SATURDAY DECEMBER 30 TEN CENTS

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Nuala O'Malley

by H. Bedford-Jones

A Stirring Story of Battle-Torn Ireland

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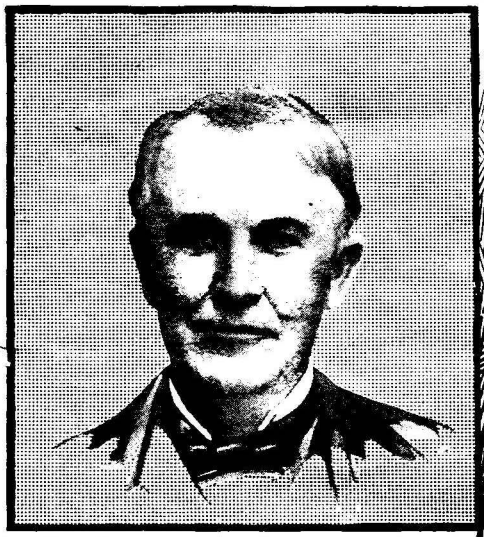

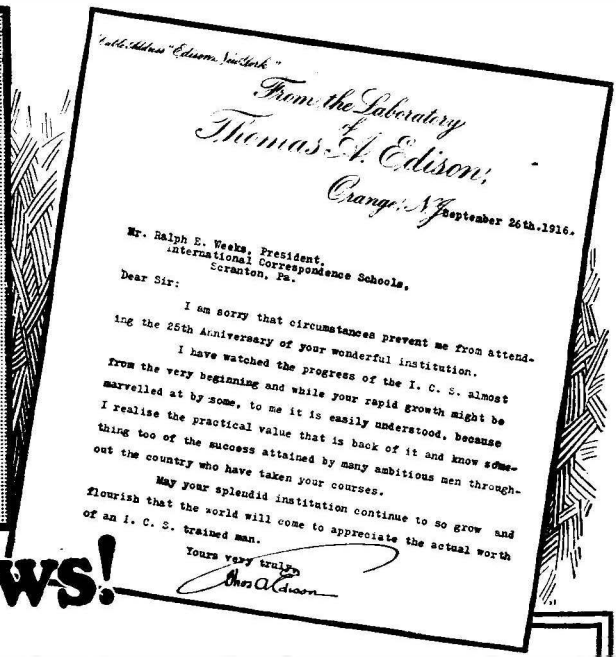

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXVI — NUMBER 2

CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 30, 1916

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

FOUR SHORT STORIES

VERSE

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 WEST FORTIETH STREET, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXVI NUMBER 2

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1916

Nuala O'Malley

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "Malay Gold," "The Ghost Hill," "John Solomon, Supercargo," etc.

THIS is a stirring, entrancing story of Erin when Cromwell was campaigning, and when the fighting heritage that is every Irishman's found vent through sword and ax and fire. You meet Brian Buidh, Brian of the Yellow Hair, more thrilling than even your favorite movie hero; and as for Nuala herself—well, just wait till you meet her!—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE BLACK WOMAN.

THE horseman reined in as his jaded steed scrambled up the shelving bank, and for a space sat there motionless, for which the horse gave mute thanks. The moon was struggling to heave through fleecy clouds, as it was hard on midnight; in the half obscurity the rider gazed around suspiciously.

There was nothing in sight to cause any man fear. Behind him rippled the Dee, and all around was desolation. Ardee itself lay a good two miles in the rear, burned and laid waste six weeks before, and ten miles to the south lay Drogheda. Indeed, as the horseman gazed about, he caught sight of a faint glare on the horizon that drew a bitter word from his lips.

Dismounting with some difficulty, owing to his cloak and Spanish hat, he examined a long, raking gash in his horse's flank; then flung off hat and cloak and calmly proceeded to bind up his own naked shoulder beneath.

His was a strange figure, indeed, now that he stood revealed. He wore no clothing save breeches and high riding-boots; an enormous sword without a sheath was girt about his waist, and the caked blood on his shoulder and cheek made his fair skin stand out with startling contrast.

About his shoulders fell long hair of ruddy yellow, while his face was young

and yet very bitter, tortured by both physical and mental anguish, as it seemed. He bound up the deep slash in his shoulder with a strip of cloth torn from his cloak, felt his wealed cheek tenderly, then flung the cloak about him again and drew down his broad-brimmed hat as he turned to his weary horse.

"Well, my friend," and his voice sounded whimsical for all its rich tone, "you've had a change of masters to-day, eh? I'd like to spare you, but man's life is first, though Heaven knows it's worth little in Ireland this day!" With that he reeled and caught at the saddle for support, put down his head, and sobbed unrestrainedly.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned at length, straightening himself to shake a clenched and blood-splashed fist at the sky. "Where were You this day? God! God! The blood of men on Thine altars—"

"Faith, you must be new come to Ireland, then!"

At the shrill, mocking voice the man whirled about and his huge blade was out like a flash. But only a cackling laugh answered him, as down from the bank above slipped a perfect hag of a creature, and he drew back in alarm. At that instant the moon flooded out; his sudden motion had flung off his wide hat, and he stood staring at the wrinkled creature whose scanty garments and thin-shredded gray locks were pierced by a pair of weird brown eyes.

Then he quivered indeed, and even the poor horse took a step backward. for the old woman had flung up her arms with a shrill cry as she gazed on the yellow-haired young man.

"The O'Neill!" The words seemed to burst from her involuntarily. She craned forward, her hands twisting at her ragged shawl, and a flood of Gaelic poured from her lips as she stared at the awe-struck man.

"Are you, then, the earl, come back from the dead? Ghost of Tyr-owen, why stand you here idle in the gap of Ulster, where once Cuculain fought against the host of Meave? Do you also stand here to fight as he fought—"

"Peace, mad-woman!" exclaimed the young man, stooping after his hat. "Peace, and be off out of my way, for I have far to ride."

The Gaelic words came roughly and brokenly from him, but the old hag took no heed. Instead, she advanced swiftly and laid her hand on his arm, still gazing into his face with a great wonder on her wrinkled features.

"Who are you?" she whispered. "Tell the Black Woman your name, if you are no ghost! For even as you stand now, once did these eyes see the great earl himself."

"I am from Drogheda," answered the man, something very like fear stamped on his powerful and bitter-touched young face. "My name is Brian Buidh, and I ride to join Owen Ruadh—"

"Liar!" The old woman spat forth the word with a cackle of laughter. "Oh, you cannot fool the Black Woman. Yellow Brian! Listen—Brian your name is, and Yellow Brian your name shall be indeed, since this is your will. Owen Ruadh O'Neill lies at the O'Reilly stead at Lough Oughter, but you shall never ride to war behind him, Brian Buidh! No—the Black Woman tells you, and the Black Woman knows. Instead, you shall ride into the west, and there shall be a storm of men—a storm of men behind you and before you—"

"For the love of Heaven. have done!" cried Yellow Brian, shrinking before her. and yet with anger in his face. "Are you crazed, woman? Drogheda has fallen; O'Neill must join with the royalists, and never shall I ride into the west. Be off, for I have no money."

He turned to mount, but again she stopped him. It seemed to him that there was strange power in that withered hand which rested so lightly on his arm.

"The Black Woman needs no money, Yellow Brian," she cackled merrily. "You shall meet me once again, on a black day for you; and when you meet with Cath-

barr of the Ax you shall remember me, Brian Buidh; and when you ride into the west and meet with the Bird Daughter you shall remember me.

"So go, Yellow Brian, upon whose heart is stamped the red hand of the O'Neills! *Beannacht leath!*"

"*Beannacht leath,*" repeated the man thickly.

There was a rustle of bushes, and he was alone, wiping the cold sweat from his face.

"Woman or fiend!" he muttered hoarsely. "How did she know that last? Yes, she was crazed, no doubt. I suppose that I do look like the earl—since he was my grandfather!"

And with a bitter laugh he climbed into the saddle and pushed his horse up the bank. The bushes closed behind him, the night closed over him, but it was long ere the weird words of the old hag who called herself the Black Woman were closed from his mind.

For, after all, Yellow Brian was of right not alone an O'Neill, but The O'Neill.

CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNING OF THE STORM.

THE people of every nation—that is, the tillers of the soil, the people who form the backbone of their race—are in continual expectancy of a Man and a Day. Theirs is always the, perhaps, dumb hope, but still the hope, that in their future lie these two things, a Man and a Day. Sometimes the Man has come and the Day has failed; sometimes the Day has come and there has been no Man to use it; but now all Ireland had swept up in a wild roar, knowing that the Man and the Day had come together.

And so, in truth, they had. Owen, the Ruadh, or red, O'Neill, had fought a desperate struggle against the royalists. Little by little he had cemented his own people together, his personal qualities and his splendid generalship had overborne all else, and the victory of Benburb had crowned the whole. Then Owen Ruadh was stricken down with sickness, Cromwell landed and stormed Drogheda, and Yellow Brian had fought clear and fled away to the kinsman he had never seen.

Now, standing on the castle ramparts overlooking Lough Oughter, Yellow Brian stared moodily out at the lake. His identity had been revealed to none, and the name of Brian Buidh had little meaning to any in Ireland. Years since he who was The O'Neill, the same whom the English called Earl of Tyr-owen, had fled with his family from the land. His eldest son John had settled at the Spanish court.

John was a spineless man, unworthy son of a great father, content to idle away his life in ease and quiet. And it was in the court of Spain that Brian O'Neill had been born, with only an old Irishwoman to nurse him and teach him the tongue and tidings of Ireland which his father cared nothing for.

Yellow Brian had written out these things, sending the letter to the sick general who lay within the castle. His terrible news of Drogheda had created consternation, but already O'Neill's forces had been sent to join the royalists against the common foe. All Ireland was distraught by war. Royalist, patriot, and Parliament man fought each against the other, and the only man who could have faced Cromwell lay sick unto death.

The Day was passing, the Man was passing, and shadow lay upon all the land.

A man came up and touched Yellow Brian's arm, with word that Owen Ruadh would see him at once. Brian nodded, following. He was well garbed now, and a steel jack glittered from beneath his dark-red cloak as he strode along. Upon his strong-set face brooded bitterness, but his eyes were young for all their cold blue, and his ruddy hair shone like spun gold in the sunlight; while his firm mouth and chin, his erect figure, and his massive shoulders gained him more than one

look of appreciation from the clustered O'Reillys.

He followed the attendant to a large room, whose huge mantel was carven with the red hand and supporting lions of the clan Reilly, and passed over to the bed beside the window. He had requested to see O'Neill alone, and the attendant withdrew silently. Brian approached the bed, and stood looking down at the man who was passing from Ireland.

Sharp and bright were the eyes as ever, but the red beard was grayed and the face was waxen; a spark of color came to it, as Owen Ruadh stretched forth a hand to take that of his visitor.

"Brian O'Neill!" he exclaimed, in a voice singularly like that of Brian himself. "Welcome, kinsman! But why the silence you enjoined in your letter?"

"My name is Yellow Brian," answered the younger man somberly. "I have none other, general. You know the gist of my story, and here is the rest. I broke with my father, for he would hear nothing of my coming to Ireland. So I cast off his name and left him to his cursed idleness, reaching Drogheda barely in time to take part in the siege. I managed to cut through, as you know, and meant to take service with you—"

He paused, for words did not come easily to him, as with all his race. A low groan broke from the crippled warrior.

"Too late, kinsman, too late! Cromwell is come, and I will never sit a horse again—ah, no protests, lad! How old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"By my faith, you look thirty! Lad, my heart is sore for you. I am wasted and broken. I have no money, and Cromwell will shatter all before him; I can do naught save give you advice."

"I want naught," broke in Brian quickly, a little glint as of ice in his blue eyes. "Not for that did I cast off my name and come to—"

"Tut, tut, lad!" O'Neill reproved him gently. "I understand, so say no more of that matter. You are Brian Buidh, but to me you are my kinsman, the rightful head of my house. You can do two things, Yellow Brian—either follow my advice, or go down to ruin with all Ireland. Now say, which shall it be?"

Brian gazed at him with thoughtful face. What was the meaning of this dark speech? As he looked into the keen, death-smitten eyes of the man who might have saved Ireland, he smiled a little.

"I see naught but ruin, Owen Ruadh," he replied slowly. "I care little for my life, having no ties left on this earth—"

"Oh, nonsense!" broke in the other impatiently. "You are young, lad—the bitterness will soon pass, trust me. Now see, here is my advice, such advice as I would give no other man alive. I am dying, Yellow Brian. Well, I know that Cromwell will break down all I have built up, and I can see no brightness for my country. But for you I can see much. You are young, powerful, the last of the old race; you look strangely like the old earl, Brian!"

The younger man started. For the first time in many days he remembered that crazed hag he had met by the Dee water the night of Drogheda.

"Now, harken well. I tell you that our house lies in the dust, Brian; there is no hope for it or for any O'Neill. But for Yellow Brian there is hope. You must carve out a holding for yourself, for you are a ruler of men by your face, lad. Go into Galway, and there, where Cromwell's men will have hardest fighting of all, gather a force and make head. I have heard strange tales of a man who has done this very thing—they say he has seized on a castle somewhere near Bertraghboy Bay, in Galway, and— But I am getting weak, Brian lad. Hearken well—Ireland is lost; carve out now for your own hand, for the Red Hand of the old house, lad! And take this for my sake."

Almost whispering the last words, Owen Ruadh took from his finger a signet graven deeply with the Red Hand of Tyrowen. Brian accepted it gravely, kissed

the hand that gave it, and with tears choking his throat, left the chamber of the man who was passing from Ireland.

He had been there a brief fifteen minutes, yet it seemed that an age had passed. Both he and the sick man had said much in few words, for they were both men who spared speech and did much. But Brian had received a great wrench.

As he had said, he had cast off his father, for the grandfather's blood ran riot within him, and had kindled to burning rage against the sluggard who had made his name a thing of reproach in all lands. With the overstrong bitterness of youth he had meant to die sword in hand, fighting for Ireland. The few burning words of Owen Ruadh had stripped all this false heroism from him, however, and had sent a flame of sanity into his brain.

Brian returned slowly to the round tower, and stood looking out over the waters, for the castle was built on an island in the lake a mile from shore. It was nearing sunset, and snow was in the air—the first snow, for this was the end of September.

"Ruin—the storm of men!" He repeated unconsciously the words of the hag who had stopped him by the Dee water. "What shall I do? Which is the part of a man, after all; to fall for Ireland or to hew out new lands and found a new house in the west? By my hilt! That old hag told me truly after all!"

At that thought he stood silent, his eyes troubled. What was this fate which seemed to drive him into the west, instead of leading him to the flame of swords as he had so long hoped and dreamed? Death meant little to him; honor meant much. All his life he had lived in Spain, yet it had been a double life. He had ridden and hunted and learned arms with the young nobles of the court, but he had talked and sorrowed and dreamed with the old Irishwoman who had nursed him.

After all, it is often the dreams of the youth which determine the career of the man, he reflected.

Which path should he take? As he stood there struggling with himself, his hand went unconsciously to his long, powerful jaw; it was a gesture habitual with him when in deep thought—which he seldom was, however. Now the youth in him spoke for death, now the sanity which had flashed into his brain from that of the sick man spoke for the life of deeds and renown which lay in the west.

An incident might turn him either way—and the incident came in the shape of a very tall old man who wore the Irish garb of belted, long-sleeved tunic and woolen hose, with iron-soled shoes. The old man's face was cunning, but his eyes were bright and keen and deep gray; his gray hair hung low to conceal his lopped ears, and there hung about him an indescribable air of shrewdness faced with apparent openness of heart.

Brian glanced at him, remembered that he had heard him called Turlough Wolf, and looked away carelessly, absorbed in his own thought. But the old man halted abruptly with an exclamation:

"*Corp na diaoul!* Where got you that face and that gesture, Drogheda man?"

Brian looked at him, frowning.

"What mean you, Turlough Wolf?"

The other stared, his thin jaw fallen.

"Why — why," he stammered, "I thought it had been The O'Neill come to life again! When I was a boy I have seen the earl hold his hand to his chin—often, often! And—and you look like him, Brian Buidh—"

"Nonsense!" Brian forced a laugh, but as he folded his arms again the glitter of O'Neill's ring on his finger caught the sharp gray eyes.

Turlough Wolf started.

"Listen!" he said, coming forward insinuatingly. "Yellow Brian, no man knows who you are, nor do I ask. But Turlough Wolf knows a man when he sees one, a chieftain among men. I owe no man service; but if you will need a swift brain, a cunning hand, and an eye that can read the hearts of men, I will serve you."

Brian looked down into the shrewd

face in wonder, then waved an impatient hand.

"No use, Turlough Wolf. I have no money to pay for service, and to-night I must ride out to seek I know not what—nay, whether I ride west or east or south, I know not!"

He turned abruptly, wishing to close the matter, but the old man laid a restraining hand on his shoulder.

"I seek no money, Yellow Brian. I seek only a master such as yourself; a man who is a master among men, and whom I can set higher still if he will heed my counsels. I am old, you are young; I know all parts of the land by heart, from the Mayo shore to Youghal, and I am skilled at many things. Take my service and you will not regret it."

Brian hesitated. After all, he considered, the thing came close to being uncanny. The Black Woman by Dee water; Owen Ruadh himself, and now this Ulysseslike Turlough Wolf—whither was fate driving him? Was he really to meet such persons as the Bird Daughter and Cathbarr of the Ax, or were they only the figment of a crazed old woman's brain?

So he hesitated, gazing down into those clear gray eyes. And as he looked it seemed to him that he found strange things in them, strange urgings that touched the chords of his soul. After all, adventure lay in the west, and he was young!

"Good!" he said, gravely extending his hand. "To-night we ride to the west, you and I. Come; let us see O'Reilly about horses."

And this was the beginning of the storm of men that came upon the west.

CHAPTER III.

THE DARK MASTER.

"THERE are two things, Yellow Brian, for you to mind. First, you must have men at your back who know you for their master; second, you must stand alone, giving and receiving aid from no man or party in the land."

Brian nodded and stored away the words in his heart, for in their three weeks of wandering he had learned that Turlough Wolf was better aid than many men. It was his doing that, when they had chanced on a party of ravagers beyond Carrick, Yellow Brian had been led into strife with their leader. The upshot of that matter was that there was a dead rover; Yellow Brian had a dozen horsemen behind him and money in his purse, and of the dozen none but feared utterly this silent man who fought like a fiend.

