before the fire and talked, and thus got to know each other better.

Morris learned that the other had come from the East, too, a good many years before, and as he himself said with a smile, "was the tenderest tenderfoot ever." Somehow, this glimpse into his innocent, blood-clean past made Morris gulp queerly. He hastened to speak of his own plans and intentions.

A week later an incident occurred which woke the homesteader from the sense of peace in which he had lately lived.

His fences had been torn down where they fronted the Rattlesnake, and three of his steers wandered across the line. It was at midday when he heard three shots fired in quick succession, and he and Swabert turned toward the spot on a run.

At the edge of the fence they came on the steers, lying dead in their own gore.

A note was pinned to the horn of one, informing them that they had half an hour from the time of discovery to move the carcasses to their own property, and if it was not accomplished in that time their rights would be considered forfeited.

Swabert's eyes had twin specks of golden light in them as he heard the note read, but he did not say much. "You'll need beef, anyhow," he consoled; "and it 'll keep good this weather."

So the carcasses were carted to the little shed that Morris called his ice-house, and there cut up. But several hours later, when they went to mend the broken fence, a surprise awaited them. Six of the Rattlesnake's saddle-horses were feeding in the rich grass by the clump of timber.

Morris looked troubled. "I don't know what to do," he hesitated; "it seems so cruel—"

"I know," said Swabert—"cruel or not."

He pulled out the long black revolver that swung in the sheath at his hip and coolly spun the cylinders. Then he turned toward the feeding horses. Morris was almost relieved at the interruption that stopped him at that instant.

"Hey, there! Wait a minute!" boomed a voice.

They turned to behold a cowpuncher sitting his pony just over the fence. Morris and his companion slowly walked toward him. The cowboy stood in the stirrup on one foot; the other leg hung over the saddle. He grinned.

"You've got one on us this time," he observed. "I rode and told the old man. He's coming to see you about it—if you'll wait."

Morris hesitated, then looked doubtfully at Swabert. "We'll wait."

The boss of the Rattlesnake spurred around the hill at that moment and drew up beside the fence.

"This is devilish bad business, Werton," he jerked out. "But you started it. You know you served notice—"

"I didn't say anything about stock," denied Morris flatly.

Hamil reddened a trifle. "Oh, well, I took it you meant that. You can't blame us. And about those six horses of mine you've got over there; I'll make a fair deal for them."

"What do you call a fair deal?"

Hamil's eye grew frigid. "Three steers in exchange, and not a thing more."

Swabert, who had stood somewhat aside quietly gazing at the king, now turned to Morris.

"Them hosses is each worth two steers," he said.

The king looked at the killer. "Who the devil are you?" he demanded. "This is no affair of yours."

"I beg pardon," drawled Swabert coldly. "I reckon you'll find that all my friend's affairs are my affairs."

"Humph!" snorted Hamil.

His eye traveled over Swabert's person, stopped an instant on the gunsheath, then came back to Morris. Yet the killer, who had watched him through narrow eyelids, thought he started slightly.

"Well, Werton, is it a deal?"

"No, I guess not," replied the homesteader. "My friend here stated the terms."

Hamil was not a man to haggle when he desired anything. "Jeff, drive up twelve head of beef," he ordered the cowboy. The man nodded and galloped off. A few minutes later he reappeared, accompanied by another rider, and driving a dozen head of wild, rangy cattle. They "bunched" them a few yards off.

"Drive out the horses," said Hamil then.

"Not till you drive the cattle in," smiled Werton. "You can trust me; I can't afford to trust you. Besides, I want you to give a note that you got a fair equivalent for the cattle."

Hamil stormed and swore, but finally complied. With the cattle and paper in his possession, Morris and the killer drove the horses out. The cowboys drove them out of sight, but Hamil lingered.

"That's nothing but robbery, Werton," he declared. "If your fence hadn't been down my horses wouldn't have went in."

"Tell your men to quit cutting it down then," flashed up Morris. "It was you started this, and I'll keep it up as long as you do. You've got more stock than me. If you can lose yours, I can lose mine."

If the cattleman intended to reply, he changed his mind, for he rode off without a word. Morris turned to his companion:

"Thanks to you, Bert, I'm nine steers ahead, though none of these is as good as mine were. Still, I can soon change that. If he'd called my bluff I don't know what I'd done."

"Bluff?" The killer's tone was soft. "I wasn't bluffing. I'd a done for them hosses as quick as I'm going to do for him some day. You see, kid, sometimes you just got to meet fire with fire. There's times it's best to do as you're done by; especially when you're dealing with a wolf. You've been kind of easy. He's more afraid of you now."

It was that night that Morris spoke of that which had troubled him since the killing of his steers.

"I'm afraid Wind will get over the line," he confided. "He's done it before, and nothing can hold him, he's so big and free. I almost believe I'd sooner lose this place than him."

"They won't hurt him," replied Swabert. "You said Hamil wants him, and that being so, he'll see nothing happens to him. Yet he might claim a stiff reward of trumped-up

damages if you wanted to get him back. I'd hate to lose that fine devil myself if he was mine. But like you say, nothing can hold him."

"I've a notion to take him down to Henderson's place," mused Werton. "That's off the Rattlesnake range—about thirty miles southeast from here. But the devil of it is he's liable to go off altogether. He isn't tame by a long shot, even if he doesn't buck like a cayuse."

"No, he's above bucking," assented Swabert. "If ever he wants to do a thing, he's going to do it by main strength. Then God pity the man that stands in his way."

"He's not a man-killer," defended Morris.

"No, but he can be turned into one," the killer said quietly.

The six days following were filled with petty deviltry directed against the homesteader. Three times half of Morris's outer fences were torn down, and once in the night the stable was set afire. This, however, was discovered in time by Swabert, who extinguished the flames before they could gather headway.

On Sunday five of the homesteader's cattle wandered across the line, and he and Swabert found their carcasses later. Swabert's lips tightened, and for several days thereafter he carried another Colt strapped to his belt.

"Poor kid," he muttered, "he ain't used to the ways of these snakes. Pity he can't see what kind of people he's dealing with. Once I was that way—" He left the sentence unfinished, brushing a hand over his eyes.

The crowning disaster came that night when Wind dashed out of his stall and went over the line.

Neither of the two men had yet turned in, and they heard his hoofs crashing through the patch of dry bushes that lined a part of the fence. They hurried forth, guns in hand. No break in the fence could be seen, which showed that Wind had leaped it—an absurdly easy feat for him.

"I'm going after him!" cried Morris, and before his companion could detain him he was over the fence. He had not taken a dozen steps, however, ere a splitting crack came from the darkness ahead. Without a cry, Mosris plunged on his face.

Then it was that the killer's guns broke loose, and a shout of pain from the hidden marksman, followed by rigid silence, told that Swabert had found his mark.

Then fearlessly he vaulted the fence and brought his friend back, curses quick and hot on his lips. This time there came no shot. Swabert carried the inert figure to the house, and as he went a purpose grew in his heart, incoherent and disjointed at first, but finally striking him clearly. The time had come to kill Hamil.

He placed Morris on a cot and examined the wound in his head, and to his relief found it was only a glance hit.

Morris soon regained consciousness, and as his eyes opened he beheld Swabert crouched in a chair before the fire, his eyes like hot coals. The killer was oblivious to everything but the purpose that enchained him, and did not look up as his friend stirred.

Dizzily Morris got to his feet and tottered across the floor, falling into the other chair. Not till his hand touched Swabert did the latter come to life, then the glance he gave Morris made the young man shudder.

"I'm all right, thanks to you!" he contrived to say.

Swabert's face did not soften, nor did he reply.

"How did you get me back?" asked Morris. "It's odd they didn't shoot at you."

"No, they didn't shoot at me. And the coyote that did shoot won't shoot at nobody else."

"He's dead?" asked Morris in hollow tones.

"I wouldn't give a cent for his chance of being alive."

Morris did not speak for a time after

this. But he was alarmed at his friend's terrible composure. "We can afford to call it quits now," he ventured. "You won't do anything more, will you, Bert?"

"Won't do anything more," echoed Swabert harshly. "What do you mean? You know what I'm here for. I don't call it anything to shoot a crawling snake that shoots from ambush. I'm going—"

"But, Bert, he was a human being!"

"Yes, a human snake, killing for hire. Hamil's the same. Don't talk to me about that part. The time's past for talk. And now I'm waiting till daylight so Hamil can see who's shooting him. I ain't canceled that debt of Tom's yet."

"Bert, you wouldn't be as cold-blooded as that? It's bad enough to kill in anger, but to calm down and then do it—"

"It's law," said Swabert coldly. "Frontier law. And if you think I ain't 'angry,' you watch me when I sight that coyote. A snake's a snake, and when he bites, kill him!"

Morris desisted, realizing that argument was of no avail. He could not stop this shedder of blood—even guilty blood. Swabert spoke again, in the same icy tone:

"You can't see our side of it, kid. You've tried to, but the other way is bred in your bone. I was like that once; I can't help it that I've changed. In a new country the honest men have got to hold down the crooks."

With that he left his chair and threw himself on a cot. It seemed to the young homesteader that he had gone instantly to sleep. He shuddered again.

To sleep peacefully even while one mediated such a deed, did not give him a good opinion of the fitness of things. He sighed as he sought his own bunk.

When broad day was once more in evidence, Swabert, who had not spoken a dozen words since rising, turned to the stable and saddled Rally. Morris followed after, and tried to say something commonplace — but Swabert looked as though nothing could swerve him from his course. He lead Rally to the yard, and was about to mount when an object in the distance caught his glance. Morris turned to look.

It was Wind!

Wind, with a saddle on and bridle-reins trailing down his side. That something unusual had happened was very evident. As the creature dashed up, Morris seized the reins and Wind came to a halt.

"Look, there's one of the stirrups broken," pointed out the homesteader; "and Wind has mud on his side. One of Hamlin's cowboys must have tried to ride him. And look at that raw ring about his neck! If he wasn't tied up, I miss my guess."

As they talked five horsemen swung into view around the hill on the Rattlesnake and pulled their horses to a halt. They looked toward the homesteader's stables, only for a moment, then wheeled about and retraced their way. Morris and Swabert looked at each other.

"Them guys was more excited than the loss of a hoss would make them," commented Swabert briefly. "Well, guess I'll drift."

"Wait—I'm going along," cried Morris.

"Not this time, kid."

Morris pressed his lips together tightly, turned to the great black, and in almost one movement had the broken saddle off. He darted into the stable and came back in an instant with his own, and was just in time to head Wind off as that impatient animal was starting for the brook. In a trice he had the saddle adjusted, swung astride, and turned Wind down the slope toward the fence.

"Now, you grand devil, show us what's in you!" he whispered.

And the black did. Morris never afterward could recall seeing that fence, his only impression was the mighty lengthening strides of the animal that bore him, yet his seat was as smooth as a rocking-chair.

A dark blur, which he knew to be the hill, leaped backward on his left, then the open levels invited. The wind sang by till he could hear hardly nothing but the rushing roar it made, and yet Wind's unearthly speed seemed ever to increase.