To the dozen had been added others—four Scotch plunderers strayed from Hamilton's horse and half a dozen Breffnians from Ormond's army, who had been driven out of Munster by the rising of the Parliament men there. They were a sadly mixed score, of all races and creeds, but were fighting ruffians to a man, and were bound together by Brian's solemn pledge that he himself would slay any who quarreled. The result was peace.

So now, with a good score of men behind him, Yellow Brian had ridden down into Galway, was past Lough Corrib and Iar Connaught, and was hard upon Connemara.

There was a thin snow upon the hills, and the bleak wind presaged more; but the score of men sang lustily as they rode. Two days before they had come upon a dozen strayed Royalist plunderers, and had gained great store of food and drink—particularly drink. So all were well content for the time being.

"Turlough," asked Brian suddenly, as they rode side by side, "did you ever hear of one called the Black Woman?"

The Wolf crossed himself and grimaced.

"That I have, Yellow Brian, but dimly. They say she deals in magic and sorcery, and no good comes of meeting with her. But stop — there are horsemen on the road! Scatter the men, and quickly; let us two bide here."

There was cunning in the advice, for the two had come to a bend in the road

and the men were a hundred yards behind them. Brian drew rein at sight of a score of men a scant quarter-mile away and riding up the hill toward them. He knew that they must also have been seen, but his men would still be out of sight, so he turned with a quick word:

"Off into the rocks, men! If I raise my sword, come and strike. Off!"

As he spoke he bared that same huge cut-or-thrust brand he had borne from Drogheda and set the point on his boot. Instantly the men scattered on either side the road, where black rocks thrust up from the snow, and within two minutes they and their horses had disappeared.

The riders below came steadily forward in a clump, and Brian saw old Turlough staring with bulging eyes. Then the Wolf half caught at his bridle, as if minded to fly, and his hands were trembling.

"What ails you, man?" smiled Brian. "Are they magicians and sorcerers, then?"

"No, *fareer gair*—worse luck!" blurted out the other. "Look at the little man who rides first, Yellow Brian!"

Brian squinted against the snow-glare, and saw that the leader of the approaching party seemed indeed to be a little man with hunched shoulders and head that glinted steel.

"A hunchback!" he exclaimed. "Well, who is he?"

"The Dark Master—O'Donnell More himself! It is in my mind that this is a black day, Brian Buidh. O'Donnell More is the master of all men at craft, and the match of most men at weapons. Beware of him, master, beware! I had thought that he was still under siege at Bertragh Castle, else I had never taken this road."

"Nonsense!" laughed out Brian joyously, drinking in the clear afternoon air. "So much the more honor if we slay him, Turlough Wolf! Let him match me at weapons, or you at wits, if he can!"

Turlough muttered something and drew back behind Brian's steed with pallid face. Yellow Brian, however, having a sure trust in his own right arm and his hidden men, scanned the approaching O'Donnell curiously, seeking what had inspired such unwonted fear in the old gray Wolf.

He could find nothing ominous in that hunched figure, save its mail-coat and steel helm. Yet the face was peculiar. Over a drooping mustache of black flared forth two intense black eyes. Brian noted this, and the thin, curved nose and prominent chin, and laughed again.

"Who is this Dark Master, Turlough?"

The other shivered slightly. "He is an O'Donnell from the north, come here some ten years since—he seized on Bertragh even as we intend seizing on a stead, and has since done evil things in the land. Now hush, for they say the wind bears him idle talk."

Brian's thin lips curved a trifle scornfully, but he kept silence, watching the approaching men. At fifty yards' distance they halted. Their leader eyed the motionless pair for a moment and then slowly rode on alone, waving back his followers. And Yellow Brian made a strange figure, with his ruddy hair streaming from beneath his steel cap and the bright, naked sword rising up from toe to head beside him.

"Well?" O'Donnell More's voice was deep and harsh, though Brian afterward found that it could be changed to suit its owner's mood. "Who are you thus disputing my passage?"

"I am Brian Buidh," came Brian's curt reply. "As for dispute, that is as you will."

"Yellow Brian?" The black brows shot up in surprise. "A strange name. Whence come you, and seeking what?"

"I seek men, O'Donnell More." Brian swiftly determined that this was a man who might give him aid, a man after his own heart. "Whence I come is my affair. Give me men, and I will repay with gold."

"What need have you of men, Yellow Brian," came the sardonic answer, "when your own lie hidden among the rocks?"

Now indeed Brian started, whereat the other smiled grimly.

"How knew you that?"

"If you recognized me from afar, you had not stayed to meet me unless you had men," stated O'Donnell shrewdly enough.

"True," said Brian, and laughed out. "Well said, O'Donnell. I have a score, and want another score. I will match mine against yours, or make a pact, as you desire."

The Dark Master sat fingering his sword-hilt and considered. With the black brows down and the black eyes fixed on him, Brian suddenly began to like the man less.

"I will give you service," returned O'Donnell at last.

Brian smiled. "Men serve me, not I them."

At this curt answer O'Donnell looked black, then fell into thought, his shoulders hunched up and his head drawn in like the head of a turtle. Brian wished now that he had struck first and talked afterward.

Finally the Dark Master looked up with a slow smile.

"Welcome to you, Brian of the hard eyes and hollow cheeks," he said. "*Slaintahut!* I will not give you men, but I will give you the loan of men if you will do me one of two favors. Ten miles to the south of here there is an old tower on a cliff, and in the tower dwells a man with certain companions who sets me at naught. On an island out near Golam Head is a castle where a woman rules, who has also set me at naught. Go, reduce either of these twain, and I will lend you twoscore men for three months."

Brian sat his great horse and looked at the Dark Master. He would have sought advice from Turlough Wolf, save that he did not like to turn his back on those burning eyes. After all, the pact was not a bad one.

"These enemies of yours—who are they, and what force have they?"

The Dark Master chuckled, and his head shot out from between his shoulders.

"The man is called Cathbarr of the Ax, and he is a hard man to fight, for he has ten men like himself, axmen all. The woman cannot fight, but she has a swift mind, many men, and her name is Nuala O'Malley, of the O'Malleys of Erris."

"I had sooner fight a man than a woman," returned Brian slowly. "Also, this Cathbarr of the Ax has fewer men. I will do you this favor, O'Donnell Dubh."

He gave no sign of the wonder that had shot into his mind at the name of Cathbarr, except that his blue eyes seemed changed suddenly to cold ice. The Dark Master saw the change, and his smile withered. Brian, watching him, reflected that this malformed freebooter could be venomous-looking at times.

"I have passed my word," O'Donnell the Black made curt answer. "Fetch either of the twain to Bertragh, dead or alive, and you have the loan of twoscore men for three months, free. Is it a pact?"

"It is a pact," answered Brian, and at that the other galloped back to his men.

Brian swung his sword and flung it high into the air; before it had flashed down to nestle in his palm again, his men were scrambling into the road. He sheathed the sword, smiling a little, and turned to Turlough.

"Well? To your mind or not, Wolf?"

"My father saw the Brown Geraldine at Dublin," responded that worthy, scratching the gray beard which had begun to sprout. "They broke his bones with the back of an ax and swung him out in a cage until he died, and after. He made pacts too easily."

"Well?" asked Brian again, but a dull flush crossed his cheeks.

"I gave you my rede," said Turlough sullenly. "I said to stand alone, receiving aid from neither man nor faction. Now there is mischief to be repaired."

"Then my sword shall repair it," said Brian, and ordered the men to swing in after him. "Guide us to this tower of Cathbarr's, for my honor is in my own keeping."

They swung about and headed to the south and the sea.

The hill-paths, which Turlough Wolf seemed to know perfectly, were cruelly hard on the horses; none were as yet trodden down, for the snow was fresh, and all the west coast lay desolate. The plague had stricken Galway and Mayo heavily that year, smiting the mountains with death. Some few parties of Roundhead horse had come through, because they feared God and Ireton more than the plague, and some Royalists had fled up from the south for much the same reason.

In any case, Yellow Brian found all the land desolate, and liked it. The more wasted the land, he reflected, the more chance for that sword of his to find swinging-room. As he had ridden, news had come from the east — news of the Wexford killing and the curse that was come upon the land. Owen Ruadh O'Neill was not yet dead, but Brian knew that he had prophesied truly. Ireland's day was gloaming fast.

Despite the dismal tone of Turlough Wolf, Brian told himself that he had done a good day's work. O'Donnell Dubh would keep his word beyond any question. As for the man he was to slay, the only part of it which troubled Brian was the prediction of the Black Woman at the Dee water. She had known him, and had prophesied O'Neill's death, and had spoken of the west and this Cathbarr of the Ax. After all, however, she might have shot a chance shaft which had gone true. Brian had no faith in magic.

All that afternoon he rode on, Turlough Wolf ahead of him, the men behind. They feared and hated the old Wolf as much as they feared and loved Brian.

Progress was slow, owing to the bad paths, the snow, and sundry changes of direction, so that when night fell they had covered but eight miles of the ten. Turlough suggested that they push on and finish their business at a stroke, but Brian curtly refused. So the men made camp in lee of a cliff and proceeded to feast away the last of their provisions and wine, in confidence that on the morrow they would have more, or else would need none.

Brian and Turlough built a fire apart, and after their repast Brian broke silence with a request for information about Cathbarr. It was his first speech since the parting with the Dark Master.

"I never heard of him," responded Turlough. "No doubt he is some outlaw who has become a thorn in the Dark Master's flesh. With the woman it is different."

"Tell me of her," said Brian, gazing into the fire.

"She is an O'Malley, and, like all the clan, makes much of ships and seamen and little of horses and riders. When the Dark Master came, ten years ago, he slew her father and mother by treachery, and would have slain her but that her men carried her off. She was a child then. Now she is a woman, very bitter against O'Donnell Dubh, and is allied with the Parliament so that her ships may have the run of the seas, it is said. O'Donnell takes sides with no faction, but caters to all. He lays nets and snares, and men fall into them, and he laughs."

"Why is Nuala O'Malley called the Bird Daughter?" asked Brian quietly.

At this question old Turlough rose on his elbow, and in his wide, gray eyes was set mingled fear and wonder.

"*M'anam an diaoul!*" he spat out. "Who are you to know this thing?"

"Answer my question," returned Brian, hiding his own surprise.

"Seven years ago, master, I was at Sligo Bay with O'Dowda when Hamilton cut us to pieces. Nuala O'Malley had brought us some powder—she was but a slip of a girl then. In the evening I was down at the ship when I saw her come from below, a hooded pigeon in her hands. She whispered in the bird's ear, set off the hood, and the bird flew into the night. I named her Bird Daughter, but no other man knew the name."

"Then a woman did," chuckled Brian

dryly. "It was but a carrier pigeon, Turlough; I have seen them used in Spain. Now listen to me."

With that he told him of the Black Woman and his weird meeting at Dee water. Old Turlough listened in no little amazement, for he was full of superstitious fancies, but Brian said nothing of his own name. The uncanny prophecies, however, which now seemed on the road to fulfilment were enough to give any man pause.

When he had finished, a very subdued Turlough Wolf stated that the Black Woman was an old hag who wandered all over the land, that some called her crazy and others thought her inspired, and that his own belief was that she was a banshee, no less.

At this Brian saw the thing in a more rational light. The old woman knew of this nook in the west, and, attracted to him by his resemblance to the long-dead earl, she had endeavored to steer him thither. After all, it was quite simple.

Of course, old Turlough swore that he had never breathed his name of Bird Daughter to a living soul, and that it was but a name he had used in his own mind for the slim girl who had fetched powder from the south. Brian chuckled, guessing that Turlough was not the only one who had seen carrier pigeons used, and who had ascribed the thing to higher powers.

The incident served the purpose of establishing a firmer intimacy between Brian and the old man, however, and convinced Turlough that his master was destined to fly high. Nor through all the storm of men that befell after did Turlough again breathe reproof as he had dared that day.

"I begin to see that your advice was good, Turlough Wolf," said Brian the next morning, as he rode shivering from camp. "As to making my men know me for their master, that troubles me little; but I think it will be a hard matter to avoid making pacts, and to stand alone."

"Lean on your sword," grunted old Turlough. "To my notion, such friendship as that huge blade of yours can give is better than good. Order men ahead."

Brian nodded and sent two of the men ahead as scouts, with the Wolf himself. For the better part of an hour they made slow headway among the rocks, and then emerged suddenly on the slope leading down to the cliffs and sea. Turlough pointed to the left.

"There lies the tower, if I mistake not."

Drawing rein, Brian saw at once why he had been sent on this errand. Cathbarr's tower was an old ruin at the end of a long and narrow headland—indeed, at high tide most of the headland would be covered, for it was low and yet beyond shot of the cliffs. Except from the water, it was almost impregnable; cannon might have reached it from shore, but two axmen could have held the narrow way against an army.

Brian laughed softly and ordered the men to remain where they were.

"What are you going to do, master?" queried old Turlough anxiously.

"I am going to lean on my sword, as you advised me," chuckled Brian, and rode on alone.

CHAPTER IV.

BRIAN LEANS ON HIS SWORD.

As he had foreseen, Brian was allowed to ride across the narrow neck of land where his men would have had to battle for progress. It was from no mere bravado that he had gone forward alone to the tower, but because men were worth saving, and he believed that his own sword was a match for any ax. If this ruffian Cathbarr was a freebooting outlaw, he would be willing enough to stake his ten men on his prowess, and Yellow Brian was very anxious to have those ten axmen behind him.

At the top of the tower men watched and steel glistened; and as Brian rode up

to the low gateway, it was flung open and a man strode out. This man hardly came up to Brian's conception of an outlaw, except as to stature.

He was a good six feet four, reflected Brian as he drew rein and waited, and was built in proportion—or, rather, out of proportion. His shoulders and chest seemed tremendous, and a long mail-shirt reached to his knees; his hair was short-clipped and brown, and beneath his curly brown beard Brian made out a massive face, wide-set brown eyes, and an air not so much ruffianly as of cheerful good-humor.

Brian had no need to ask his name, however, for in one hand he carried a weapon such as had seldom seen the light since powder had come to Ireland. It was an ax, some five feet from haft to helve; double-bladed, each blade eight inches long, curved back slightly, and two inches thick by twice as much wide. The edges, which came down sharply from the thickness, were not overkeen, and were not meant to be so. When the thing struck, that was the end of what stood before it.

"*Cead mile failte!*" cried Cathbarr of the Ax in a deep, rumbling voice, his white teeth flashing through his beard in a smile. "A hundred thousand welcomes to you, swordsman! Are you come to capture my lordly castle?"

"No; your men," laughed Brian, liking this huge, merry giant on the instant. "I am come from O'Donnell Dubh to reduce you and fetch you to him."

The smile froze on the giant's face.

"I am sorry for that, yellow one! I like your face and your thews, and to find that you serve the black traitor of Bertragh is an ill thing."

"I serve no man," answered Brian easily. "I need men. If I conquer you, O'Donnell lends me twoscore men for three months; also, by conquering you I win your men to me, which makes fifty. With my seventy men, I shall fall to work."

"By my faith, a ready reckoner!" and Cathbarr grinned again. "Get down and fight."

Brian swung out of the saddle and led his horse to one side. They were not so badly matched, he reflected. Cathbarr's head was bared, while he had steel cap and jack; but for some reason he felt hesitant at thought of killing this merry giant.

"Not so bad," he said, baring his five-foot blade and holding it up against the huge ax. "Not so bad, eh?"

Cathbarr burst into a laugh.

"It will grieve me to crush your skull, dear man," he rumbled. "What a pair we would make, matched against that Dark Master! But enough. Ready?"

Brian nodded slightly, and the long ax flashed up.

Now, Brian O'Neill had served a stiff apprenticeship at weapons, and had faced many men whose eyes boded him death, but here, for the first time in all his life, he felt the self-confidence stricken out of him.

As Cathbarr heaved up his ax, he became a different man. All the good cheer fled out of his face; his curly brown beard seemed to stand out about his head like snakes, and the massiveness of his body was reflected in the battle-fury of his face. He needed no blows to rouse him into madness; but with the ax swinging like a reed about him, he came rushing at Brian, a giant come to earth from of old time. His men on the tower set up a wild yell of encouragement.

Brian leaped swiftly aside and, thinking to end the fight at a blow, brought down his sword against the descending ax-haft. Sparks flew — the haft was bound with iron; Brian only saved himself from falling by a miracle.

Then began a strange battle of feet against brawn, for Cathbarr rushed and rushed again, but ever Brian slipped away from the falling ax, nor was he able to strike back. The play of that ax was a marvel to behold; it was shield and weapon in one, and it seemed no heavier than a thing of wood as it whirled. Twice

Brian got in his point against the mail-coat without effect, and twice the ax brushed his shoulder, so that he gave over thrusting. He knew that he was fighting for his life indeed.

An instant later he discovered that fact anew as a glancing touch of the ax drove off his steel cap and sent him staggering back a dozen paces, reeling and clutching at the air. To his amazement Cathbarr did not follow him, but stood waiting for him to recover; he had not looked for such courtesy on the west coast.

He sprang back into his defense, desperate now. Again the ax whirled, seeming a part of the giant himself, and Brian knew that he was lost if he waited for it. So, instead of waiting, he leaped under the blow, dropped his sword, and drove up his fist into the bearded chin, now flecked with foam.

It was a cruel blow. Cathbarr grunted, his head rocked back, and he swayed on his feet. Before he could recover, Brian had set his thigh against him, caught his arm, and sent him whirling to the ground, ax and all. Then he picked up his sword and stood leaning on it, panting.

Cathbarr sat up and gazed around blankly, until his gaze fell on the waiting figure. Brian looked at him, smiling slightly, and the eyes of the two men met and clinched. As if he had been a child caught doing wrong, the giant grinned and wiped the foam from his beard.

"Was that fair fighting, yellow man?" he asked.

"No," laughed Brian. "It was unfair, Cathbarr; but I think my fists can best your ax yet."

Slowly the giant got to his feet. To Brian's surprise he left his ax where it lay and came forward with extended hand.

"Had you claimed that blow as fair," he rumbled, "I would have slain you. Now I love you, yellow man. Let us make a pact together. What is your name?"

They struck hands, and Brian felt a great thrill of admiration for this man whose terrible strength enclosed the simple heart of a child. But he shook his head.

"I make no pacts, Cathbarr. My name is Brian Buidh. I made pact with the Dark Master, and now I am sorry for it; yet it must be held to, for I see no way out of it. But wait—I have a cunning man whose wit may help us here."

He turned and flung up his sword in the air. His men rode down to the narrow causeway, while from the tower came shouts warning Cathbarr against treachery. But the giant only grinned again, and Brian shouted to Turlough Wolf to come on alone.

Old Turlough obeyed in no little wonder. When he came up Brian told him what had chanced — that out of enmity had arisen friendship.

"But," he concluded, trouble in his heart, "you must find me a way out, Turlough. I have passed my word to O'Donness to reduce Cathbarr; to do that I must slay him, or he me. I see little honor either way."

"Few men find honor in their dealings with the Dark Master," grumbled Turlough, looking from Cathbarr to Brian. "Yet, if you want a way out, it is an easy matter. Cathbarr of the Ax, give service to my master. Thus, Brian Buidh, you shall reduce Cathbarr; yet the Dark Master said naught of giving up this man to him."

"Good!" cried Brian, eagerness in his blue eyes, and swung on the giant. "Will you give me your service, friend, and follow me? There shall be a storm of men—" He paused abruptly as the words fell from his lips, but he had said enough.

"I give you service, Yellow Brian," rumbled Cathbarr, taking his hand again, and his strong, white teeth flashed through his beard. "I will follow you, and my men, and there shall be firm friendship between us. Is it good?"

"It is good!" exclaimed Brian, his heart singing. But Turlough laughed harshly.

"So you have again broken my rede,

Brian Buidh, for this man knows you not as his master, but names you his friend. I bade you take, not give."

"It was your own advice," retorted Brian, laughing.

"Aye, since you asked it, I found the way out. But you have not conquered him."

"He conquered me by not telling a lie," said Cathbarr simply. "I serve him."

Turlough eyed them keenly, heard how the fight had gone, and then suddenly comprehended what manner of man this huge, bearded fellow was. His face cleared, and without a word he clasped Cathbarr's hand, and asked Brian for orders.

"How far from here is Bertragh Castle?" questioned Brian.

"It overlooks Bertraghboy Bay," answered the giant. "Bide here till noon, while my men bring in their horses from the hills, and with the night we can arrive there."

To this Brian assented, well pleased that Cathbarr had horses. Turlough went back to bring up his men, and Brian entered the tower that served Cathbarr for castle. It was a small place, but strong; the ten men who took his hand and gave him service were cut after the pattern of their master—huge fellows all, O'Flahertys from the mountains who had followed Cathbarr down to loot the coast, with no ill success.

It was a strange tale that he heard, while he and his men ate and drank with their new comrades. For some months Cathbarr had maintained himself here, raiding O'Donnell's lands chiefly and making his ax feared through all the coast. In fact, the giant had attempted his own errand—to set himself up in power; but he had gone about it like a child.

The Dark Master had come against him with a hundred men, and after losing a score and more at the causeway, had tried to starve him out. At that Cathbarr had calmly stolen away by boat, raided O'Donnell's choicest farms overnight, and was back with his plunder before the Dark Master guessed his absence. After this O'Donnell had kept watch and ward upon his lands, with better results; Cathbarr occupied himself with raiding against the scattered parties of plunderers in the hills, and had won some booty.

Brian discovered many things during the hour or two he waited for the horses to be fetched in. Chief of these was that he had set himself a difficult nut to crack. The Dark Master held a strong castle, with rich farms around it, and could summon at need some three hundred men to his standard. In short, Brian found that O'Donnell held the very position he himself wanted to hold—and was like to keep it.

"Of course," he thought soberly, reflecting on his future course, "if I come off clear to-night I can ride with my seventy men to a better place. And yet—I don't know! What better place than this? It will be no long time before hoofs are in the land, for Royalist and Roundhead and Ulsterman will be storming through the hills; Galway will be the last to give in to Cromwell, of a certainty. When the hurricane falls, I want a roof to shelter me—and whom could I turn out better than this O'Donnell?"

Cathbarr's tower was too small to serve him as a fortalice, for it was barely large enough to shelter the eleven axmen. Suddenly an idea flashed across Brian's mind. Why not a union with this O'Malley woman against the Dark Master?

Upon the thought, he rose and went out to the ice-rimmed shore below the tower, where he paced up and down, considering the matter. After all, it would do no harm, and there were great possibilities in it. He returned to the tower at sound of shouts and clattering hoofs, and took Turlough aside.

"Turlough Wolf, in your advice you spoke against making pacts with men, but you said nothing of women. It is my purpose to send you to this O'Malley castle, to propose a pact with Nuala O'Malley against the Dark Master. You

can tell her that I have a hundred horsemen behind me—for I will have them. Will you do this, bearing her word back to me?"

Turlough plucked moodily at his ragged beard.

"I see no harm in such a pact, master," he replied thoughtfully. "As to reaching the Bird Daughter, that is another matter. I think that I can do it, however. When shall I start, and where shall I find you again?"

Brian reflected a moment.

"Start now, Turlough. Cathbarr and I will have no need of advice this night, for we shall either fight our way clear, or else the Dark Master will keep to his word. When you return, you will find me here; if I am not here, I will leave a man here to give you word of me."

"I am to say that you have a hundred horsemen behind you?" Turlough's sharp eyes swept to Brian's half-questioningly.

"Say a hundred and a half," laughed out Brian, "and trust your silver tongue for the rest, old Wolf! Never fear, I will have the men. But mind this, Turlough. I will make no other pact with her than this, against the Dark Master. It may be that when I have driven him forth I may fly after other game."

"Men have sought to drive the Dark Master forth," quoth Turlough, "and their heads have rotted above his gate. Take heed lest there be an empty spike there this night, Yellow Brian!"

But Brian only laughed shortly, and bade the old man affectionate farewell, for he knew that Turlough loved him. And when Turlough had ridden somberly away, Brian felt a strange sense of desertion, of loss, that was no whit inspired by Turlough's gloomy last words. He shook it off, however, at gripping hands again with Cathbarr. The axmen had gathered most of their loot and buried what was of value, for Brian had determined to return here from Bertragh and make use of the tower until he had heard from Turlough's errand.

So now, at the head of thirty men, he rode across the narrow causeway with Cathbarr of the Ax at his side for friend and guide. The giant did not yet quite comprehend exactly what plan had flashed across the brain of old Turlough, so as they rode Brian made the thing clearer to him. When the simple and straightforward Cathbarr grasped the matter, he smote his horse's neck with a bellow of laughter.

"Ho! So you bring me before the Dark Master ax in hand, reduced to *your* service instead of his, my men added to yours—oh, it is a jest, brother, a jest! I think that O'Donnell will slay us both on the spot!"

"Not if your axmen are true," retorted Brian.

Cathbarr laughed again. "They fear me and they love me, brother," he cried, gazing back at the file of horsemen. "Your own men fear you and love you also. Therefore we are men alike."

Brian began to love the man for his utter simplicity, save where there was killing in hand. Cathbarr seemed in reality to have the heart of a child, impulsive and passionate to an extreme, and there was always a certain rugged power in his bearing which bespoke him a true Flaherty of the mountains. His men were like himself in this respect, and after they had fraternized with Brian's men they began to feel the same unbounded surety in Yellow Brian as Cathbarr expressed. Their axes were the usual splay-bladed affairs that their grandfathers had used under Red Hugh at the Yellow Ford, nor indeed in all his life had Brian ever seen another ax like to that of Cathbarr's.

They rode through the afternoon while a light snow fell and a keen east wind cut down from the peaks of the Twelve Pins, until the shaggy horses slithered along with tails tucked tight beneath them. But there was good cheer in the company, for the news had spread of how Yellow Brian would have seventy men behind him that night. When the darkness began to fall, Bertragh Castle came in sight far below—a gray crag jutting up from

the plain, scarped and embattled, the sea behind it and the watch-fires of men twinkling from its keep. All about lay farms and steads, and the lowing of byred cattle rose on the evening air when the snow ceased.

" Be careful not to drink or eat in that hall," warned Cathbarr blackly. " Ill comes of it to all who accept hospitality there."

Brian nodded and rode on in silence, for there were parties of horsemen and pikemen down below and the blare of horns shrilled up. Evidently the riders on the hills had been seen from afar.

As they reached the lower ground Brian was aware of a band of men riding to meet them, and halted. Through the dusk came a score of armed horsemen, and their leader inquired their business, shouting from a safe distance. Brian returned the shout.

" I am Yellow Brian, and I seek O'Donnell Dubh according to a pact made with him yesterday. I have reduced Cathbarr of the Ax, and am come in peace."

" You are expected," called the other, riding up with his men. " The Dark Master is waiting for you."

And Brian rode on to Bertragh, not without some forebodings.

CHAPTER V.

YELLOW BRIAN RIDES SOUTH.

OUTSIDE the castle gates, where cressets flared over the snow, an old seneschal appeared and ordered Brian to leave his men outside. To this the men made some objection, but Brian laughed softly.

" Bide where you are," he said. " You shall not be slain unless I am slain inside."

The O'Donnells watched him and Cathbarr with no little wonder, and the two men made a fine pair as they marched across the creaking drawbridge. Though Cathbarr topped Brian by half a head, there was no doubt as to which was the nobler man; the giant gazed around him with amazed eyes, but Brian held his head high and strode in with a smile flickering on his lips. But his blue eyes were very sharp that night.

He saw the crowded men in the courtyard, many of them armed with muskets, their matches burning, and noted also that the Dark Master possessed some half-dozen bastards—immense, nine-foot pieces mounted on huge carriages, with their eight-pound balls piled beside them. In those days it was no small thing to own such cannon in the west of Ireland, and Brian eyed them approvingly as he passed through the courtyard. He was beginning to count them as his own.

Cathbarr had told him that the Dark Master had brought many O'Donnells down from the north to settle the farms and lands beyond the castle, but Brian saw that these were not all. The garrison was a riffraff of all the armies that had wasted Ireland, and they were fighting men fit for their work.

Brian entered the hall, with Cathbarr muttering oaths a pace behind him. The hall was high, lit with cressets, and beside a huge fireplace sat the Dark Master in a carved chair of black wood, an old harper sitting opposite. Behind Brian and Cathbarr flocked in men until the hall was well filled.

Brian found the penetrating eyes fixed on him as he advanced, but in them was no surprise or fear, and O'Donnell calmly stroked his drooping mustache as he watched. Cathbarr still followed behind, bearing that great ax of his, and Brian stopped a few paces from the hearth as the Dark Master spoke.

" Welcome to Bertragh, Yellow Brian. I had not looked for you so soon."

" No." Brian's voice rang out richly in the stillness. " But I am here, O'Donnell Dubh, to claim my two-score men. I have reduced Cathbarr of the Ax."

For the first time the hunched O'Donnell seemed to notice Cathbarr. His black eyes flickered curiously to the giant, then he smiled sourly.

"If he is reduced, why does he not kneel, Brian of the hard eyes?"

"Kneel," ordered Brian.

Cathbarr flushed and his beard began to stand out, but he obeyed. There was no great love in his face as he knelt, holding to his ax, and gazed at O'Donnell.

"Throw your ax into the fire," said the Dark Master, his voice smooth as silk.

"Do not," exclaimed Brian, and his eyes grew bitterly cold as they clinched with those of the Dark Master. Over the latter's pallid face crept a slow red fire, and his head drew back between his shoulders. Men held their breaths.

"O'Donnell," went on Brian slowly, "I have fulfilled my pact. I have reduced Cathbarr of the Ax—but he serves me and not you. Since I have conquered him as you bade, I call on you to carry out the pact and lend me two-score men for three months, scat-free."

If Brian had wanted any testimony as to O'Donnell's iron hand, he had it. His words, with all they implied, would have drawn a howl of rage from the retainers of any other chief in the land, but the men behind and around him only grew more silent.

As for the Dark Master, the red hue died slowly from his face, though his head remained drawn in, and still his eyes held those of Brian. When he spoke, it was as if he were musing aloud.

"So, Brian of the hard eyes, you have some courage, eh? *Duar na Criosd!* Little did I ever think that a man would come to me and borrow my own men that he might make war upon me! Is this your thought, Yellow Brian?"

"You have sharp ears, Dark Master," said Brian dryly, and a chuckle passed through the crowd. "In time I might take this castle, it is true. Just now I have other things in mind, however, and I shall not fall upon you until there has passed gage of battle between us."

"Thanks for so much," smiled the other slowly, though the red crept up to his cheek-bones faintly. Brian seemed perfectly at his ease, as indeed he was. "And what if I fell upon you first?"

"I am liker to offer battle than accept it, O'Donnell."

"Now, that is a good answer," said the Dark Master, while a whisper floated around the hall. "I would be glad to have you at my back, Yellow Brian, for men who ride behind me are like to win much."

Brian laughed a little.

"Some day I may be at your back, O'Donnell Dubh, and in that day I may win all that you have, from life to goods."

To his blank amazement, O'Donnell only threw out his head and chuckled; but it was an evil chuckle, and there was venom gleaming in his black eyes.

"I think that it were best for me to slay you here, Brian of the hard eyes, to slay you and this Cathbarr of the Ax. It seems to my mind that it is anything but good to turn you loose upon the land, for I hear a storm of hoofs in the air, and dead men are riding on the wind, and there is a whisper—"

He paused, drew his cloak about him, and gazed down at his foot. That pause was more dreadful than speech, for the crowded men moved not a finger, so that Brian all but thought that he and the Dark Master were alone. Then his face blanched a trifle. For, whether it were some uncanny play of mind or very truth, it seemed to him that from the wide fireplace there did indeed come a faint ring of hoofs and clash of steel: the long cressets over them suddenly flickered smokingly, though no draft crossed their faces.

Then indeed Brian knew that his fate hung upon the Dark Master's thoughts, and he drew himself up a little straighter, and his blue eyes glinted colder than any ice as his hand closed upon his sword-hilt. But at the slight motion O'Donnell looked up keenly.

"You have ridden hard, Brian. Pause and sup with me—"

"I did not come to eat or drink," said Brian sternly. "Also, I am weary of this

talking. Now fulfil your pact, Dark Master, or be shamed before all your men."

"Are you for Royalist or Parliament?" asked O'Donnell, as if he had not heard.

"I am for Brian Buidh.

"Take two-score men and begone," and the other rose. To his surprise, Brian found that, despite the hunched back, O'Donnell was as tall as himself. The black eyes flamed out at him for an instant. "I will keep my honor, though I regret it later, Yellow Brian. Go, with your men. When next we meet your head shall grin over my gates."

"Thanks for so much," retorted Brian mockingly, though he drew a swift breath of relief. "My head serves me too well to render it easily. *Slan leat*, O'Donnell!"

"*Slan leat*," repeated the Dark Master and turned his back, gazing down at the fire.

Brian turned and strode down the hall, Cathbarr at his heels. When they reached the courtyard he found men saddling in haste, and an officer saluted him gravely.

"Two-score men are at your orders, Yellow Brian."

"Let them follow me," said Brian curtly. "And who quarrels with my men, dies."

To that there was no dispute. The drawbridge clanked down once more, Brian and Cathbarr mounted and rode out to where the thirty waited grimly, and after them came the forty men from the garrison. Cathbarr, who trusted the Dark Master little, set his ten axmen in the van, followed with Brian, and the sixty followed them into the night.

"I think we came out of that well, brother," said the giant softly. "Where do we ride?"

"To your tower, for the night. After that, in search of more men."

"Toward Galway or Slyne Head?"

"Wherever there are men."

After that they rode on in silence, while the men behind fraternized freely. All were of the same stamp, and indeed the two-score already were as willing to serve Brian as O'Donnell, since they had witnessed that scene in the castle hall.

Brian wondered dully what the outcome of all this was to be. The strain of facing O'Donnell and bearding him in his own den had been no light one, but he knew that Cathbarr had spoken truth in saying that they were well out of it. The Dark Master, he thought, was a man well worth fighting. To take his castle was not like turning out a chieftain of some ancient family, with his clan about him for miles around; O'Donnell had seized upon the place himself, his men were reavers and outlaws, and the castle was a strong one.

Then there was the O'Malley alliance. Brian had it in mind to beset the Dark Master by sea and land at once, for all the O'Malley clan had been seamen and rovers from time immemorial, while he himself preferred men and horses at his back. In calmer mood now, he reflected that Turlough might not return for a week, and there was food and fodder for seventy men and horses to be obtained.

If he rode toward Galway he would have to plunder the patriots, which went against the grain. But in lower Galway and Clare things were different. That winter no army held to winter quarters save that of Cromwell, and between Limerick and Galway there was a wild rout of men out of half a dozen armies, the plague had swept off all but the seafaring folk, and men held only what their swords could guard.

So Brian determined that he would ride toward the south.

He realized well that his men must be drawn together by fighting, that they must learn a perfect confidence in him, and that they must earn their sustenance for the time being. Cathbarr already knew of old Turlough's mission, and of course approved, since in his eyes Brian could do no wrong. What was more, reflected Brian, he could not make this alliance empty-handed. He must get men and spare horses, stores and powder, and some

muskets or pistols if possible, for few of his men carried more than sword or perhaps a sorry pistolet or ancient bombardule out of date a generation since.

"A storm of men!" he muttered as he gazed at the stars. "A storm of men! Did that Black Woman speak truly, I wonder? And what dark magic was that which passed to-night?"

But no answer came to his questions save that the cold stars chilled him to the bone. Since they had no better place to seek, they returned to Cathbarr's tower, but it was long past midnight when they reached it, and the men were nodding in their saddles. As barely a dozen could crowd into the place, the rest were forced to camp outside in the snow, but roaring fires and some little food put them in good humor and it was no hardship to any of them.

"It has been a strange two days for us twain," said Brian as he and Cathbarr divided a scorched bannock one of the Scots had hastily turned out over the coals.

"Yes," smiled the giant into his beard, his deep-throated bull's voice rumbling through their tiny room. "But it is in my mind that there are stranger days ahead of us, Brian Buidh. A witch-woman once told me that I would meet my death from water and fire together, brother, in a cause not mine own."

"You are not bound to my service," replied Brian.

"But I am bound to you, for I like you," answered Cathbarr, and his hand crushed down on Brian's. That night they slept together beneath the same blanket, and though after that they spoke few words of love or friendship, the two men drew ever closer each to the other in all things.

It had indeed been a strange two days for him, thought Brian as he roused up the camp late the next morning and set out sentries in the hills. He had met the Dark Master on the first, and on the second he had met Cathbarr, then had forced the Dark Master into lending him men against his will. Now, after a scant three days beyond Lough Corrib, he had twined his fate with that of other men, had set his heart upon winning Bertragh Castle, and had won both a stout friend and a stout enemy.

For he counted O'Donnell as a foe, in which he was not far wrong.