For a moment the homesteader almost had a fear of this unfleshly thing he rode. But it passed, and his soul leaped in unison to that starlike flight.

A sudden shout from somewhere near him drew his attention, and he tightened the rein. Ever condescending, Wind decided to humor this request of his master, and slowed down. A gallop, and finally a trot, and Rally loped abreast.

"Good God, Morr," cried Swabert, "that isn't a horse you're riding! I thought a small cyclone was coming."

They rode on and soon came into view of the ranch buildings—Wind often turning his head sidewise to see why his master persisted in going at a snail's trot.

They dismounted at the porch and tied their mounts. As they mounted the step a man stepped from the doorway leading to Hamil's office. Swabert was watchful, but the man did not even notice him. His eyes were fixed on Wind in a sort of awed curiosity.

"Where's the boss?" demanded Swabert, his eyes cold and glittering.

"Ain't you heard?" said the other in surprise. "But no, you couldn't have. The boss was killed this morning—"

"Killed?" Swabert's tone was vacant.

"Yes, killed trying to ride that black devil Wind there! We caught him over here last night—the hoss, I mean—and chained him up in the stable. The hoss was nearly crazy this morning, but the old man would ride him. He—he was shook off like I'd shake off a fly, and the crazy devil trampled him! He's in there."

They followed the direction given and looked down on all that was earthly of the king. Then they turned silently and withdrew.

They were nearly home again when Swabert turned to his friend.

"I'm glad," he announced simply, "that God used an innocent means for paying Hamil off!"

They were silent again for a time. Then it was Morris who spoke:

"Didn't you ask me once where I got Wind? I believe you did. It's strange, come to think of it; your friend, Tom Haller, owned him before."

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SUMMA CUM LAUDE

BY MARY CARTER ANDERSON

WE wondered why he never forged ahead,
For his eyes were full of courage and his heart was brave, we knew;
And the great adventure thrilled him with a joy that comes to few,
Yet he always lagged behind—who should have led.

Some said he lacked ambition for the quest,
Some, that he lacked direction as a poleless needle might,
And others, that he dallied where the primrose path seemed bright,
But the verdict was—he would not do his best.

And then suddenly one day we saw him fall,
And we knew. We knew the handicap he'd carried year by year.
Then we no longer wondered that he never left the rear,
But we marveled that he'd ever marched at all!

Maggie Gives Herself

by Genevieve Hamilton

THE majority of those who chewed the steaks of the Stack Café were men who worked on the hill at the smelter.

On Main Street, in the second block up from the depot, the café had its narrow frontage. In the window were geraniums which by summer might trim themselves with red flowers. As it was January, they left the matter of red to the crape paper around their pots.

It was a diluted red that trimmed them, for the water the geraniums could not drink soaked up the crape paper.

The window was further cheered by a platter of oranges, labels on cans of foodstuffs, and by bottles of tomato catchup. Back of the window stretched the counter, faced by a dozen stools; beyond, fulfilling the sign, "Private Tables for Ladies," were booths where occupants could draw themselves into seclusion with dollar curtains.

Only one waitress was on duty.

It was ten forty-five in the morning, and between hours. Maggie O'Day gave the impression of being contained. It was not all due to the high linen stock that swathed her neck, nor to that her burnt sienna hair was held in a net; it was mostly due to a life of long work-hours which, though it had worn her body, had given her a firm hold on spunk. Maggie was thirty, and she looked it.

Bud Kelly, who was the only man on the consumer's side of the counter, had nearly swallowed his fifty-cent topsirloin.

Maggie wished he would stop talking and leave, for she had heard the engine bell of the train from Southern Cross clang hysterically into the station—and she expected a visitor. Kelly opened a full mouth and laughed. "Suppose you ain't interested in Dan Donlan's bein' raised to foreman in the flotation plant?"

"Maybe I'm more interested in hearing Alex Senegube has struck zinc in the bottom of the Copper-Lined."

"That old mine wizard is still after you, is he? Well, good night, Dan! And Senegube's richer than ever if it's true he's struck zinc—"

"Ain't it true?"

Kelly's looks had been back and forth from his plate to Maggie, and he had not seen the café door open. There stood Senegube.

"If you are talken about the Copper-Lined—her bottom has turned zinc," the miner confirmed, and pushed his short body up on a stool.

Maggie went back to the kitchen to call an order for two fried; then she returned, for Kelly was ready to pay his fifty cents and take a toothpick.

"Maggie," said Senegube, as the

café door closed, "I have promised zinc this week, so I cannot stay down to-night to take you to the show."

"Just as well you can't. To-night is going to be a good night to be out—on the rink."

"I suppose," Senegube replied dryly, "Donlan still knows how to skate."

"Um—some."

Maggie's monosyllables conveyed no doubt, and the miner slid to the other side of the proposition — himself. "Luck is with me, anyway, finden you alone. You can guess, Madgie, why I am taken this time from the business that I came down for?" Senegube leaned across the counter and grabbed Maggie's arm.

"Let go!" she cried. "I'm going for the eggs!"

"I am not in here for eggs—I am here for the chicken!"

"Why don't you say hen?" Maggie laughed, and Senegube released her arm, for the low curtain in the window did not hide them from the street. "That's what I am, Alex—a hen scratching for two young roosters."

"Yas, it is that, and I want you to stop scratchen. Scratchen means scrapen together never more than a little. I have got diggens; diggens enough for me, you, and—the boys!"

"The boys!" echoed Maggie.