However, there was no time to be wasted, for fodder was exceeding scanty, and Brian himself had no heart for idleness. As he had resolved on his course during that return ride the night before, he gathered his men together and briefly ordered them to be ready to ride at noon, and to Cathbarr alone he outlined his plan. Then he picked two of the axmen who knew the country roundabout, and ten from among those O'Donnell had loaned him, and took them aside and told them of Turlough Wolf, who would come before long.

"You will bide here," he concluded, "and bid him wait for me. I shall return this side of ten days. And mind you, if there is feud or treachery among you so that one man's blood is let, then I will exact a tenfold vengeance from both men."

The twelve, who were sturdy ruffians and well able to hold the place against any sudden attack by the Dark Master, looked into the ice-blue eyes for an instant, and straightway vowed that there would be neither treachery nor quarreling among them. And Brian guessed shrewdly that he had inspired some little fear in their hearts.

So that at high noon they rode away to the east, threescore strong, with Brian and Cathbarr and the remaining eight axmen in the van. Brian did not spare either man or horse that day, for there was little food left them; when midnight came they had slipped past Galway and were ready to ride south, though they all went to rest supperless.

With the morning Brian found that two of the men had slipped off and were busy plundering a hill-farm a mile away, where an old woman lived alone. He promptly

had them brought before him, and bade them take up their weapons.

"I am no executioner," he said as he bared his huge sword. "I am a teacher of lessons, and my lessons must be learned."

When they rode away from that place, leaving the two men buried under cairns, Brian was well assured that there would be no more ravaging by his men, though they died of hunger.

However, it proved that there was no great chance of this, for Brian drove such a storm past Slieve Aughty as had not been heard of in generations. Of all that chanced in those seven days ere he set his face to the north again, not much has survived, for there were greater storms to come afterward, and more talked-of fighting. But certain things were done which had a sequel.

By the fifth day Brian had swept past Gort toward Lough Graney, and turned west by Crusheen, which he passed through with a hundred horsemen at his heels. Two days before he had struck upon fifty Ulstermen who were working north from Munster, and what were left of them after the meeting took service with him. From them he learned that O'Neill was dying or dead, and that the Royalists and Confederacy men were paralyzed through the south.

They had left Crusheen ten miles behind them on the fifth day, when Cathbarr laid his hand on Brian's knee and pointed to the left, where a hill rose against the sky.

"Look there, *boucal*—when the birds fly from the *ceanabhan,* seek for snakes!"

Brian drew rein. Gazing at the long slopes of moor-grass that rose across the hill, he saw a sudden flight of blackbirds from over the crest; they flew toward him, then swerved swiftly and darted to the right. Brian called up two of his men who knew the country, and asked them what lay over the hill.

"The Ennis road to Mal Bay," they replied, and he sent them ahead to scout.

Before he reached the hill-crest they were back with word that an "army" was on the road, and Brian pushed forward with Cathbarr to see for himself. Slipping from their horses, they gained the hilltop and looked over on the winding road beyond. Neither of them spoke, but Brian's eyes glinted suddenly, for he beheld a train of four wagons convoyed by some two hundred troopers. He touched Cathbarr and they returned.

"A party of Ormond's Scottish troopers," he said quietly when they had rejoined the men. "Cathbarr, take thirty men and work around them. When you strike, I will lead over the hill and flank them."

The giant nodded, picked his men, and rode away. Brian led his seventy closer to the rise of ground, and as they waited they could hear the creaking of wagons and the snap of whips. It was a Royalist convoy, and since there was no love between the Scots and the Irish of any party, Brian's men were hungry for the fight.

They got their fill that day.

A rippling shout, a scattering of shots, and Brian spurred forward. The road wound a hundred yards below, and Cathbarr had already fallen on the vanguard. The Scots were riding forward to whelm him when Brian's men drove down with a wild yell and smote the length of their flank.

Brian hewed his way to the side of Cathbarr, and then the sword and ax flashed side by side. The captain in command of the troopers pistoled Cathbarr's horse, but the huge ax met his steel cap and Cathbarr was mounted again. Meanwhile, Brian was engaged with a cornet who had great skill at fencing, and his huge Spanish blade touched the young officer lightly until the Scot pulled forth a pistol, and at that Brian smote with the edge.

The muskets and pistols of the troopers worked sad havoc among Brian's men at first, but there was no chance to reload, and when the officers had gone down the Scots lost heart. They would have trusted to no Gaelic oaths, for men got no

quarter in the west, but when Brian shouted at them in English they listened to him right willingly. A score broke away and galloped breakneck for the south again, and perhaps fifty had gone down; the rest gathered about the wagons stared at Brian and Cathbarr in superstitious awe as the two lowered bloody ax and sword and offered terms.

"I offer service to you," said Brian. "I am Brian Buidh, and if you will ride with me you shall find war. Those who wish may return to Ennis."

Now, at the most Brian had some seventy-five men left, and those clustered at the wagons were over a hundred and a score, with muskets. But their officers were down, they had received no pay for a year and more, and they were for the most part Macdonalds of the Isles, who loved freebooting better than army work. So out of them all only ten men chose to ride to Ennis again, and Cathbarr shook his head as they departed.

"It seems to me that ill shall come of this," he said, and wiped his ax clean.

Brian laughed shortly and dismounted. He found that the wagons contained powder, stores, and muskets; so after placing the wounded in them, he rode north to Corrofin that day with close to two hundred men at his back. Staying that night at Corrofin, he hanged ten of the Scots for plundering, rested his horses for two days, and set his face homeward with the surety that his men knew him for master.

The storm of men was gathering fast.

CHAPTER VI.

BRIAN TAKES CAPTIVES.

"*FAILTE abhaile!* Welcome, Yellow Brian!"

"So you won back before me, eh?" Brian swung down from his horse and gripped hands with old Turlough Wolf. "Get the men camped, Cathbarr, then join us."

Turlough's cunning eyes rested on the wagons and weary horsemen, and he nodded approvingly as Brian told him of what had chanced.

"Said I not that you were a master of men?" he chuckled quietly, as he turned to follow into Cathbarr's tower. "But it is easier to master men than women, Brian. I bear you a bitter rede from the Bird Daughter, master."

"Hard words fare ill on empty stomachs," quoth Brian. "Keep it till I have eaten."

When Cathbarr had joined them and they had dined well on Royalist stores and wine, Turlough made report on his mission. It seemed that he had met with a party of the O'Malleys at the head of Kilkieran Bay at the close of his first day's ride, and after hearing his errand they had taken him in their ship out to Gorumna Isle, where stood the hold of Nuala, the Bird Daughter. And somewhat to his own amazement, Turlough had found that by this same name she was known along the whole coast.

He reported that it was a strong place, for the castle had been built by her father; that she had two large ships and five small ones, and that both ships and castle were defended by all manner of "shot"—meaning cannon. She had just returned from Kinsale, where she had been aiding Blake hold Prince Rupert's fleet in the bay. Now Rupert had slipped away, and after plundering a French ship with wines, she had come home again.

"She seems a woman of heart," smiled Brian. "What of her looks?"

"I did not see her." Turlough shook his head. "She ordered my message written out, so she has some clerkly learning. She took an hour to ponder it, master, then set me ashore with this message.

"'Tell Yellow Brian,' she ordered, 'that I claim tribute from Golam Head to Slyne. I will make no pact with him until he pay me tribute; and if I find him on my land I will set him in chains above my water-gate.'"

Brian felt no little dismay at this, for he had counted strongly on alliance with this Bird Daughter.

However, Turlough proceeded to set forth the reasons for such a message, as he had conceived them within his shrewd mind. First, it seemed that the pestilence had visited Gorumna in the absence of its mistress, and that the Dark Master had caught a score of the O'Malleys who had been wrecked in Bertraghboy Bay, promptly hanging them all. Between the plague and the hanging Nuala had a bare fourscore men left within the castle, and she counted Brian's offer as a ruse on the part of O'Donnell, for she was strongly afraid of treachery.

"There is more pride than power in that message," commented Cathbarr easily. "The Dark Master has stripped away all her lands along the coast, and save for Kilkieran Bay she has little left. Let us fall on her, brother, and take what *is* left."

Brian laughed at this naive counsel, looking at Turlough. But the old Wolf said nothing, brooding over the fire; and Brian reflected within himself.

He had come into a merciless feud, that he knew well. If he was to enter upon it he must banish all pity from his heart, which was no easy thing for him; but Turlough related things he had heard which speedily changed his mind. There were tales of O'Donnell's ridings through the land, of men slaughtered and women carried off to people his castle; of treachery, and worse.

It was also whispered that the Dark Master had made alliance with certain pirates from the north coast.

However, Brian knew that he must reach some decision regarding his own men, and that speedily. The three talked long that night, setting aside the question of the O'Malley alliance for the time being. Brian had some two hundred men to house and horses to feed; he had good store of provision and powder, but Cathbarr's little tower was utterly useless to house the tenth of them all, while the stores would have to be sheltered. Then O'Donnell might fling his men on them at any moment, which would mean disaster in their present position.

Cathbarr suggested an attack on Bertragh castle, but Turlough dissented.

"When we strike, we must strike to win," he said shrewdly. "The Dark Master has more men than we, and the sea is at his back, and they say he is a warlock to boot."

The giant stared and crossed himself at talk of warlocks, but Brian laughed out.

"I have a plan," he said, fingering his sword. "O'Donnell watches all the hill-paths like a hawk, even now in winter. Those wagons are of no great use to us, and we can store the goods here in the tower for the present. Get it done to-night, Cathbarr, and get the accouterments from two of those largest Scots for yourself and me."

Turlough Wolf chuckled suddenly, and Brian knew that the old man had pierced to something of his plan. But not all.

"Turlough," he went on as the scheme came to him more clearly, "at dawn ride out with a hundred men to that hill-road where first we met the Dark Master. Hide the men in the hills, and be ready to ride hard when the time comes. Cathbarr, before the dawn breaks have the wagons start out with twenty of the Scots troopers as escort. Bid as many more as can lie down in the wagons and cover up close with their muskets. Send a man or two with them to guide to that hill-road of which I spoke. We will ride after and catch them up shortly after sunrise."

"Good!" roared out the giant, whose brains lay all in his ax. "And the Dark Master will swoop down to the feast, eh?"

"He will not," returned Brian dryly. "He will send two or threescore men upon us, and it is my purpose to take as many of these prisoner as may be."

Cathbarr stared, and Turlough's gray eyes squinted up at Brian.

"How is this, master?" he asked in-

quiringly. "It is too good a trap to waste on prisoners—"

"My plan is my plan," said Brian briefly. "I am not making war on O'Donnell, but I intend to pay tribute to the Bird Daughter, and that right soon. While we are gone have a score of men remain here and build huts on the cliffs, Cathbarr."

Turlough fell to staring into the fire, divining the plan at length, and Cathbarr went out to fulfil his orders. Brian knew well that there was danger in the scheme, but he determined to deal with one thing at a time, and thoroughly. Just at present he was intent on forming an alliance with Nuala O'Malley, for ships and cannon were needful before he could nip the Dark Master in his hold. It was going to cost the lives of men, and he made up his mind not to pause for that. If he was to live and make head it must be by the strong hand alone—the Red Hand of Tyr-owen; and he looked down at the ring of Owen Ruadh and took it for a symbol, as his ancestors had taken it.

Before they went to rest Turlough pointed out that if the hills were watched he and his hundred would be noted, so Brian bade him hit back toward Lough Corrib and then to come straight down upon the main road. It might be that he could overcome the Dark Master's men of himself, and if not, he would hold them until Turlough came up.

With this plan arranged, then, the four wagons set forth under the cold stars. with thirty Scots lying hidden and twenty riding before and behind. With the first gleam of dawn Turlough and his hundred cantered off to the northeast, and an hour later Brian and Cathbarr put on the buff coats and steel jacks of the troopers, with the wide morions; took a pair of loaded pistols, and galloped after the slow-moving wagons. Brian wore his Spanish blade, but Cathbarr had sent his ax ahead with the troopers.

They caught up with the wagons when the latter were entering upon the road proper out of the hill-track they had followed. The first snows had vanished for the most part, leaving bleak, gaunt hills and rugged crags that twisted with soft fog. The sun struck the fog away, however, and as Brian rode on he gazed up at the purple mountains on his right, and down at the purple bog to his left, and caught the gleam of the Bertraghboy water out beyond. He laughed as he drank in the keen air of morning.

"Best get your edge ready, Cathbarr of the Ax!"

Cathbarr grunted, and slung the heavy hammer-ax at his saddlebow. One of the guides, who were from the Dark Master's twoscore men, pointed to a twisted peak on their right, whence an almost invisible spiral of gray smoke wound up.

"The signal, Yellow Brian," he grinned, cheerfully giving away his secrets. In fact, all those twoscore men rather hoped that their old master would be crushed by Brian, for so long as there was booty in sight they cared not whom they served.

Half an hour later Brian saw ahead of him that same bend of road where first he and Turlough had met O'Donnell Dubh. But there was no sign of Turlough, and he cantered ahead to see if the O'Donnell men were below. As he did so a bullet sang past his ear, and he whirled to see half a dozen of his men go down beneath a storm of lead from the hillsides; at the same instant some threescore men came scrambling down from among the rocks—those same rocks where he had first laid ambush for the Dark Master.

And riders were coming up on the road below!

He was caught very neatly, and caught by more men than he had looked for. The remainder of the twenty gathered behind him and Cathbarr, and the thirty rose among the wagons and for a moment stopped the assault with their musketry; but before the smoke had

cleared away two-score horsemen came thundering up the road from behind the curve, and struck.

"Albanach! Albanach!"

The wild yells shrilled up, and the Scots troopers knew that they were fighting without quarter in sight, for the "Albanach," as they were termed in Gaelic, gave and got little mercy in Ireland. The saddles of the fallen were filled from the men in the wagons, and leaving the musketeers to hold off the unmounted men, Brian plunged into the swirl of fighting horsemen and joined Cathbarr.

The odds were heavy, but the big claymores of the Scots were heavier still. Side by side, Brian and Cathbarr plunged through the ranks, sword biting and ax smiting, until they stood almost alone among the O'Donnells, for their men had been borne back. Then the giant bellowed and his ax crushed down a man stabbing at Brian's horse; Brian pistoled one who struck at Cathbarr's back, and pressing their horses head to tail they faced the circle of men, while behind them roared the battle.

For a moment the O'Donnells held off, recognizing the pair, then one of them spurred forward with a howl of delight.

"*Dhar mo lamb,* Yellow Brian—your head to our gates!"

Brian thrust unexpectedly, and the man went over his horse's tail as the ring closed in. So far Cathbarr had forgotten his pistols, but now he used them, and took a bullet-crease across his neck in return; then the ax and sword heaved up together, and the ring surged back. A skean went home in Cathbarr's horse, however, and the giant plunged down, but with that Brian spurred and went at the O'Donnells with the point of his blade. This sort of fighting was new to them, and when Brian had spitted three of them he heard Cathbarr's ax crunch down once more.

They were still cut off from the wagons, but there came a wild drumming of hoofs, and wilder yells from the men on the hillside. Like a thunderburst, Turlough and his hundred broke on the battle. The O'Donnells were swallowed up, stamped flat; the unmounted men fled among the rocks, Turlough's men after them, and a dozen horsemen went streaming down the road.

It was hard to make the maddened Scots take prisoners, but Brian did it, and when Turlough's men came back he found that they had in all thirty captives. Some forty of the attackers had fallen and the rest had fled.

Since all his captives expected no less than a quick death, Brian ordered ten of them bound on spare horses, of which there were plenty. He himself had lost twenty-three of his Scots, and the remaining score of captives cheerfully took service under him. Then, picking out one of them, he gave the man a horse and told him to ride home.

"Tell your master, O'Donnell Dubh," he said, "that his men made this attack on me, and therefore there is war between us."

The man grinned and departed at a gallop, and word passed through the men that the Dark Master had found his match at last. As to this, however, they were fated to change their opinion later.

"Now," said Brian to old Turlough, as between them they bound up a slash in Cathbarr's thigh, "do you put the wounded in the wagons and begone home again. Set out sentries against an attack from O'Donnell, and scatter a score of men out along the roads to watch for other parties. You might pick up another score of recruits, Turlough Wolf."

Turlough shook his head and tugged at his beard.

"Best take me with you, master, instead of this overgrown ox. You may need brains in dealing with the Bird Daughter, and he has no more brains than strew his ax-edge. Also he is wounded."

Brian pondered this, while Cathbarr furtively shook a fist at Turlough. There was wisdom in the advice, but on the other hand Brian did not like to leave

his precious two hundred men in care of Cathbarr. If the Dark Master attacked suddenly, as he was like to do, brains would be more needed than brawn.

On the other hand, he counted on Cathbarr's open face removing the evident suspicion that the smooth-tongued Turlough had raised in Gorumna Isle. It had been a mistake, he saw plainly, to send such an emissary on his mission. Picturing this woman who led her own ships to war, he limned her in his mind as a large-boned, flat-breasted, wide-hipped creature — and with good reason. He had seen women fighting at Drogheda and he had seen them in other places as he rode to the rest, for in those days many a woman took her slain lord's *skean fada* and drew blood for Ireland before she was cut down. And when women rode to battle there was no mercy asked or given, from Royalist or Confederate or Parliament man.

Nuala O'Malley was a woman of blood, said Brian to himself, and he would give her blood for her help.

So he curtly refused Turlough's advice, saw that the ten bridles of his bound and mounted captives were lined together, and beckoned to Cathbarr. Before they rode off, however, they doffed their Scot accouterments and took back their own garments, after which Cathbarr led the way over the hills to Kilkieran Bay, and Turlough took command of the force in sullen ill-humor.

The morning was still young, for the attack had taken place a short two hours after sunrise and had soon been quelled. Beyond a slashed thigh and a red-creased neck, Cathbarr of the Ax was unhurt, and Brian had received no scratch. If the ten captives wondered why they were bound and their comrades freed, they said nothing of it.

Even after seeing what he had of the merciless war in Ireland, Brian had much ado in making up his mind to hold to the plan he had formed on the previous evening. These ten ruffians were scoundrels enough, to judge by looks, and yet they were men; and he had been raised in no such school of war as this, where surrender meant slaughter without pity. However, he determined to do what he could for them, and he would have held to this determination had it not been for what chanced when they rode down to the little fishing village where Turlough had met the O'Malley men.

They arrived just as the evening was darkling, after a hard day's ride.

As they came within sight of the place, which lay at the head of Kilkieran water, Brian made out that a small galley was pulled up on shore, and there were a number of men about the huts. Upon the approach of the two chiefs with their file of captives there was an instant scurry of figures; women ran to the huts, and a dozen or more roughly clad men appeared with pikes and muskets. Brian held up his hand in sign of peace and rode slowly onward, Cathbarr at his side, to within a dozen paces of the huts.

"Who are you?" cried out one of the musketeers. "Be off!"

"Bark less, dog," said Brian, scorn in his eye. "We seek Nuala O'Malley. Take us out to Gorumna Isle in your boat."

"What seek ye with the Bird Daughter?" queried the other suspiciously.

"Her business, not yours."

The seamen gazed at them doubtfully, then a number of other men came from the huts, well-armed. One of these set up a cry, pointing at the captives, and a burst of yells answered him from the rest. Next instant Brian and Cathbarr had their weapons out and were facing an excited crowd of men.

"Be silent, dogs!" bellowed Cathbarr, and his voice quelled the uproar. "What means this attack? Would you have the Bird Daughter strip you with whips, fools?"

The spokesman stood out, his dark face quivering with fury as he pointed.

"That is as it may be, axman, but first those bound men shall die. One is the man who slew my brother, nailing

him to his own door till he died; another is he who burned Lame Art's wife and child last Whit-Sunday—"

"There is he who lopped my husband's hands and nose! Slay him!" shrieked out a hag as she burst forward. Brian held out his sword and she drew back, but instantly others had taken up the cry.

"And the devil who hung Blind Ulick!"

"There is he who—"

In that brief moment Brian heard things too horrible for speech. The ten bound men had grouped together, some pale as death, others laughing defiantly. But as the crowd surged forward Brian held up his sword, and they paused to listen; he knew now that there was no more pity in his heart for these black ruffians of O'Donnell's.

"Let the Bird Daughter render judgment upon them," he shouted. "Friends, take us to the Bird Daughter and let her do as she will, for I bear these men to her alone."

At that the crowd fell silent, but their leader gave a rapid order, and half a dozen men ran down to the strand. Another order, and the maddened villagers gave back as the seamen closed about Brian and Cathbarr and their captives.

"Come," said the leader roughly. "You shall go to Gorumna Isle with us, strange men, but I do not think that you shall ever come back again."

"Nor do I," grinned Cathbarr in the ear of Brian, as they left their horses to the fishermen, unbound the prisoners from their steeds, and made their way down to the galley. Brian looked at his friend, and they both smiled grimly.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BIRD DAUGHTER.

"NOW, *there* is a castle worth the taking, Yellow Brian!" said Cathbarr.

Brian nodded, his eyes shining in the starlight. After a pull of a long seven miles down the bay, the galley had rounded into the northern end of Gorumna Isle, guided by a high beacon set among the stars. As they drew nearer Brian made out that this beacon was set on the tower of a high pile of masonry black against the sky, lit here and there by cressets, and it was plain that the Bird Daughter kept good watch since they had more than once been hailed in passing the islands.

Once turned into the harbor, Brian found suddenly that they were among ships, many of them small galleys, but two of good size which bore riding-lights. Again they responded to hails, and without warning a few torches blazed out ahead of them. Then it was seen that the castle was built with its lower part close on the water, and its upper part rising on the crag. In reality, as he found later, it was two castles in one, as of necessity it had to be. Were the opposite isles held by an enemy, and hostile ships in the little harbor, the higher towers running up the crag could dominate all, and the lower castle could be abandoned without danger.

Even in the starlight Brian's trained soldier's eye made out something of this. Then the leader of the seamen came and stood beside them, for during the two-hours' trip he had talked somewhat with Cathbarr and had come to look with more respect on Brian himself. That was only natural, for seamen ever like those men who talk least.

"Strangers," he said with rough courtesy, "a word in your ear. If you would gain speech with the Lady Nuala, deal not with her as with me. Send in your names and your business, and you may perchance get to see her in the morning, or a week hence, as she may choose."

"Thanks," answered Brian. "But my will is not like to hang upon hers."

The seaman shrugged his shoulders, the oars were put in, and they floated up to where the torches flared. Here there was a landing-place of hewn stone, with a gate lying open beyond it, and armed

men waiting. One of these, from his bunch of huge keys and air of authority, Brian knew for the seneschal.

"*M'anam go'n Dhia!*" he growled, peering down into the boat as it ground on the stone, "what fish have you there?"

"Two salmon and ten herring, Muiertach," laughed one of the men. Brian and his friend stepped out while the ten prisoners were prodded after them, and Brian found the seneschal looking him over with some wonder, hands on hips.

"Well! A giant with a devil's ax, and Cuculain, the Royal Hound, come to life again! Who are you, yellow man, and who is this axman, and who are these ten bound men?"

Brian was minded to answer curtly enough, but he looked at the seneschal and remembered the seaman's kindly warning. Under his eye the laugh withered suddenly on the seneschal's lips.

"These ten men belong to me, Muiertach. Go, tell the Bird Daughter that Brian Buidh and Cathbarr of the Ax have come to her, bringing tribute as she demanded."

Now it was that Cathbarr, who had asked no questions all that day, perceived for the first time the reason of their fighting and hard riding, and what the manner of that tribute was. He broke into a great bellow of laughter so that the rough-clad seamen stared at him in wonder, but at a word from Brian he quieted instantly.

"In the morning the message shall be delivered, Brian Buidh," returned burly Muiertach with a glimmer of respect in his voice. "And now render up your weapons, so that we may treat you as guests—"

"So you sea-rovers are afraid of two men, lest they capture your hold?"

Brian's biting words brought a deep flush to Muiertach's face.

"No weapons do we render," he went on, his voice cold as his eyes. "We come as guests, seneschal, and our business is not with you. Take these ten men to your dungeons, take us to guest chambers and give us to eat, and see that we have speech with the Bird Daughter before to-morrow's sun is high."

At this Muiertach growled something into his beard, but turned with a gesture of assent. His men closed around the captives, while Brian and Cathbarr followed him into the castle, the giant still chuckling to himself with great rumbles of laughter.

"Let strict watch be kept over these two," said Muiertach in English to one of the torchmen who accompanied them, thinking he would not be understood.

"You may yet get a touch of the whip for that order," said Brian in the same tongue.

Stricken with amazement, Muiertach turned and stared at him, jaw dropping, while Cathbarr glanced from one to the other in perplexity. Brian smiled.

"Lead on, and talk less."

With tenfold respect, the seneschal obeyed. Now Brian saw that this castle was indeed a stronghold, and might easily be defended by fewer men than it had. The inner walls of the lower castle were well lined with falcons and falconets, while on the towers above peered out heavier cannon, which he took for culverins from their length of nose. Crossing the courtyard, they entered the building itself, and Muiertach led them through upward-winding corridors, studded with cressets and with here and there a recessed *prie-dieu* in the wall.

From the snatches of talk behind the doors they passed, Brian guessed that this lower castle was occupied by the garrison. In this he was right, for with torchmen before and behind them they emerged into the cold night air again and climbed upward, coming to a gate in the wall of the upper castle. This stood open, but it clanged shut behind them, and after crossing a steep courtyard they entered a second and broader corridor.

Muiertach led them up a long flight of stairs, then another, and finally flung open a heavy door. It was evident that they were lodged in one of the towers.

"Rest sound and fear not to eat our food," said the seneschal. "*Beannacht leath!*"

"Blessing on you," responded Brian and Cathbarr together, and entered.

For a wonder, Brian found that the chamber was lighted with candles, which Cathbarr examined with no little awe. Also, it contained a very good bed, on which the giant looked with suspicion. The hard stone walls were hung with tattered tapestries, and before they had settled well into their chairs two men entered with food and wine of the best.

"Not so bad," smiled Brian as they ate. "How come your wounds, brother?"

"Those scratches? Bah!" And the giant gurgled down half a quart of Canary at a stretch. "You are not going to sleep on that bed of cloths?"

"That I am," laughed Brian, "and soon, for I am overweary with riding. Try it, Cathbarr, and you will be glad of it."

"Not I! Since there is no bracken here the floor is good enough for me. Eh, but this sea-woman will have a thought in her mind over your message, brother!"

Brian chuckled, but he was too weary with that day's work to talk or think, and when the remnants of their meal had been removed and their door shut, he gratefully sought the first bed he had known for weeks. After some laughing persuasion he prevailed on the suspicious Cathbarr to blow out the candles, and upon that he fell asleep.

When he wakened it was broad daylight, and Cathbarr was still snoring with his ax looped about his wrist as usual. Brian, feeling like a new man, went to the open casement and looked out.

He found himself gazing through a three-foot stone wall, and as he was doubtless in one of the towers, this argued that the lower walls were twelve feet thick or more. The lower castle was hid from him, but his view was toward the upper bay and included the harbor. The two larger ships, which were small carracks, but large for the west coast in that day, bore six guns on a side, and Brian saw that they were being scrubbed and made shipshape. The Bird Daughter must be a woman of some scrupulousness, he reflected. Beyond the brown sails of two fishing-boats, and low, storm-boding clouds over the farther hills, there was nothing more in sight.

As Cathbarr still wore his long mail-shirt, Brian kicked him awake, and after his first bellowing yawn their door opened and men brought in jars of water. When the giant's wounds had been dressed, under protest, and they had broken their fast, the seneschal appeared.

"Chieftains," he said respectfully, "the Lady Nuala has received your message and will have speech with you this afternoon. Until then she wishes that you keep your chamber, since she knows not your mind in this visit."

"That is but fair," assented Brian.

Cathbarr grumbled, but there was no help for it, since they were virtually prisoners. The day passed slowly, and toward noon storm drew down on the harbor and snow eddied in their casement. With that, they fell to polishing their weapons; Brian procured a razor and a much-needed shave, and Cathbarr furbished up his huge ax until it glowed like silver.

Finally Muiertach appeared. Brian slung the great sword across his back, and they followed the seneschal down to the courtyard. Here they were joined by the captive O'Donnells and the seamen who had brought them to the castle, and Muiertach led them to the great hall.

The father of this O'Malley woman must have been a man of parts, thought Brian as he gazed around. The hall was scantily filled with, perhaps, three-score men ranged along the walls, and at the farther end was a low dais where a huge log fire roared high. The beams were hung with a few pennons and ship-ensigns, and on the dais were placed a half-dozen chairs. Behind one of these stood two women, and in the chair, calmly facing the hall, sat the Bird Daughter.

Brian caught his breath sharply, and his blue eyes flickered flame as he saw her. Never in his life had his gaze met such a woman—not in all the land of Spain or elsewhere in Ireland.

At this time Nuala O'Malley was twenty years old, and ten of those years had been passed either on shipboard or here in Gorumna Isle. As one chronicler describes her, "She was not tall, but neither was she small of stature, and when she stood on a ship's deck there was no tossing could cause her to stumble. Her hair was not blue, but neither was it black, and her eyes were very deep and bright, violet in color, and set wide in her head. Her nose was neither small nor large, her cheeks were ever red with the wind off the sea, her mouth was finely curved, but tight-set withal, and she had more chin than women are wont to have. She was very lissom in body, but her head never drooped."

And that is a most excellent description of the Bird Daughter, in fewer words than most men might use to-day.

But of all this Brian noted at the moment only that before him sat a girl-woman whose calm poise and confident power struck out at him like a vibrant presence. Like himself, she wore a cloak of dark red, but no steel jack glittered beneath it; there was a torque of ancient gold about her neck, and her hair was caught up and hidden beneath a small cap of red.

Brian thought of the woman he had painted in his mind, then laughed softly. She caught the laugh on his face, and comprehended it, and was pleased; then as she watched him very calmly, it seemed to Brian that her sheer beauty was a thing of deception. It must be, for she was surely a woman of blood. He had known enough of beautiful women, who played the parts of men, to know that on the far side of their beauty was neither mercy nor love nor compassion, that their lovers were many steps to ambition, and that they were venomous. So his smile died away, and his blue eyes glittered cold and dark, and this the Bird Daughter saw also.

Now, there was no man on the dais save Muiertach, who mounted the two steps with his keys jangling. As Brian would have gone after him, two pikemen stepped forward to intervene. Brian looked into their eyes and they drew back again. He and Cathbarr mounted to the dais, and he bowed a low, courtly, Spanish bow, of which the Bird Daughter took no note. Instead he heard her voice, very low and penetrating, and she was speaking to the two pikemen.

"Go out into the courtyard," she said, "and give each other five lashes. This is because you dared insult a guest, and because you drew back after insulting him. Go!"

The two pikemen, rather pale under their beards, handed over their pikes to comrades and strode out of the hall. She turned to Brian, speaking still in Gaelic:

"Welcome, Brian Buidh. You have come to bring me tribute?"

"Yes, Lady Nuala, and the tribute is these ten men of the Dark Master's."

She looked at Cathbarr; her eyes swept over his ax. Then she looked again at Brian, and spoke to Muiertach in English.

"Truly, I have seldom seen such a man as this—"

A swift look of warning flashed over the seneschal's face, and Brian laughed.

"Lady," he said in the same tongue, "he is Cathbarr of the Ax, and he will be a good man to stand with us against the Dark Master."

She betrayed no surprise, except that a little tinge of red crept to her temples.

"I did not know you spoke English, Brian Buidh. Still, it was not to Cathbarr that I referred."

At that it was Brian's turn to redden, and mentally he cursed himself. There was no evil in this woman's heart, he saw at once. For an instant he was confused and taken aback. Then she smiled, slowly rose, and tendered him her hand. Going to one knee, he put her fingers to his lips.

"Now sit, Yellow Brian," she said, "and let us talk. First, these captives of yours. Do you in truth bring them as a tribute? How do I know they are O'Donnell's men?"

"Ask these seamen of yours," laughed Brian, seating himself beside her. Cathbarr remained standing and leaning on his ax, looking like some giant of the old times.

She took him at his word, and when she had heard from the seamen certain tales of what cruelties the ten prisoners had done, her violet eyes suddenly turned black and an angry pallor drove across her face.

"That is enough," she interrupted curtly. "Take them out and hang them."

The men were led away, and Brian saw that her hands were tightly clenched, but whether in fury or in fear of herself he could not tell. Then she turned to him, looking straightly into his face, and on the instant Brian knew that if this girl-woman bade him go to his death, he would go, laughing.

"Tell me of yourself, Brian Buidh. Of what family are you? By the ring on your finger you are an O'Neill; yet I have heard nothing of such a man as yourself leading that sept. When your messenger came to me, I read cunning in his face, and took it for a trap set by the Dark Master; but now that I have seen you and Cathbarr of the Ax, I will take fealty from you if you wish to serve me."

Brian smiled a little.

"Serve you I would, lady, but not in fealty. I take fealty and do not give it. My name is indeed Brian Buidh, and as for that ring, it was a gift from Owen Ruadh."

"Owen Ruadh died two days since," she said softly, watching his face. "I had word of it this morning."

At that he started, and Cathbarr's eyes widened in fear of magic. Owen Ruadh had lain on the other side of Ireland, and three months would have been fast for such news to travel. But Brian nodded sadly.

"Carrier pigeons, eh?" he said in English and paused. He knew not why, but his loneliness seemed stricken into his heart on a sudden; he who neither explained nor asked for explanation from any man, felt impelled to open his life to this girl-woman. He crushed down the impulse, yet not entirely.

"Perhaps, Lady Nuala, there shall be greater confidence between us in time, and so I truly desire. But know this much—I am better born than any man in Ireland—aye, than Clanrickard himself; and I am here in the west to seek a new name and a new power. It is in my mind to take O'Donnell's castle from him, lady. I have some two hundred men, of whom the Dark Master himself lent me twoscore, and in alliance with your ships we could reduce him."

"How is this, Brian? You say he *lent* you twoscore men?"

He laughed and explained the fashion of that loan; and when he had finished a great laugh ran down the hall, and the Bird Daughter herself was chuckling. Then he waited for her answer, and it was not long in coming.

"There is some reason in your plan, Brian Buidh, but more reason against it. The castle that O'Donnell holds was formerly my father's. If you held it, there would be no peace between us, unless you gave fealty to me, which I see plainly you will not do. I claim that castle, and shall always claim it."

"Then it seems that I am held in a cleft stick," smiled Brian easily, "since I will give fealty to none save the king, or Parliament. You are allied with the Roundheads, I understand?"

She nodded, watching him gravely.

"Yes. Cromwell is master of the country, and I am not minded to butt my head against a wall, Brian Buidh. If I am to hold to the little that is left me, I shall need all my strength."

"And that is not much, lady. Your coasts are plague-smitten, your men reduced, and Cromwell has not yet won all the country. Galway will be the last to fall, indeed. But as to Bertragh Castle,

why should you not sell your rights in it to me?"

At his first words a helpless anger flashed into her face, succeeded by a still more helpless pride.

"No, I will not sell what I have been unable to conquer back, Brian Buidh. If there were any way out of this difficulty with honor, I would take it; for I tell you frankly that I would make alliance with you if I could."

Brian gazed at her, reading her heart, and fighting vainly against the impulse that rose within him. Twice he tried to speak and could not, while she watched the conflict in his face and wondered. He wished vainly that he had Turlough's cunning brain to aid him now.

"Lady," he said at last, biting his lips, "I will do this. I will give you fealty for the holding of Bertragh Castle, keeping it ever at your service, but for this alone. When we have taken it, it may be that I shall render it back after I have won a better for myself; yet, because I would sit at your side and have equal honor with you, and because we have need of each other, I will give you the service that I would grant to no man alive. Is it good?"

For an instant he thought that she was about to break forth in eager assent, then she sank back in her chair, while breathless silence filled the hall. She gazed down at the floor, her face flushing deeply, and finally looked up again, sadly.

"I do not desire pity or compassion, Brian Buidh," she said simply, and her eyes held tears of helpless anger.

Then Brian saw that she had pierced his mind, for which he was both sorry and glad. He knew well there were other castles to be had for the taking, and there was nothing to prevent his riding on past Slyne Head and winning them—except for his meeting with this girl-woman. Therefore he lied, and if she knew it, she gave no sign.

"You mistake me, lady," he said earnestly, his blue eyes softening darkly. "I propose this only as a stepping-stone to my own ambition. Soon there will be a sweep of war through the coasts, and I would have a roof over my head. Is it good?"

She rose and held out her hands to him.

"It is good, Brian Buidh. Give me fealty-oath, for Bertragh Castle alone."

And he gave it, and his words were drowned in a roar of cheers that stormed down the hall, for the O'Malleys had heard all that passed.

An hour later Cathbarr of the Ax was despatched in a swift galley to bear the tidings to Turlough, and bid him make ready for a swift and sharp campaign.

Through the remainder of that afternoon and evening Brian sat beside the Bird Daughter, and he found his tongue loosened most astonishingly, for him. He told her some part of his story, though not his name, while in turn he learned of her life, and of how her father and mother had been slain by O'Donnell through blackest treachery.