"Cannot what I am willen to do for your boys—give them college when they have got their underlearnen; letten them travel—cannot that bring you to love me a little?"

"Alex, you make me feel awful guilty that I don't want to throw my arms around your neck and whisper 'Thine ever more!' but my arms haven't grew that loving inclination—not yet." Maggie leaned her elbows on the counter: "Alex, I'm grateful; and I sure do like you. But you don't set 'my heart a thumpin', bumpin'.' You don't 'make me foolish for days.'"

"What are you singen words of a song like that for? And your age thirty; you are old enough to know better."

Maggie slapped her hands down on the counter. "Thank the Lord, I don't!" she cried; then she turned from Senegube and went for his eggs.

"Say, Madgie," Senegube asked when she had returned and was pouring out a cup of coffee, "did not that husband you left dead of drink up in Big Timber—did not he take that 'foolish for days' longen out of you?"

"Take it out of me!" The slam with which Maggie set the coffee before Senegube would have broken a thinner cup. "Never did he put it in me! I was eighteen when I learned what love wasn't. I married to please my dying mother; she wanted to see me settled with a man who could spend money on me. Lord, but how she did miss her guess!" Maggie again put her elbows on the counter. "That's why, Alex Senegube, I've got a lot of love that hasn't been given out yet to nobody—to hand over to somebody."

"Make it me, Madgie. You have knowed who I was from the first week since you came to take this job—"

"And that makes a widow of me over a year, don't it?"

"And six months agone, when I first asked you, if that hulk, Dan Donlan, had not never happened on Anaconda just about then, by now you hed married me."

"I don't know." But Maggie looked down.

"I know. And I know you keepen me uncertain is maken me olden than you need to have me. Madgie, you promised me last time you would soon tell me final."

Maggie's mouth opened to reply, but at the same time the café door opened and let in three iron-workers. The door and Maggie's mouth shut. Senegube hid his nose in his coffee-cup, and Maggie hurried to let the cook know the noon rush, that began at eleven, was on.

Senegube waited until Maggie started the men on their meal with napkins and glasses of water before he dropped

a dollar on the counter opposite the cash register. The iron-workers talking among themselves enabled him to demand in low-spoken words: "Promise next time to make it final."

Maggie promised.

"Which way is it goen to be?"

"It may be yes—and yet it mayn't." She put down the change. "But if I do say yes," she whispered, "I'll make being a husband to me a pleasant occupation."

Through the midday hours; through the long hours of afternoon; as Maggie sped from counter back to kitchen, back to counter, back to kitchen, side by side with remembering orders ran Senegube's words: "What I am willen to do for your boys—cannot that make you love me a little?" Yes, she admitted it could make her love the little man a little; but Maggie wanted to love a lot, and she longed for a lot of a man to love. Then she would hurry out of the kitchen with a plate of fried potatoes and a platter of fried meat.

Within the high, green-painted boards that fenced the flooded common the ice of the rink held hard and smooth. The scud of skates and voices of children had swung round and round the common since four o'clock in the afternoon. Now it was eight.

On Friday night the band played.

It had already been playing for an hour around the stove in the shelter built in the center of the rink. The year was yet new, and above the shelter a giant Christmas tree still stood, half screening among its boughs balls of colored light. And all this joyousness the company gave the town—free.

The day's work in the Stack Café gave Maggie a weariness by evening; but after supper she always revived if the ice held good. And she had told Senegube it would be a night to skate. Therefore, when Dan Donlan pushed open the door of the little pavilion at the corner of the common, it was Maggie who stepped inside under his arm.

The little room was choked with youth. Donlan passed the time of evening with the proctor who held a whip to keep order, which he never used. The sign on the wall commanded "No Loafing," but the little stove, with its side burned out from overheating, gave out a coveted warmth, and those wedged upon the bench around the walls did loaf.

Maggie secured a seat by lifting, unawares, a small, toasted boy.

"Hello, ma!" cried the usurped to the usurper. Then he turned to his mother's escort. "Say, Mr. Donlan, you've got to let me and ma skate a piece!"

"Sure, Jo!" laughed Donlan as he laced Maggie's skating shoe. "Since your mother belongs to you, guess I'll have to let you and Dave each skate a whole tune with her."

Donlan fastened their walking shoes high up on a beam, where all around the walls shoes hung; then he split a way through the children out to the rink. There the children continued. Arms and legs going, like four-tailed pollywogs, they wriggled around the ice, and what direction the next wriggle would take them a grown person could only guess.

Donlan would have had no easy matter of keeping Maggie for his partner if to Bud Kelly and the other men who asked her to skate she had not made her reply: "Can't to-night; I'm going home soon." When they were swinging in slow, long strokes to "Tipperary," she confided: "I'm turning them down, Dan, because I don't like you when you're mad. When you bring me and I skate with any but the kids—Lord, how you do sulk!"

Donlan made no comment until they had dodged through the end of the rink where the crowd gathered. Then he spoke slowly: "I am glad you are giving me to-night, Maggie. We ain't apt to be skating together much more."

"Dan, I don't get you!" She leaned toward her big partner, for they were about to turn a corner.

"Funny you don't—"

From an unsuspected somewhere a little boy pollywog darted in front of the two, his tail legs tangled, and he flopped down at Maggie's feet. Donlan quickly raised his arms and held Maggie from a fall, and the pollywog got his tails in motion again and squirmed away.

"Ouch!" complained Maggie. In the collision one foot had lost balance and thrown her weight on her ankle. "I got a wrench!" and she let Donlan steer her on her sound foot to the fence. Maggie again said "Ouch!" but her ankle did not hurt her at all compared to the pain Donlan's words had put into her heart. "You said you wasn't going to skate with me no more—to lay me up—is that your way of fixing it?"