The more he saw of her, the more clearly he read her heart and the more he gave her deeper fealty than had passed his lips in the oath of service. As for her, she had met Blake and others of the Roundhead captains on her cruises, deadly earnest men all; but in the earnestness of Brian she found somewhat more besides, though she said nothing of it then. It was arranged between them that in three days they would meet before Bertragh Castle, by sea and land, and the Dark Master would be speedily wiped out.

With the morning Brian set forth to join his men in the largest sailing galley, for a wild gale was sweeping down from Iar Connaught. But the O'Malleys were skilled seamen who laughed at wind and waves, and Brian kissed the hand of the Bird Daughter as he stepped aboard, with never a thought of the storm of men that was coming down upon them both, and of the blacker storm which the Dark Master was brewing in his heart.

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 DEATH OF THE OLD YEAR

BY J. EDWARD TUFFT

'TWAS midnight on a lonely trail, the Old Year's horse had stumbled; the blithe New Year came riding up to where his dad had tumbled. "'S'matter, pop?" the youth exclaimed, then straightway took to crying. Though but a kid he soon perceived that his old man was dying.

The old chap raised a feeble hand, and then a feeble whisper, and thus he spoke as down the trail the wintry winds blew crisper: "Ah, kid, I guess your dad is through, I guess he's goin' under; now will you take his sage advice, or will you not, I wonder? You bear the image of your pap, you bear his tone and temper; you're subject, just as he has been, to fits of wild distemper!

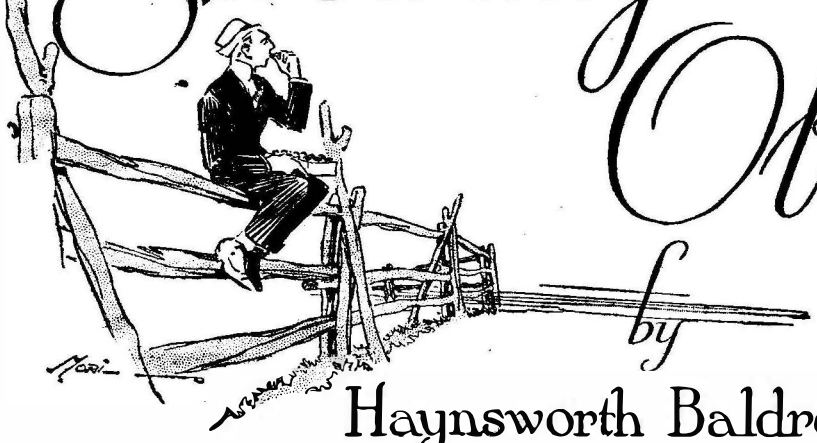
"I sowed my oats, and sowed 'em young—wild oats ain't fit for sowin'; they seem to stay right in the soil, and will persist in growin'! You can't remove the plagued things by any crop rotation, and they will show up here and there in spite of cultivation!

"Your dad reformed in middle life, or tried to—(thank you, sonny). He toed the mark, and worked long hours, and even saved his money. Folks liked him then, forgot his youth, his friends—but why the parley? There soon grew up another crop of wild oats in his barley!

"I plowed and harrowed, worked and sweat—I raked, and pruned, and hoed 'em. It was no use, they throve and grew, for, kid, you see I'd sowed 'em! 'Ah, let 'em grow,' at last I said—then I cut loose and traveled. Kid, you're just startin' at the toe—my sock is nearly raveled—my old age is an open book—a gay old sport—you know it—if you have got a single oat—that's wild—my lad—don't sow it!"

The whisper died upon his lips, the Old Year went to glory; the New Year took him to the morgue, but soon forgot the story. "Poor dad," he sighed, "poor doting dad, his dreams, no doubt, was voicing!" He gave him Christian burial and went his way rejoicing.

Swearing Off



by Haynsworth Baldrey

AS Barbara poured the coffee Tom dropped the stub of his second cigarette on his plate and lighted the third.

"I wish you wouldn't smoke those things at the breakfast table, dear," Barbara said.

"That's so, Barb, I forgot your objections."

Tom was a good sort, and liked to please his wife. Therefore the unsmoked cigarette followed the stubs.

They sat at the breakfast table. Quite the regular thing. You know how it goes. He was a good-looking chap. Anyway, Barbara thought so. Your opinion, or mine, would not affect her. So we will concede that point.

And then as for the girl; she was beautiful. There was no chance for a difference of opinion there. We would all agree with Tom except for— Well, I may as well confess it. She was just a little too plump, and her complexion did not show quite clear in the early morning sun.

Up to that point the breakfast had progressed cheerfully, as a breakfast should where the table is set for two on a porch over which honeysuckle is climbing.

"I forgot. Honest I did," Tom apologized boyishly. And as he spoke his nervous fingers selected a cigarette from the box at his elbow.

"You see," he said, striking a match, "you look so wonderfully lovely this morning that I forgot myself." The cigarette was alight by that time, and he smiled whimsically at his wife through the smoke.

"Tom! You are hopeless," sighed Barbara.

"I? Oh, I say!" He regarded the cigarette accusingly. "I give you my word I did not know I had lighted the thing."

At this point a white-aproned maid brought the mail. Tom hid his confusion by spreading the morning paper wide before him.

You would have thought, from the way Barbara laid aside the loaf-sugar she was nibbling and leaned across the table, that she found the newspaper which Tom held out most interesting. She was not interested in the news a bit. But just a corner of a letter was visible above the pa-

per, and the corner held the embossed trade-mark of the "Sugar Bowl." She wanted that letter. Of course she could have asked for it and Tom would have handed it over without a word. But, equally, of course, he would glance at it. And that was just what Barbara did not want. She was just wondering if she could slip it from between his fingers without attracting his attention when Tom roused himself.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "here is a letter."

"I think it is mine."

"No, it is addressed to me."

Very deliberately he laid it on the table while he lighted a fresh cigarette. Then he ripped open the envelope and drew out the enclosed bill. Barbara nibbled the sugar and watched the puzzled look on his face give place to one of indignation.

"Do you mean to tell me, Barbara, that you have eaten a pound of candy every day for a month?"

"Oh, it is not as bad as that, really, Tom. I have nearly half of the box that came yesterday in my desk now."

"But, Barbara, this bill is for thirty pounds of chocolates. That is frightful."

"I don't spend half as much for candy," she said, with the color in her cheeks growing deeper, "as you do for those beastly cigarettes."

"But, my dear, aside from the cost. It is your health I am thinking of. You will ruin your digestion. You said yourself, not longer ago than yesterday, that you did not know why you are getting so fat."

"Tom Van Waters! I didn't. I said 'stout.' Besides, candy is not half as bad as tobacco. I'll bet you anything you want that you cannot hold that glass of water straight out without spilling it."

Tom took the bet and tried to steady his nerves. But the glass jiggled, and the harder he tried the more it jiggled, until the water slopped over.

"There!" cried Barbara.

Tom slammed the glass on the table. The water leaped and splashed like a fountain. Barbara and Tom pushed hastily from the table.

"Your temper is getting to be as unsteady as your hand, Tom."

"I don't give a damn if it is," Tom said, viewing the wreck he had made of the cheerful breakfast. "No one can keep his temper if he is to be criticised for everything he does."

Barbara sat with her hands folded. Her eyes were quiet except for an occasional flash. It was a rule in their house that they should not both lose their tempers at the same time. The one who let loose first had right of way, so to speak. Of late Tom had held the prerogative far too often.

As I said, Tom was a good sort. He realized the struggle Barbara was making, and with an effort calmed himself. He walked around the mess between them and held Barbara's head tight against his side for a moment, then he tilted up her chin and kissed her.

"Thank you," he said.

Barbara caught her breath a few times and relaxed against his coat.

"We came very near quarreling, Tom. If you had said one more word I should have said just what I think. It never was so hard to hold in before. Perhaps I *am* eating too much candy."

Tom patted her cheek and took a long breath before he said:

"And I guess I wouldn't go to pieces that way if I didn't smoke so much."

Barbara smiled up at him.

"Of course," she said, "candy is not like tobacco. I can stop eating it."

"Why, Barb, you do not think tobacco has become a habit with me, do you? I could stop."

"Could you really?" Barbara was on her feet with her hands on his shoulders. "Oh, could you?" she cried.

"Of course I can. And I will if you will stop eating that indigestible chocolate."

"I will, Tom, I will."

Tom was late in leaving home that

morning, but he was very happy as he walked down the path. At the picket gate he met a boy.

" Oh, Tom," called Barbara, " will you take that box of candy to Miss Ames? She was awfully nice to me when I was waiting in your office for you Monday."

Tom sent her an understanding smile and took the box from the boy.

After Tom had turned the corner toward the station Barbara went to her sitting-room. She sat down at her desk to write to Sister Sarah. Her first move, after arranging her paper and removing a hair from the point of her pen, was to open a candy-box. She turned back the paper lace and placed the box convenient to her reach. She selected just a little one, put it into her mouth, and dipped her pen in the ink.

Next instant she was removing the offending chocolate. She took the half-filled box into the hall and called Mary. When the maid came she said:

" Mary, please take this candy, and do not eat it where I can see you."

Mary's cheeks dimpled, and there was a mischievous sparkle in her blue eyes. She had heard all that had passed at the breakfast table.

Tom sat alone in the train and smiled all the way. He was still smiling as he entered his office. What a mate Barbara was! Nothing he could do to give her pleasure was too much trouble. As for the tobacco habit, that bugaboo held up before young men, it made him laugh. He was a man with a will. He opened his desk and sat down. And Barbara was right, of course. He did smoke too much. He drew the morning mail toward him and his right hand fumbled in a drawer. He'd show her she could depend on him. His right hand put a cigar in his mouth and struck a match.

The necessary concentration needed to bring the light in contact with the end of the cigar brought him up with a start. He flung the cigar from him and settled seriously to reading the mail.

His well-trained right hand was constantly giving offense. Time and time again he was obliged to recall it from the drawer. He had to give so much attention to that hand that he could not concentrate on his work. At last he shoved it deep in his coat-pocket and gave orders for it to stay there. There was a cigarette-box in that pocket and a cigarette was half-way to his lips before he knew it.

In desperation he emptied his pockets and desk of all the smokables he could find. A push on a button brought a skinny, freckle-faced boy to his side.

" Micky, take these cigars out to the drafting room."

Micky disappeared, grinning above his load. From an inner office came a subdued shout.

Tom settled once more to his work and had just become interested when an unmistakable whiff of cigar-smoke wafted into his office through the open door at the rear. Up to that time he had attributed his restlessness to the fact that he had nothing to do with his right hand. That whiff of smoke convinced him that he was wrong. He was hungry. Hungry for the taste of the spicy tobacco.

He jumped up, slammed the door, and opened the window. Immediately the breeze blew the open letters about the room. Tom swore wildly as he gathered them up. He was on his hands and knees half under the desk reaching for the last letter when his door opened and a jovial voice said.

" Don't hide, Tom. I'm not a collector."

In his haste to arise Tom bumped his head against the edge of the desk. He was having rather a hard time of it. When he got to his feet his right hand had found something to do. It was carefully patting a spot on the crown of his head that was rapidly changing from a spot to a mound.

Before him stood Warner Bhem. In the corner of his wide grin was a black cigar. Tom sputtered. When he could speak he said.

"Warner, you get out of here, and don't you ever come in again smoking a beastly cigar. The room fairly reeks with it."

Warner's mouth opened, and to keep it from falling he took the cigar in his fingers and looked questioningly at it.

"Beastly?" he asked. "Why, Tom, it is the brand you always smoke. Have one yourself."

"No," Tom almost shouted. "No, I don't smoke. I've quit."

Warner's chin fell lower.

"You've quit? Tom, you are joking. Why, you can't quit."

"I can, I tell you. I have."

Warner dropped the cigar out of the window.

"Poor chap," he said. "How long has this been going on?"

"Since eight o'clock this morning."

Warner laughed.

"I understand, old chap. I quit once. Quit all morning. Didn't smoke till noon. You can't tell me anything about it. I know. It's hell. When once you get the tobacco habit you—"

"'Tobacco habit,' bosh! I smoke because I want to. Not from habit."

"Uh-huh. I've heard a lot of fellows say that."

"I will quit I tell you."

"All right, Tom. I hope you do. I always thought you smoked too much. I'll tell you what a chap told me. He said: 'Every time you want to smoke eat a piece of candy.' He said he stopped that way."

Tom remembered the box of candy Barbara had sent to his stenographer. Before he passed it to Warner he placed a large chocolate cream in his mouth. It was sickeningly sweet, but it did relieve the gnawing hunger.

Barbara found it impossible to write letters. She decided to put the room to rights and read. Picking up Tom's lounging jacket she dropped a gold cigarette-case from a pocket. She picked it up and stood looking at it a minute. She could not throw it away. She had given it to Tom on their honeymoon.

He didn't smoke anything then but his old brier pipe, she remembered. And it made his coat so smelly that she had given him the cigarette-case and coaxed his pipe away. She sighed and wished she hadn't. But it was all right now. Tom had a fine, strong will. Barbara wished that she had a fine, strong will. Then maybe she would not be so candy hungry.

She settled comfortably in a wicker chair, opened a magazine and turned the pages to the serial she was reading. Let's see, the last instalment stopped just where the wing of the aeroplane had broken. Her fingers searched the table at her side. Why, no. That was the story in Who-do-you-call-it's Magazine. This was the one where the jewels had disappeared. Her fingers found the cigarette-case. No, it wasn't either. How absurd! Now she knew. It was where the wife had just learned that her husband was in love with his stenographer. Her fingers placed a cigarette in her mouth and her bright little teeth closed on it.

With an exclamation of disgust she threw the broken cigarette into the waste-basket.

"How can any one like that stuff?" she asked aloud, removing particles of tobacco from her tongue. Still, it did have rather a spicy flavor. Tentatively she bit into a tiny shred. Her tongue recoiled from the unfamiliar taste. But Barbara smiled. It really wasn't half bad. After another little bit of a taste she discovered that she was not nearly so hungry for chocolates.

"I wonder," she said. "Perhaps the smoke is not so sharp."

It wasn't.

They were sitting at the same little sunny breakfast table a week later and Barbara broke the silence. Their meals had been rather silent of late.

"I am going to be in town this morn-

ing," she said, " and if you want to take me to lunch I will come to your office at noon."

Tom glanced up from his paper. " All right," he said. Then, hesitating, he added. " You tell me where you want to go and I will meet you there."

Barbara raised her eyebrows.

" But I always have gone to your office. Why shouldn't I?"

" Why, no reason. Come if you want to."

Barbara sat staring at her plate. That story she was reading about the man who fell in love with his stenographer kept coming to her mind. Tom was so queer lately.

" That Ames girl is still working for you, isn't she?"

She had never called her " that Ames girl " before. Tom looked up quickly.

" Sure she is. She has been in the office nearly as long as I have, and knows about as much about the business. Why?"

" Oh, nothing. Only I met her on the street a couple of days ago and she did not thank me for the candy I sent her. And she is generally so nice. You gave it to her, didn't you?"

" I—why—yes, of course I did. In fact every one in the office had some. But I may not have mentioned that you sent it."

" Why, Tom, you don't give her candy yourself?"

" Why not?"

" Do you?"

" Yes, I do. You don't object, do you?"

" N-no. I suppose not."

Tom did give Miss Ames candy. He had to. He could not very well give candy to all the men in his office to keep them from smoking and not give it to Miss Ames as well.

It was no wonder that he did not care to have Barbara drop in. Each morning a delivery boy brought an armful of boxes. At night they were empty.

After all Barbara did not go shopping until afternoon, and then she made a flying trip. It was this way. She had discovered that she could get cigarettes at the grocery store, and she ordered a box every day with the regular order, and this morning they had not come.

It was late before she overcame her pride and bribed Mary to go to a little tobacco shop. She did not dare pass the candy counters in the stores feeling as she did then. And she had given Tom her promise.

The shopping trip was cut short to allow time for just one smoke before Tom's return. Then she washed her hands in scented water and used a highly flavored dentifrice, which she hated. But she knew Tom's opinion of women who smoked.

Sunday was a miserable day. In the morning they attended church. At dinner they attempted to be gay. The attempt was a failure. The reason it was especially hard for Barbara was because she had found something.

On their return from church Tom had thrown himself into a hammock, while Barbara entered the house to remove her hat. She folded her parasol and stood it in the umbrella stand. The parasol toppled over. Barbara tried again. There was an object in the bottom of the vase among the umbrellas which interfered. She drew it out. It was neatly wrapped, but you couldn't fool her. She knew a candy-box when she saw one.

Tom's statement that he was going for a walk after dinner did not come as a surprise to her. She did not suggest, as she had on the previous Sunday, that she might accompany him and thereby cause him to repeat his excuse that he felt like walking fast. Besides, if the truth must all be told, she was glad to be alone for a time.

From the window of her sitting-room she saw Tom leave, and she knew by the hang of his coat that the box was in his pocket. Tears trickled down her cheeks as she lighted a cigarette.

Miss Ames lived in the outskirts of the city. It would take Tom an hour to reach there and return, and if he stayed

two hours he could not return until six o'clock. That was the time he had come home the previous Sunday.

If Barbara had seen Tom sitting on a fence at the roadside eating chocolate creams she would have been greatly surprised. She was so sure that he would not return until six o'clock that she was taken unawares and did not know of his presence in the house until she heard his step on the stairs.

There was just time to drop the cigarette behind the table and put her foot on it.

"Here you are," he said. "I looked all over down-stairs." Then he stopped and sniffed. "Who has been here?"

Barbara swallowed several times before she answered.

"N-no one."

"No one? Why, the room is full of smoke."

He looked at her steadily. She did not look happy, and he noticed that she was pale. He took a step forward.

"Barbara," he cried, and she had never heard him speak like that. "Barbara, some one has been in this room smoking. If you deny it there is but one thing for me to think. Where is he?"

He was very white and his hands were clenched at his sides.

"Tom!" she cried. "You dare accuse me? You?"

"Where is he?"

"There isn't any 'he.' I almost wish there was after what I have learned today." She drew herself erect and her cheeks were flaming. "I am the only one who has been in this room. It was I who smoked. And I don't care. Who are you to accuse me?"

"Barbara—you smoking!"

"Yes, I was, Tom. I did it because I was so hungry for candy."

For a moment Tom gazed, and then with a shout of laughter he started toward her, his arms outspread.

"Don't you touch me!"

Tom stopped at the tone of her voice.

"Don't you dare touch me. I know where you have been this afternoon. Why are you home so early? Didn't she know you were coming?"

"'She'? Barbara, whom do you mean by she?"

"Oh, I sha'n't name her. But I know who you take candy to every Sunday. I found what you had hidden in the umbrella-stand."

Tom dropped to a chair. Barbara lost some of her pose as he continued to laugh.

"I fail to see your cause for laughter."

"Oh, but you will, Barb dear. It is so funny. You smoking cigarettes to keep from eating candy. And I have eaten candy until I am nearly sick to keep my promise to you. And all the boys in the office eating candy. And Micky getting so fat he has grown out of his clothes."

Barbara collapsed.

"Tom!" she cried, "you poor boy. Was it as hard as that? Don't you think you could smoke just a little and not all the time?"

"And how about you?"

"I shall allow myself just a very little candy."

"Shake!"

But it did not amount to much as a hand-shake. Barbara's hair could not have become so very disarranged by a mere hand-shake. At last she freed her lips enough to say:

"Yesterday, Tom, I found your old brier pipe."

"You dear. Lead me to it."

In the cool of the evening Barbara reclined on the breeze-swept porch and nibbled chocolates. At her feet, with his back against a column, was Tom. Between his teeth his old much-loved brier. After a blissful silence Barbara spoke:

"In the morning, Tom, will you get a box of candy and take it to Miss Ames? I—I feel as if I owe her an apology."

Tom shouted.

"Barbara," he asked, "was she the one? Why, yesterday she told me that if I ever offered her another piece of candy she'd quit her job."

Out of the Invisible

by Frank Blighton

Author of "Mr. North of Nowhere," "Mr. South of Somewhere," the *Swami Ram* stories, etc.

CHAPTER I.

POTATOES SIX.

PEERING into the fur-rimmed orifice of a focal plane camera, Daniel McKay Hollins directed the efforts of his English man servant. some twenty feet distant from where he was standing in a hollow between two pine-clad, sandy ridges.

"Baker," said Hollins, as he scanned the images reflected on the ground glass of the costly instrument, "please place the last two sticks a little to your left. I said to your left," he iterated, as the diligent Baker, with pertinacious agility, grasped two others of the properly set sticks of the six standing in a row, and proceeded to disarrange the entire line.

When the servant had complied and achieved something which approximated Hollins's desires, he withdrew out of camera range and surveyed the scene of his endeavors.

In a fairly straight line, equidistant from each other, extending half-way across the bottom of the small ravine, with their sharp-pointed tops exactly the same distance from the ground, stood the six slender sticks of freshly sawed pine.

"What next, sir?" asked Baker, as his master laid down his camera and reached into the pockets of the golf-jacket he wore, producing six potatoes, which he handled with deliberate care.

"Please place one of each of these on each of those sticks," replied Hollins gravely, "painted side down."

"Yes, sir," obediently returned Baker, albeit his bovine countenance, fringed with irreproachable side-whiskers, contorted, for an instant, with a look of half alarm, as foreign as it was momentary. He stepped over to receive the six tubers. All were of uniform contour and large size. Five of them were painted, on half their surfaces, with red, green, blue, yellow, and white, respectively. The sixth was uncolored.

In the strong, semi-tropic rays of the Florida sun, the six tubers stood out in sharp relief, as Baker proceeded to put them in place on each of the sharp sticks, his previous mild wonder at the eccentric behavior of his heretofore sane, logical, and leisurely master deepening into an amazement bordering on resentment.

It was all so childish, so utterly absurd, Baker reflected. And, what was worse, it seemed to fit in with other erratic acts of the same gentleman for the past few weeks. Daniel McKay Hollins was always rather exacting, as all men of action are, but, of late, he had become exceed-

ingly irascible over small matters—these potatoes, for instance.

Why, the servant asked himself, should he be now peering into the camera's orifice, with a face as deadly and purposeful, while he directed the lens toward the innocuous potatoes, as if he were sighting a machine-gun on an approaching enemy?

Why was he out there in the broiling Florida sun, anyway, to photograph the potatoes, after paddling a mile or more up the river, when he might have taken their portraits in the yard of the cottage he had engaged for the season?

"One would imagine he was taking the portrait of 'is majesty," ruminated the perplexed Baker, as his master, for the fourth time, again senselessly sighted his camera at the unappreciative vegetables, and again lowered it.

"Baker," said he abruptly, "potatoes have eyes, have they not?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"Suppose they should possess other sensibilities, or functions?"

"And—if so, sir?" Baker backed away.

By training and tradition he must preserve his own *status quo,* but he reflected that his experience with mentally defective people was negligible. Such questions were ominous in themselves, and he prudently resolved to be on guard against any violent outbreak, should the other's mood change from the peculiarly furtive behavior he had exhibited all of the morning, until this extraordinary and unaccountable episode of potato-photography had been disclosed as his purpose.

Hollins, a young man of twenty-three or four, rather above medium height and of the agile, nervous type commonly known as "wiry," gave no immediate evidence of fell designs upon his complaisant assistant. He was even smiling slightly, and his gray-blue, keen eyes gleamed, as he continued:

"Assuming, for the sake of a theory, that they do have other sensibilities, would they not, being land-bred, as it were, prefer to be photographed on a landscape instead of a marine background?"

Baker's alarm passed. His master was "spoofing" him, a habit which he had. But his reply was entirely respectful, as became one of his own position:

"Why should they object to either, sir?"

Hollins's face twitched and his shoulders trembled, but his voice was as grave as a parson's as he echoed:

"Ah! Why, indeed? Baker, you state it with admirable brevity and with a logic that neither I nor the hypothetically sensitive potatoes can gainsay. So, we shall first photograph them up this gorge, and then down it, with the river for a background afterward."

Which he proceeded to do with a brisk, businesslike air, backing away at various distances, until he had five plates exposed.

"Now," quoth Hollins, "one more exposure and we'll go home. Let me see." He peered at either side of the ravine, then his eyes wandered up its tortuous length, to where, some little distance away, it grew narrower and shallower.

"Do you see that group of cypress trees up there—about a mile away?" he demanded.

"Quite plainly, sir."

"Take the potato that is white underneath and the one that is uncolored, with their two sticks, and set them against that background, the same distance apart as here. When you have again reentered the ravine, I shall take another view," said Hollins.

Baker complied, without comment.

As he trudged stolidly up the ravine, however, his former apprehensions returned.

"What's the use of that?" he demanded of himself. "Why, 'e cawn't see them at all at that distance. How's 'e going to take their portraits, then? They won't look bigger than the 'ead of a pin on the plate."

In which pardonable reflection the perplexed Baker was slightly out of focus

with his master's intentions, as immediately appeared when he was around the first turn of the twisting ravine.

After another furtive scrutiny of the lonely spot, Hollins whipped off the lens he had been using, replacing it by an exceedingly powerful telephoto device, laid his camera on a convenient stump, tilted it with a billfold to get the range of the group of trees he had indicated, and, with a grim smile, watched every movement of his conscientious servant on the ground glass as clearly as if he were only twenty feet off, as he placed the two tubers at last in a highway where the ravine ended, and the trees began.

When Baker had again started to return and was out of camera range in a depression, with a last lingering look at the images on his ground-glass, Hollins picked up the bulb.

A bird just then went fluttering up the ravine, as if startled by some intruder, zigzagging this way and that. Hollins waited until it flitted into a pine-tree on one side of the little gorge—then pressed the bulb. After dropping the plate into place, he again replaced the former lens, smiled grimly at the four tubers on sticks, and waited for Baker's return with the air of a man who has done a good morning's work.

In the slight interim between his last glance at the two objects he was photographing at long distance and the exposure of the plate, however, occurred another incident in the vicinity of his two tubers not only entirely unforeseen by Hollins, but of a character so remote from his plans that, subsequently, it assumed an aspect even more fantastic to that level-headed, determined, and indefatigable young man than his own bizarre conduct had appeared to Baker during the whole of the morning.

While he waited for Baker to appear at some point Hollins was unable to definitely locate, and so distant that the rhythmic sequences of sharp sounds became merely dots and dashes, as if jerked from the clattering arm of some gigantic telegraphic sounder, there rippled a series of explosions.

The concussions, because of their remoteness, were at first utterly without any significance save as sounds.

Then, just as Baker rounded the last turn in the twisting little gorge, and Hollins moved a trifle impatiently down it toward where their boat was tied up, an invisible object sped directly with a vicious drone across the spot which he had just quitted, spat into a pine-tree on the side of the ravine, ripped through the slender trunk—and continued on, leaving a sinister and significant hole to mark its flight.

Following which other rhythmic sequences of explosive sounds came, more audibly than before, but still at some distance.

Then, as abruptly as the whole mysterious business had transpired, utter silence ensued.

Hollins, however, with Baker at his side, lost no time in making a swift, albeit dignified, return to his canoe, tied up at the entrance to the ravine a couple of hundred yards below. He shoved off, glancing warily back of him, until they were round the next bend of the turgid stream, which flowed seaward.

Whatever had occurred, however, was not repeated. Only the chanting little frogs, metallically bright as the lily leaves on which they perched, the whisper of the stream, and the sigh of the rising landward breeze through the wooded banks, broke their silent journey back.

Baker remained unusually uncommunicative because his previous forebodings concerning his master's state of mind had returned. Hollins was quiet for quite another reason. He knew that had he not moved when he did the high-power bullet which had zipped across the space where he had been standing had more than sufficient trajectory to penetrate his skull instead of the tree.

Some one had shot at him—that much was sure.

Who it was Hollins had not the slight-

est idea. In fact, there was absolutely no reason why any one should shoot at him, for he had never been in that part of Florida before. And, so far as he was aware, no one of his northern friends knew he was in Florida at all.

Only Baker had known of the canoe trip up the river, and he had expressly cautioned Baker against speaking of it to any one.

Baker, however, just then was observing him with an expression rather unwonted, not to say surreptitiously scrutinizing him. He had noticed it before, in the ravine.

Yet, what had Baker to gain by having some one shoot him?

Besides, Baker was not that sort. He had been with Hollins for three years now, having been engaged in London. Baker was essentially a man of small imagination, and less initiative—aside from his vocational routine.

Therein he was perfect, and heretofore he had seemed devoted in his own quaint, stolid way, to Hollins.

Even his own unrestrained liberty of speculation, deduction, and conjecture could not connect Baker with the deed. But, if not Baker, who else? Hollins asked himself, as the canoe swerved in under his paddle-strokes, toward the little wharf from which they had set out that morning.

CHAPTER II.

PHOTOGRAPHIC—AND OTHER—DEVELOPMENTS.

THE spot where they were to land was the only one on the river's course for some miles evidencing a break in the solid wall of forest.

Beside the little wharf which afforded them a landing, but beyond it and still seaward, was a decrepit and weather-beaten old building, between which and salt water lay only a short fringe of sand, where the river widened to meet the sea.

It was a deep space wherein the cottage was located, flecked with a celestial golden-green color, contrasting sharply with the subdued tints of the wilder vegetation, making them appear almost spectral by contrast; for the neat two-story frame cottage was set in an orange-grove.

Daniel McKay Hollins had rented this cottage, after a prolonged inspection of various places on the east coast of Florida, at an absurdly low figure, chiefly because of its remoteness from any other habitation.

Some misguided Northerner had settled there ten or a dozen years ago, and planted the grove. Its inaccessibility, however, to market and the lack of all but an apology for a road connecting it with the village of Tecumseh, some eight miles inland, together with an inopportune frost or two, had blighted the aspirations of its owner, who had departed, leaving it to be rented, if possible, to any chance tourist.

There was also a shed, which, for the time, served as a temporary garage to the small rented touring-car with which Hollins or Baker made trips back and forth to the village; and here, with Baker and Tom Lee, a Chinese cook, Hollins had installed himself to carry out some long-cherished and carefully-guarded plans, during the months of February and March.

Ordinarily, he would have gone to Palm Beach for the fag-end of the winter season. But something of far more importance than the social frivolities of his set now actuated him—something of which he had not spoken to a soul, and of and concerning which he expected great things. That something must have his undivided time and attention.

A little later, another trusted person would arrive—in fact, he was now *en route*. But that person had been given a sealed envelope, with a ticket, money, and directions at the office of Hollins's attorney in Maiden Lane, New York; so, by no process of reason could he have revealed Hollins's purposes or plans—the more especially as he was not yet informed of them in their entirety.

That was what puzzled Hollins more and more as he and Baker went back to the house. He had sent Baker over to Tecumseh in the car the day before—which the servant drove almost as well as himself—but had warned him not to speak of the proposed journey up the river.

Baker had not spoken a word on the way home nor referred to the episode of the bullet—a most surprising, not to say suspicious circumstance—but was still occasionally eying Hollins in a manner quite different from his usual frank and respectful demeanor.

Also, as Hollins recalled, Baker had not seemed to be at all concerned, either during the return to the boat down the ravine, nor had he manifested any perturbation whatever at another possible shot being sent after their canoe from the great wilderness which had undoubtedly shielded the would-be assassin of Hollins.

His master resolved to keep an eye on Baker, but to betray none of his own conjectures, for the present, at least. So, as they neared the little cottage, with its white walls and green blinds sitting primly in the grove, he merely observed, in casual tones:

"I think I'll take a run over to Tecumseh and get these plates developed, Baker. Have Tom Lee get dinner ready for us about six. Is there anything I ought to bring back with me for his use or yours?"

"Not a thing, sir, that I can recall. We are well stocked," replied Baker unhesitatingly.

At the village, which was a new, booming community of about two thousand people, Hollins went directly to a photographer and left his plates to be developed, with instructions to have one print made of each.

From there he went to the post-office, obtained a sheaf of New York daily papers and one or two letters forwarded by his attorney; thence to the telegraph-office, which was situated at the railway station.

There was a message awaiting him. He tore it open, rather nervously, smiled, thrust it into his pocket, and started to walk back to where he had left his car at a local garage to have it refilled with gas.

He glanced at his watch. It would be an hour yet before he could obtain the prints of his photographs of the six potatoes; and he was wondering just what to do in the interim, when, to his stupefaction, he heard his name called out in accents unmistakable.

He was half stupefied. Until that morning he had not imagined that any one in Florida, aside from the one person he had sent for and his own servants, could possibly have known of his presence in that state.

Had the flawless sky overhead split in twain, revealing the descent of an assortment of seraphim, the reaction upon Daniel McKay Hollins at the sound of this particular voice could hardly have awakened more assorted emotions.

It emanated from a natty, high-powered, roadster, with a dark green body and bright red wire wheels, which had just drawn up at the curb.

Hollins whipped off his golf-cap, bowing with an embarrassment which he strove to choke back. It deleted, however, much of his spurious selfcontrol.

"Y-Yvonne — Miss Butler, I mean?" he gasped.

The girl in the tonneau smiled from the billows of the gray veil mantling her head and face like a mist.

"Why, Mr. Hollins! What are *you* doing in this part of Florida?"

Her smile, while most wholesome, was a trifle curious, perking the corners of her delectable mouth in a piquant, maddening way; and the shy, wistful look from her brown eyes, as she scrutinized him more closely, gave him a fluttering sensation in his cardiac region that transmitted itself into a throaty quiver in his voice, as he endeavored to formulate a reply.

Her eyes were the same shade as her luxuriant hair, which wandered, gypsy-

like, from the confines of her riding veil. The same eyes, the same hair, the same Yvonne Butler — no mistaking that, despite his unfortunate *faux pax* of some five weeks before, when, Hollins told himself, he had made such a silly ass of himself as to richly merit forever forfeiting her esteem—even her recognition.

He finally forced his gaze to meet hers squarely.

"I hardly know how to answer you," he said slowly. "I had some — some ideas, you know, and came down here to think them over, and—"

He intended to add—"to work them out, if I could."

But he was floundering, so desperately, that she came gracefully to his rescue, leaving his brain still in a state of flux which the mere sight of her created.

"They must have been rather out of the ordinary," interpolated Miss Butler, "to cause you to leap into invisibility some weeks since, in New York. All of your friends were completely mystified. None of them, I am told, had the remotest idea what had become of you. I understand that queries at your club, your house, and your lawyer, elicited nothing."

"I seem to have suddenly acquired importance only when absent without explanation," countered Hollins, now a little reassured. "And," he suddenly amended, "how do you come to be here?"

"Oh, father and I came down for the season, and leased the Ryndenham villa. You've heard of that?"

"I must plead utter and abyssmal ignorance. I've been here only three weeks—out in a remote spot—thinking over my ideas, you know."

"Vernon Doty is with us also," volunteered the girl. "You know him, rather well, don't you?"

Her *vis-a-vis* nodded.

"He belongs to one of my clubs in New York. Is he with you?"

"Not exactly. He has the place next to ours. There's quite a colony out toward Miramar—that's the name of the Ryndenham place. It's Spanish, you know, meaning 'Look at the sea.' Of course, we see him frequently. Here comes father now. He's been—well, he's been making a call."

Hollins wondered if it was merely his stimulated imagination or a fact that Yvonne suddenly exhibited more than a trace of reserve at the mention of old Cyrus Butler's errand, as her auditor glanced in the direction toward which she was looking.

An elderly, slightly obese gentleman, a trifle less tall than himself, with an iron-gray mustache and a leonine cast of countenance neared them.

For an instant, owing to his previous embarrassment at sight of Yvonne and the occasion when he had last called upon her in New York, Hollins wished that the "invisibility" the girl had charged him with assuming, could have closed down upon him, then and there. He feared that Mr. Butler, too, might have heard of the incident which pained him to recall. However, the old banker grasped his hand in paws as leonine as those of a black-maned monarch of the Nubian desert, and roared out:

"What a coincidence, Hollins. To think of meeting you in this section of Florida. Of course, you'll ride up to the house with us, won't you?"

He released the young chap's hand only to begin fumbling with the rumble seat.

"Really," protested Hollins weakly, "I'm — I'm not dressed — and all that sort of thing."

Cyrus Butler intercepted the quasi-objection in two paws, hurling it in the general direction of the Tecumseh opera-house.

"When you're in Moscow, do as the cows do," he roared. "In with you. Say, Hollins, isn't there a song about meeting a pal from your home town?"

"I believe there is, but I'm a poor singer."

"Well, come out anyway. Say, I've

got a story to tell you that 'll make your hair curl. Wait until we get to the house."

He clambered into the tonneau, and sent the roadster purring up a macadam stretch through a part of the village Nestor had never yet visited.