She laughed because she wanted to cry.

"Don't talk like that Mag. That hurts me worse than the pain in your foot hurts you."

"Then, Dan, *what* do you mean?"

"Can't you skate no more?"

Maggie took a stroke so unsuccessfully that Donlan had to catch her.

"It's no go," she despaired.

"Then you had better let me help you limp home; and I'll tell you why you and I has finished skating."

The two crossed Main Street and took their way down the east side, compact with the little homes of those who worked on the hill. When they reached the shadows along Third Street, Donlan put his arm around Maggie so snugly she could not limp had she wanted to; she could scarcely walk on her sound foot. And to Maggie this did not seem as if Donlan did not *want* to skate with her again.

On Cedar Street the two turned up. Maggie's small cottage was in the middle of the block. Out of the patch of snow, beside her door the bare twigs of one little lilac-bush stood up like a witch's broom.

Maggie let Donlan fumble the key into the lock; then she hobbled past him into the little sitting-room. The blinds were up, and the dimness shed from the white of the snow-covered town flooded in and by dark shadows revealed the objects of the room. "Got a match?" she asked, finding none as she patted her hand over the big center table.

"A whole pocketful." Donlan closed the door and came over to Maggie. "Wait," he said, putting his arms around her. "Let me hold you like this just one little minute. Then I'll go, and you can light the lamp, and I'll not bother you no more."

"Aren't your words and your actions kind of dislocated to-night—Let go!"

Donlan held her close. "I know Senegube was in to-day. It won't be much longer until he makes you come to a show-down. Maggie, tell him yes."

"Is *that* what you meant?" Maggie jerked herself away from Donlan. "So *you're* playing the little game of beat me to it! Before I can give you walking papers you are wishing me on the old Finn!"

To her wrath Donlan answered gently: "Senegube is a man out of the ordinary, Mag. He's made money; yet nobody can say 'it ain't his by rights.'"

Maggie laughed out loud and began patting the table again in search for a match-box. "Even though you do think you've lost out, I can't see why you're taking so much interest in the man running against you."

"'Tain't him; it's you I'm thinking of, Maggie. I want to see you happy. Senegube can give you an automobile; help, so you needn't do your work; money for a trip whenever you've a mind. And me—I can support you and your boys; but all I could give 'em is a common bringing up; and I know it would make you happy to be able to give your boys advantages like college and travel."

"Jo and Dave—college, travel."

In her words was no expression. Then she looked up in the dimness at

the silhouette of the big man beside her, and through her body she felt the rush of life. "Is that why you want me to marry a man who can give me things you think I'd like—because you love me?"

"Because I love you," Donlan replied. "Little woman, let me kiss you once is all I ask. Give me the comfort of telling me I had a chance if it hadn't been for what you felt right to give your boys."

Along Third Street came the clink of dangling skates and the voices of a group of children singing. The two in the dimness of the little sitting-room knew the group had halted at the corner because the song did not die away. Within the next moments Maggie knew she must reason out no or yes for Senegube's answer.

"Dan," she asked crossly, "who's living *my* life?"

Donlan acknowledged that she was.

"And Senegube," Maggie cried, "he can have my respect—I can like him up to the last notch—" Her words rushed on, marking the spans of her reasoning. "The first time Maggie Gavin married she sacrificed herself for her mother. And now when Maggie O'Day's free to marry again, it's to give herself for her boys—Dan, I wish you'd tell me where Maggie *herself* comes in?"

"It looks as though she was losing out," Donlan confessed.

"Yes! And who's doing the marrying, anyway?"

The song at the corner ended in a chorus of laughter, and among the voices the mother recognized her sons'.

"I would not ask *them* to give themselves for me!" she cried fiercely.

"I didn't know, Mag, you was going to take our parting so hard," and Donlan's voice was full of reproach for himself.

But Maggie's reasoning was not yet done: "Some day my Dave and my Jo will have a heart full of love for some one—if they don't give it to the one it belongs to, they'll be fools!"

"We can't help it if your love belongs to me," was Donlan's logic. "It's the big thing of the world that everybody wants—and oh, little woman, I want it, too!"

Maggie turned and stretched her arms up to the big man's shoulders: "Love's not whole, Dan, unless it's take and *give*. I can give a lot of love to a man; but, believe me, I want a lot of a man to love!"

"I got last tag!" Dave's shout and the two boys' footsteps were very near.

"Quick, Dan, we must light up!" cried Maggie. And Donlan put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a match.

A SOLDIER

BY ELINOR LYON

At sunrise, on the purple slope apart,
He lay and watched the lark's ecstatic dart,
With dreams of beauty growing in his heart.

But noontide's blaze lit up a brazen sky,
Wherein the blood-red banners floated high.
And trumpets shrilled: "To conquer—or to die!"

At twilight, when the last red trench was wrung
From shattered hands, there lay with muted tongue
A poet, dead, with all his songs unsung!

The Crime Line

by Jack Holden

IN the weird glow of a northern night a primitive freight scow snaked in from a sluggish current and grounded on a desolate bank of the Athabasca River, far beyond the law-abiding borders of civilization.

A fresh-faced youth, bravely attired in the scarlet jacket and yellow-striped breeches of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, stepped gingerly over the side of the scow and strained his vision against the baffling velours of the nocturnal wilderness.

From a vantage-point atop his cargo the half-breed boatman also peered into the sighing night.

"No light, no sergeant," he whispered hoarsely; then, as the youthful officer made no reply: "Dangerous job you try 'rest Larry Martin without help."

Constable Caldwell wheeled quickly, boyishly resentful of the admonition.

"Oh, I don't know!" His voice was sharply confident; but, nevertheless, his hand was unsteady as he pulled his automatic part way from its holster and let it slip back with an audible thud. "Guess I can round up the rat that knifed old Devereaux without any assistance from our down-river post."

"Uh-huh!" grunted the boatman. He dropped back into the scow-bottom and reached for his sweep. "Mus' go now. G' luck."

"Thanks. See you on your up trip."

The scow poled out into the moon-spangled waterway.

"Oh, I say!" belatedly called the inexperienced man-hunter. "What's this Larry look like?"

No answer save the silken swish and gurgle of a little rapid that glinted silver in the moonshine.

Constable Caldwell watched the unwieldy scow pitch into the swirl and go gaily cavorting around a corner as though well pleased to be off from the scene of an atrocious murder.

"Uncanny hole to be dumped in," he muttered, again battering his vision against the wall of the gloom. For a moment he almost regretted the adventurous itch that had dragged him from the safe placidity of a bank-clerking career to the dire hazard of capturing a murderer in No Man's Land.

"Guess there'd be some sort of glimmer in the old house if Sergeant McMahon had arrived from Chippewyan, like the major said he would. Wonder what sort of a duffer this McMahon is? Not that it matters a hoot."

The boyish officer pushed his way along an almost obliterated pathway

to the comparative clearing, where, dimly discernible in the somber shades of the all-embracing forest, a huge black blob betokened the oddly fashioned and long deserted log cabin where the murder had been done—and in the vicinity of which the murderer might yet be lurking.

Knifelike gads stung his features. Hidden traps of the wild snagged at his feet. Vicious thorns bit at his hands. A night breeze from the forest depths moaned a dismal warning. The wilderness creaked and groaned a sullen protest of his intrusion. Somber voices all about him seemed to whisper: "Keep back; keep back."

Somewhere in the primitive maw of the ancient waste a wailing plaint quavered into the night and swung to a wild, unearthly shriek, as though the morose spirit of this awesome desolation voiced a despair born of eternal solitude.

The cry brought the red-coated ex-clerk to a startled stop.

"Timber wolf," he scorned his trepidation. "Come, kid, buck up."

"I'm not scared of anything, dead or alive," he muttered stoutly, as if refuting some secret soul accusation. "Come along, murderer; get busy, ghost—"

Close at hand a stick snapped. It might have been a pistol-shot, to judge by the way Constable Caldwell's athletic frame tensed. He crouched behind the huge bole of a dolorously sighing forest giant, automatic clutched in ready grasp.

"Stung again!" he muttered presently, as though resentful of the deception.

He worked forward. Evidently the path had not been trod of late. He gave up hope of expecting a brother officer from a down-river point.

The mysterious old house now loomed close in front of him, specter-like, strangely uncouth, an eery ghost of some forgotten man's ambition, snuggled in the somber embrace of a jealous wilderness. A tree-filtered moon spattered its sagging roof with big blobs of light.

"So that's where Larry slit the old boy's throat," Caldwell thought. "Nice cheerful place—for a murder. Larry is still in the district, I guess, but it's a cinch he's not in that house. Sergeant McMahon's not there, either. He should have arrived—darn it! I'll make sure."

The novice crept up to the crazy structure. He knocked. No reply. No sound of any kind. He pushed open the creaky door and entered.

A shaft of light leaped from the darkness and a blinding radiance stung his eyes. A gruff voice rasped "Hands up!" and he obeyed instantly.

Then a pistol-pointing figure emerged from the gloom, and Constable Caldwell gasped his relief as he discerned the scarlet coat of a brother officer.

"I'm your assistant from Athabasca," he said.

Sergeant McMahon greeted him coldly.

"Damn it, man, you might 'a' got winged," he berated. "So you're the greenhorn the major sent me to help round up Larry Martin. Greenhorn is right. What if it 'd 'a' been Larry in here instead of me? Guess he'd plug you with lead as quick as you'd shoot him—what?"

The reprimanded junior flushed.

"I wouldn't shoot him if I could help it," he said.

"That so?" The sergeant stepped back and scrutinized his assistant critically, an odd little smile flicking over his hard features.

Caldwell vaguely sensed an import in the man's words and actions that he could not quite fathom. He experienced a pang of disappointment. This uncouth sergeant was distinctly different from the spick-and-span brother officers whom he had met. His uniform was unkempt and ill-fitting. There was a little tear on the right side of the tunic.

The stamp of the wild was in the

man's leathery countenance, an animal expression reminiscent of the wolf.

His thin slit of a mouth curved downward. Deep furrows, lining it from aquiline nose to powerful jaw, emphasized its ruthlessness. A huge shock of unkempt hair tumbled over his slanting forehead into the compassionless gray eyes.

There was that about him which suggested the human bloodhound developed to a savage degree of competency.

Throughout Caldwell's small supper-making operations the sergeant reclined on his blanket in front of the cabin's rusty old stove, uncompanionably silent and preoccupied. It was not until Caldwell had settled down beside him that he made an effort at speech.

"Larry Martin was my best friend," he muttered, his voice hoarse and scarcely above a whisper.

Caldwell propped himself up on one elbow and gazed at his granite-faced companion in astonishment.

The sergeant cleared his throat noisily and continued, his voice still dull and colorless:

"It's as vivid as though it happened yesterday — that day, so long ago, when I first took notice of poor old Larry. He was coming along in his Sunday clothes, white collar and all, a little, red-edged Bible under one arm. One of our tough gang says, 'Let's kidnap Gertie,' and we did. Yes, sir; we stuffed a handkerchief in the sissy kid's mouth and lugged him off to our cave, out by the fair grounds.

"Oh, he kicked up a fuss—but inside of a month he was one of the gang. Queer, eh? Well, his mother was dead, and I guess he could go straight to hell, for all his stepmother cared."

Caldwell shifted his position so that he could better watch the sergeant's face. In the flickering yellow glare of the open grate the harsh lines seemed less harsh now.

"And that's the same Larry that slit the old man's throat in this very room?" he queried.

"The same," mumbled his superior officer.

There was a long silence. The night wind wailed about the old house in fitful gusts. Live embers in the ancient stove flared from dull yellow to vivid red. Huge, ungainly shadows flitted like gigantic bats about the dingy, smoke-begrimed walls.

A rat scurried across the floor. A ray of light glued itself to a dark splotch on the floor, and Caldwell caught himself wondering if the splotch was the blood that Larry Martin had shed.

"Go on," he encouraged. For no good reason, a distaste for his law-enforcing task was growing upon him.

The sergeant resumed his dull monotone, as though talking half aloud to himself:

"God only knows why Larry joined our gang. If he only hadn't! He wasn't mean and devilish like we were. Never tied up a cat and pelted it to death with catapults. Didn't even want to steal fruit at first. He'd stay outside an orchard and look after us kinda longing like, and then we'd ask him to have a great, big, juicy pear, and when he'd reach for it we'd jerk it back and eat it with smacking lips, and the juice running down. Oh, those pears! I'd like to have another real pear before I die."

Again the listener sensed a subtle import that he was too dull to comprehend.

"Can't get 'em in this rotten country," he sympathized.

The narrator laced his fingers back of his shaggy head and stared up at the somber shadows flitting about the drab ceiling.

"In a year or two Larry had learned to steal pears as fast as the next one. He learned other things, too; but we didn't get really bad—yet.

"Well, Larry and I were out stealing hickory nuts, one Sunday afternoon, when we found a purse in the road with two five-dollar bills in it. It

looked like a godsend, but Larry didn't want to keep it.

"I persuaded him that we should, all the time wondering if we really should or not. And when I'd pointed out all the things that ten dollars would buy, and Larry's mouth was just watering like for new bats and balls and things, I'm darned if I didn't get cold feet about keeping it. Too late. Larry wouldn't agree to give it up then. So I told him to count me out and keep the whole ten or not, just as he pleased.

"He kept it. Denied having found it when the owner came along and questioned him. We didn't realize it at the time, but right there was the dividing line between read badness and our kiddish imitation.

"That was the crime line!

"Poor old Larry slipped over—because I persuaded him. He was arrested. He shouldered all the blame. He was locked up for ten days with tramps and thieves. Oh, it did poor Larry good; it showed him the error of his ways—not! Great God! it ruined him; it made a criminal out of a kid who was good enough at heart!"

The hardened man-hunter flung his hands up to his face, and for a moment resembled an old lady overcome with emotion. Then his hands dropped suddenly, and his voice clanged harsh and metallic:

"Some lads could have brazened it out. Larry couldn't. And how do you suppose the gang—myself and the others—helped him? Our fathers swore they'd flay us alive if we were ever seen again with the young devil who was leading us astray—think of that!—so we passed Larry up.

"Larry had done time. A dividing line had arisen, and he was on the wrong side of it. He disappeared. I didn't see him again for seven years, not till I met him at Lac la Biche, two months ago. He told me his story then."

"I'd like to hear it," said Caldwell, hugely interested. "Poor devil! I suppose he went from bad to worse."

Sergeant McMahon smiled grimly.

"Larry was still a good kid when he left his home town because he had become an outcast. He resolved to make amends. He went to the city. How was he to know that the cheap lodging-house where he put up was a hangout for petty thieves?

"At that, they didn't get him.

"He hunted for honest work and couldn't find it. To get away from a crooked bunch he gave his last two dollars to an employment agent, shipped three hundred miles to a construction camp, arrived there at midnight, starving, and learned that the contractors were laying men off, instead of taking them on.

"Crookedness wherever he turned. And him at the learning age! Well, he tramped thirty miles to the nearest town, and was flung into jail for being without visible means of support.

"He got out on his eighteenth birthday. He got in again next day. A prominent citizen had been robbed, and the police had to grab some down-and-outer. Larry spent another week at the crook's university before he was released for lack of evidence.

"At the learning age, mind you.

"Middle of winter and no work to be had; no grub to keep body and soul together. Is it any wonder he was tempted? Civilization wouldn't give him an honest living. Civilization had taught him—in jail—the tricks of the thievery trade.

"What in God's name was the boy to do? Starve? Would you? Well, Larry didn't. He only sneaked a pocketful of silverware, at that—but he got five years.

"He took his sentence without a whimper. Then the glad spring broke, and he cursed himself for having given away to temptation. The seasons dragged around and spring came again. And still Larry was caged like a wild beast. And would be for four long years.

"For what?

"For taking a bit of silverware because he had to or starve. Hell! Hadn't he been punished enough? Wasn't one year in prison plenty? The confinement got on his nerves. He just *had* to escape. He tried—failed—got solitary confinement."

In the old stove before which the two officers lay on their blankets a few dull embers still glowed. Sergeant McMahon arose, picked up a can of water, and extinguished them.

Abysmal darkness, chill and sooty, blotted out the cabin interior. Caldwell could not see his hand in front of him. The moaning of the night breeze seemed to invade the room. A creepy patter of rats' feet sounded.

"Can you imagine yourself in this kind of pitch blackness day after day?" came the sergeant's voice from the inky void. "If so, you've got some idea of solitary confinement. It gets to feel as though you were at the bottom of a deep well that's had a load of soot dumped into it.

"The choking black air grips at your gullet like a weasel.

"You call out, you yell, you scream—but it's no use. You beat on the walls till your hands are raw. A million slimy devils drive pins into your brain till all your ideas focus into one. Heaven help you if that one idea isn't a good one—and it never is.

"Down in that hell-hole all the impulses, good and bad, of Larry Martin's soul merged into one desire—revenge on happy, careless humanity outside that had tossed him into a living hell as thoughtlessly as you'd toss an insect into a red-hot stove. Something snapped in his brain. I doubt if he's been quite sane since.

"The thought of revenge bore him up till the end of his term.

"The morning of his release he bought two automatics with his prison wages. He stationed himself at the busiest corner of the city, his plan being to murder a round dozen at least before going down himself. He stood there for a long time, gloating, turning the terrible idea over in his mind like a child reflecting on Christmas morning.

"How sweet was revenge!

"He had wrapped a handkerchief round his right hand, so that when he drew one murder machine from his overcoat pocket it was invisible. He pointed that concealed gun at person after person. He couldn't just decide on whom to begin his butchery.

"He pointed it at an old lady—and something rose up in his throat and half strangled him.

"He put his hand back in his pocket, walked to a river, and threw his guns into it. The old lady's face had brought to his crazy brain a vision of his long departed mother.

"He wanted to lead a righteous life. Too late! Every now and then the desire to slay, to see vigorous life crumple like an empty sack, to hear some one shriek for mercy as he shrieked in the black dungeon, would come stealing over him just as the craving for dope grips a poor devil of a hop fiend. Larry lived a dog's existence.

"At last he fled from civilization, up here to the lonesome north, where there's only human rubbish to kill, and not much of that.

"He told me all about it—over there at Lac la Biche.

"He dreaded a relapse worse than you dread a knife in your back while you're asleep to-night. He knew that if any one ever done him dirt—made him real angry—he'd not be able to hold in. I remember him sneering at our ideas of law and order.

"We'd jail a poor redskin for stealing a pocketful of beans, while he, a shrapnel shell of lust and murder liable to burst at any moment, went here and there as he pleased. He laughed at our bungling civilization—and he was dead right.

"What? Don't you think if he hadn't been jailed for making a kiddish mistake—picking up the purse—

he might have grown up a decent citizen?"

"It's a rotten shame," agreed Constable Caldwell. "I guess lots of criminals get started just like that. I don't think a youngster who has done some small misdeed should be flung into jail with hardened old crooks right straight off the bat."

"Ah! I'm glad you've said that," breathed the hardened man-hunter, an odd catch in his voice.

"But that don't alter the fact that Larry has killed a man and we've got to bring him in, dead or alive."

"Dead or alive it is."

"He'd shoot both of us rather than submit to capture?" surmised Caldwell.

"Would he?" The sergeant's laugh was as mirthless as blasphemy. "He'd shoot us down like rabbits. He's got to—don't you see? He's killed a man. The law means to kill him. To save his life he'll kill a whole regiment. He's in the crime rut.

"He slipped into it years ago when he picked up a purse, and he's never been able to climb out. Once you're in the crime rut, lad, it's the hardest job in all the world to climb out."

The sergeant drew a book from his pocket. At the same instant a beam of moonlight coming through a tiny slit of a window lighted up dimly the interior of the cabin; and Caldwell saw that the book was a little, dark-edged Bible.

"Let's pray for poor old Larry," McMahon said. "Then, after we've had a few winks, we'll go out and shoot him, or drag him in to let the law hang him."

For a quarter of an hour Sergeant McMahon read from the Bible, Caldwell joining in as best he could. Then the odd pair sought repose.

The mournful night noises blended into a dirge, and Constable Caldwell dozed off. He awoke with a start. A vision of jail-crazed Larry, creeping about like a weasel and slitting throats in the darkness because he had to or die on the gallows, had impinged on his dreams.

He tiptoed to the window and gazed out into the sighing night. Thinking of Larry skulking out there in the woods, a prison-crazed replica of a man to be hunted down and killed like a mad dog, Caldwell shuddered. And that same Larry had been a good kid, had tried to live honestly.

Yes, civilization still contained flaws—terrible flaws. Noiselessly the young officer practised whipping his automatic from its sheath. He wondered if, when they met, his bullet would find its mark quicker than Larry's.

At daybreak Sergeant McMahon awoke from a sound sleep and issued his orders.

"You take that trail through to Lac la Biche," he instructed, "and I'll follow the other one that leads to Baptiste Lake and on to the new railroad. Tell the major not to worry if I don't show up for a month. If Larry has taken this trail I'll get him, no matter how long it takes."

The law-hounds adjusted their packs and commenced their long hikes, one going east and the other west.

After two hours of solitary travel, Constable Caldwell missed his compass and retraced his steps, pondering as he walked the odd character of Sergeant McMahon. Why, at one point in his narrative the wolf-visaged sergeant had appeared to be on the verge of womanly tears. And the praying—that was odd.

He was a strange officer, surely. It was curious that his uniform fitted him no better, that it had that little hole in the right breast.

And then, off the trail, some fifty yards from the old house, the young officer stumbled on a full and complete explanation. He stumbled on a dead body, a body that he was able presently to identify as that of the *real* Sergeant McMahon.

It had been stripped of its uniform, and had lain there, stark and cold, for eighteen hours at least.