Then they were into the open country, which was flowing deliriously past, in a riot of palmettos in ranks, in legions, along a well-kept oiled road; then palms —true palms—satin-skinned and wonderfully tall, clean and lithe, standing aloof from the cypresses with their funereal draperies of moss, with orchids blooming on their limbs; while other trees, in now and then a swampy spot, shot into view, clutched with parasitic plants of extraordinary snaky beauty, climbing and twining and interwreathing among their limbs; now and again mistletoe mingling with moss, and yet other air-plants nestling in the arm-pits of other trunks and branches; while, among them all, myriads of butterflies fluttered on vermilion wings.

Then they were pulling up in the spacious grounds of the Ryndenham villa, and a huge bronze figure of a Spaniard in armor, of heroic proportions, was looking down toward a fountain around which they whirled.

His cryptic eyes peered somberly at Hollins as he left the machine to follow his host and daughter into the house. Here Yvonne excused herself, and he followed Mr. Butler out upon a spacious veranda, below which were terraces. A mile or more distant, but lapping the edge of the gorgeously kept sloping grounds—like white lace fringing a gigantic restless sapphire—was the sea.

"Sit down, Hollins," said Butler, waving his guest to a wicker rocker, while he dropped into another, and tendered a panetella. "Odd thing, my running into any one I know down here this morning—except Doty, of course."

"I cannot account for it at all," said Hollins, with what, afterward, he recalled, must have seemed quite unnecessary warmth. "I hadn't the remotest idea that you or Doty were anywhere around here."

"Nor had I—and I guess Doty will feel the same way when he hears you are here—the remotest idea that I'd meet any one I knew in this part of Florida. To be entirely candid, Hollins, I wasn't really dying to meet any one I knew, for —well, for certain reasons. If I had been, I'd have gone on to Palm Beach or San Augustine. By the way, what brings you to Tecumseh?"

Hollins clenched his teeth on his cigar and took time to ignite it before replying. The inquiry was an awkward one.

"I had a whim," said he, at length, choosing his words with care, "and wanted to work it out, in my own way, without meeting any one I knew," he concluded.

Somehow, even to himself, his reply did not sound convincing.

Butler gave a grunt that might have savored of incredulity.

"Well," said he, in turn, as though also called upon to defend his presence in the part of Florida not usually frequented by the horde of winter tourists, "that's just what brings me down here, really—a whim and a little deal."

Hollins was so relieved that he laughed.

"What is it now?" he bantered. "Are you figuring on a loan to the Chinese and dodging the Japs?"

"Not exactly," enigmatically returned his host, "although, in a way, it deals with a matter that was, originally, rather more domestic than foreign. Well, we all have our whims, Hollins. I've had my share of what you call whims—or dreams, I guess," he continued in a semi-confidential tone that greatly relieved his auditor. "When I was a little younger than you are and grubbing away as an assistant cashier in a banking house, do you know what I wanted to do?"

Hollins shook his head, smilingly.

"What was it?" he ventured.

The banker gave him a quizzical smile.

"I ain't going to tell you, Dan, because I don't want any one to know—even now. May do it, some day," he observed, his voice trailing off and a reminiscent gleam shooting suddenly into his somewhat tawny eyes. They had a feral sheen, even in the glare of the Florida sunlight, tempered only by the discreetly placed veranda awnings.

"You said you'd tell me a story that would make my hair curl," hazarded Hollins again.

He had certain reasons for deflecting the current of their chat away from himself — reasons which of themselves were as innocuous as the potatoes he had been photographing that morning; yet, as he did not care to try to evade any more direct queries concerning his own plans, with which the same tubers were very much connected, he propounded the tentative remark as one draws a proverbial herring across the trail of a hypothetical fox.

"Yes, I hadn't forgotten it," resumed Cyrus Butler, with a click of his teeth. "Did any one ever try to intimidate you, Dan?"

"In what way?" parried the other.

He could have said no, yesterday, with perfect truth, but not with entire candor since the mysterious flight of a high-powered bullet across the obscure little ravine where he had been earlier in the day.

"Well, were you ever in a deal on which you had your heart set, and some one butted in on it, and kept butting in, and intimated to you that you'd better lay off?"

"I think not, sir, at least not in that way. My experience, you know, isn't very extensive — in deals, as you call them."

Cyrus Butler looked seaward again, then at his listener.

"Well, it's funny how things go. I've been money-grubbing—as the proletariat calls the banking business — for a good many years. Never had any one start anything with me, until lately. Then, I went in on a deal. Financed it. New kind of a deal—not strictly banking, but, still, having to do with—well—with finance.

"I went in because it made a certain appeal to my imagination. Something rather out of the ordinary, and, in a way, as I said before, with foreign antecedents. A lot of queer things have been happening since then. My meeting you this morning, for instance, was so unexpected that it almost floored me for a minute. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you talking with Yvonne, at the machine.

"The funny part of it was I'd been trying to get hold of you in New York—wanted to talk over this deal with you. You weren't to be found, so I picked on Doty. That's what made it seem so odd, to bump into you down here in Tecumseh. For a lot of odd things have happened, since, as I said before—and now, Dan, they're after me again—hard."

Hollins sat bolt upright in his chair.

"Who's after you?" He launched the query point-blank.

Butler puffed his panatella before replying.

"Maybe I ought not to have mentioned it—O'Hara told me to keep mum, no matter what happened. He's one of the operatives of the Wicks Agency—I've used Wicks and his men for years. O'Hara came down here with me to keep an eye out. Good job he came, too, for they're after me again. How they found out I was here is a mystery to me. No one outside of Doty and O'Hara knew where I was coming, that is, I thought no one else knew."

He paused, frowning portentously.

"I'm afraid I'm a little confused," said Hollins, after a short pause. "Am I to infer that you're in danger of some kind, because of this—this deal you've referred to?"

Butler emitted a short, mirthless laugh.

"If I knew who the cusses were I could tell you better," said he. "Whoever they are, they're clever — no, that's too simple a word. They're resourceful,

or they'd never have followed me here, and devilish adroit, too. Why, only this morning, after I left Yvonne in Tecumseh and took a run out on another road in my roadster, they had the effrontery to hand me a sign—no, not hand it to me, they just flashed it on me.

"They knew I'd understand they were on to me. Well, when I saw it, I was stunned. Couldn't believe my own eyes for a minute, Dan. I took their cussed sign and drove back to Tecumseh—like to got lost in the hills, trying to get back another way."

His auditor's face reflected a distress so genuine that it was unmistakable. It seemed incredible that Mr. Butler, like himself, had been the victim of some mysterious espionage by unseen eyes, as Hollins already had grave reason to believe he had also been; and at a similar period of time.

Coincidences are not usually found to recur in sustained series of events. His meeting with Mr. Butler and Yvonne had been a most amazing coincidence. That both he and the old banker were both the object of some unseen enemy—in his own case an enemy that would not stop short of deliberate murder, apparently — was too utterly fantastic for credence by any sane person.

Such events presuppose common motives, involving common objects and common plans, on the part of the intended victims. Hollins had a very fixed, well-ripened and predetermined motive in whatever he did — even to photographing potatoes. And he well knew that Cyrus Butler — nor, for that matter — any other human being, living or dead, past or present, had ever been actuated by his own particular motive—in the struggle to attain a certain objective, which had influenced him to come to Florida.

In fact, Hollins realized, that in stating he had a "whim" to account for his presence near Tecumseh, he had been very conservative. Any one would have been fairly justified—had Hollins's real motive been known—in referring to it as an obsession.

Or, in plain English, stripped of the polysyllabic word-buffer — they would have called him "stark, raving crazy."

Hence, if his deduction from Cyrus Butler's remarks was justified, and his old friend, as well as his deceased father's friend, was really in peril of some kind, Hollins knew that it could not be merely a second coincidence; and he leaned forward to interrogate the banker further, with a feeling of increasing interest.

It was, indeed, most inexplicable, that the spot that Hollins had picked out as remote, mild of climate, and altogether well-suited for his own big idea, should suddenly become peopled with potential assassins, intimidators, or other recondite personalities, and just why they had singled out this hard-headed, tight-fisted old banker, as well as himself, for their designs, when neither knew the other was there, was on a par with the inexplicable nature of several other things which had transpired that morning—not the least of which had been the curious and certainly stealthy manner that his man had been watching him on his return.

With these thoughts fuming within him, Daniel McKay Hollins launched another query, with a view of clarifying, if possible, at least a part of the situation in which events were entangling him with uncanny celerity.

CHAPTER III.

THE PERIPATETIC POTATO.

"YOU recognized this sign you mentioned?" queried the younger man.

"Recognized it?" growled Butler. "Dan, it almost derailed me. I had been motoring out toward—well, toward a certain place," he continued with a sudden reticence most peculiar for him to exhibit. "I passed a place. I came back again, inside fifteen minutes. Right there, where I'd passed before—"

He ceased suddenly when a colored servant came out on the veranda with a low-uttered apology.

"Well, what is it?" snapped Butler.

"Mistah Jeremiah O'Hara, he's heah now, sah, and wants to know if he can see you-all, sah."

"Send him right out, and place another chair for him."

Hollins started to rise. The banker gestured to him to remain seated, and Hollins turned sidewise to face the newcomer.

He was a big, burly chap, not yet forty, with reddish hair and a torso suggesting that his prior occupation before joining the staff of the Wicks agency had been juggling safes or infant locomotives. His head resembled an inverted truncated cone, and the sententious lines of his huge-jowled, somewhat flabby face reflected the man's dominant characteristic.

It denoted that he took himself very seriously.

His diminutive eyes were crafty, close-set, and deep together, beneath apologies for brows. He moved with a lethargic swing which Hollins at once saw was intentionally assumed; for Mr. O'Hara could, if need be, for all of his huge bulk, project any or all of his ponderous anatomy through space with the panther-like quickness which is one of the anomalies of men of his physical type and temperament.

Cyrus Butler waved the latest arrival to the chair.

"I was just telling Mr. Hollins here, an old friend of mine from New York, what happened to me this morning—just about to tell him, rather, when the boy said you were back again. Have you got that sign with you?"

O'Hara reached hesitatingly toward his coat-pocket.

"Yes," said he at length, "I've got it. But, Mr. Butler, as I was saying to you down in the village—"

The banker made a slight gesture of irritation.

"Dan's known me for years—I knew his dad before he was born. I want him to see it, too."

O'Hara complied.

"Just as you say," he observed in a tone carrying the implication that a most egregious error was being committed. He withdrew his hand from his pocket and extended it.

Hollins, already on the *qui vive* with anticipation, almost fell out of his chair. For O'Hara's huge palm held one of the same two potatoes which he had directed Butler to take up the ravine just before he was shot at—the one with its under surface painted white.

His start of surprise was not simulated in the slightest. Hollins, realizing that O'Hara was eying him closely, turned to Cyrus Butler with a smile tinctured with as much perplexity as he could inject into it, offhand, when he comprehended the utterly innocent nature of the circumstance which the banker had construed to contain a menace from sources as ignorant of that potato's real purpose, as Hollins was of the man or men who had fired at him.

He was so relieved that he wanted to laugh outright.

To do so, however, would be to give offense to his host; and Butler, on such occasions, could be as irascible as a longshoreman.

Hollins also felt that this was neither the time nor the place for a candid explanation of how the painted potato came to be in the road, for two reasons: first, O'Hara, who thrived on suspicions, would not believe that it was innocently placed there; even now, as Hollins shrewdly divined, O'Hara had some fine-spun, farfetched "theory" to account for its presence; second, to really give an explanation which would explain, involved revealing the fact that he was repeatedly photographing that particular potato at short range and at long distance. And here again arose the inevitable—"Why?"

That fact, above all others, Hollins had long ago resolved to keep to himself, along with other facts. Too much depended

upon it to reveal it even to reassure a friend, who, by some strange coincidence, was present on the east coast of Florida, for reasons which, too, Mr. Butler had made plain he did not care to disclose at that time, at least.

Had O'Hara not been present, Hollins told himself, he might perhaps have riven the veil to his own plans, although he was very loath to do so until he had gone a little further with them.

In another forty-eight hours, if all went well, they would be far enough advanced perhaps to give him time to return and impart to Cyrus Butler privily what he now hesitated to disclose.

The real facts behind the "intimidation" to which the banker had cryptically referred to in their chat could then be dealt with on a cause to effect basis, by eliminating the potato, without subsequent errors of judgment which would lead O'Hara or any other investigator in the banker's employ, away from the real trail.

So Hollins, after a decent interval, merely shook his head and said:

"I don't get it at all. Isn't there some mistake? Did they ever send you such a sign before?"

O'Hara gave a grunt and replaced the incriminating evidence in his pocket. Mr. Butler grunted an unintelligible reply which Hollins took for a negative, and endeavored to relight his panatella-stub, an operation requiring several attempts, for the sea-breeze was now swirling around the veranda gustily.

"As I was saying, Hollins—"

"Excuse *me*," suavely interpolated the detective. "I've got to git busy, Mr. Butler. With all due respect to your friend here. You know and I know—and if he's from New York he knows," continued O'Hara pointedly, "what happened to another banker only a couple-a years back, when a crank come inta his summer home and took a shot at him. With no disrespect intended to your friend, Mr. Butler, I'm of the opinion that we'd better let this matter rest until I can give you the benefit of my own ideas about it.

"This thing's getting too warm—entirely too warm," continued the sleuth unctuously, as if experiencing the accession of several fresh British thermal units in the delivery of his platitudes, "to waste time over it. Am I right," he oracularly demanded, "or am I not?"

Butler turned to Hollins and winked solemnly.

"What do you think of this mess, anyway?" he demanded.

"With all due respect, and with no disrespect to Mr. O'Hara—since he sees fit to thus refer to me," laughed Hollins somewhat boisterously, "I don't get the connection of the potato. Why a potato? And why a painted potato? Did they warn that other banker by a vegetable of any kind before the crank went in and took a shot at him?"

"Cranks don't always work the same way," observed O'Hara ominously.

His frigid tone indicated that he disliked Hollins already for combating his theories. It lessened his principal asset in the eyes of his employer—his enormous self-esteem and his porcine orbs grew hard and cold.

Hollins did not attempt to repress a satirical smile at O'Hara's umbrage. He knew the type—cheap arrogance, fortified by truculence bred of quasi-police authority, made the fellow dogmatic.

So, Hollins ignored the self-sufficient detective and addressed himself to the banker as he replied:

"The purely coincidental character of my meeting with you this morning should, of itself, be sufficient to absolve me of any desire to hamper Mr. O'Hara. Besides, I must get back to the village."

"By the way, Dan, will you be here long?" asked Butler as Hollins rose. "If so, you must run out and see us often. won't you? Can't you stay to lunch? Yvonne would be pleased, I'm sure."

"Thank you. No, I fear I must be going after I make my adieus to Yvonne."

"Well, Dan, I'm mighty sorry about

this potato business, but if you knew what's back of all of it you'd understand how serious it is."

"I'll lunch with you in a day or two, on some of the baked evidence," grinned Hollins. "Therein, Mr. Butler, in my own undetectatorial opinion, lies its principal nourishment. As for what happened before, of course, I'm not qualified to express an opinion, since I am ignorant of all the facts. But, if you feel you may need me, call on me for help. I'm out the other side of the village, but I come in almost every day, and I suppose you have a phone?"

"Oh, yes." Butler arose and extended his hand. "Call me up to-morrow, Dan, will you?"

"If I come in, and I expect to now. Good day, sir. Good afternoon, Mr. O'Hara."

He walked around the corner of the big mansion, ruminating.

The explosions he had heard while photographing that potato at long distance were, no doubt, due to the open muffler of Mr. Butler's motor. That explained some things—but not the mysterious shot through the trees.

Some one else was lurking in that vicinity.

Some one had fired at where he had happened to be standing.

The more he thought of it, the more sinister the fact became, because, now that he analyzed it closely, while he had heard the open muffler's exhaust without difficulty, he could not remember hearing the discharge of the weapon which had sent that projectile hurtling directly through the identical space where he had stood a fraction of a minute before.

In a way, his coincidental meeting with the Butlers was profitable, because it separated some of the wheat from the chaff of his previous conjectures. But it left him again without a clue, save Baker's surreptitious glances—and Baker had been in another direction from where the shot was fired.

Likewise, he had been in plain view, almost all of the time that he had been absent, owing to the ability of the telephoto lens to annihilate distance by gathering lightrays and objectifying the ravine and the servant, who, when all was said, was merely carrying out Hollins's own orders.

"I'm wrong in suspecting Baker," he told himself. "He didn't hear the shot fired, either. He didn't even know where we were going, except it was up the river. I didn't really know, myself, until I came on that ravine. But, who else knew I was in Florida, and who else might have an object in taking a shot at me?"

He looked around. He was walking through a flowering pergola, and, a little beyond, he descried Yvonne—and Vernon Doty, chatting by a tennis net. There was a third chap present also, but he was over on the court, bouncing the ball idly on the ground with his racket, evidently waiting for one or the other to join him.

At the sight of Yvonne conversing with his fellow clubman Hollins again underwent a curious emotional transformation.

Yvonne was most appealing.

The svelte figure of her, leaning negligently against a settee in the shade of a magnificent magnolia-tree, made the rest of the glorious day mean and tawdry. Her blouse was open at the neck. Her short skirt revealed her symmetrical ankles. Her feet were entrancing, even in the hideous flat, rubber-soled tennis slippers she wore. To Hollins, already smarting under the knowledge of a recent indiscretion which he feared had lowered him in her eyes, she possessed all the delirious, toxic feminine lure which weighs so heavily in the balance of human existence.

She was only one of millions of her sex, and yet she reflected that sublimated something in personality and individuality which made him actually dizzy and raging at seeing her in proximity to Doty—Doty, whom he had always secretly despised for a shallow sneak.

For an instant Hollins could under-

stand how one man could lay in wait in the underbrush to shoot at another. Then his mood passed.

He hated Doty, always would hate him. He had hated him from the first, because he had a head like a horse and whinnied when he laughed.

Long before either of them had met Yvonne Butler, this instinctive hate was bred—like the flaming love for the girl that blazed within him, yet left his face cold and rigid.

He fought for self-control before walking over to where Yvonne was personifying all that Hollins held desirable, save his " whim," and his determination to see it through, regardless.

The previous events of the morning became suddenly of little or no importance. They lingered, true, but dim and wraithlike in his consciousness. For Yvonne was there—one woman of millions—nevertheless reflecting that infinity of personal charm which no other woman ever possessed for the man eying her hungrily, from the flower-draped pergola.

He was scarcely conscious that he stood there, clasping and unclasping his hands; nor did he know that Jeremiah O'Hara, just then frowning sententiously through a window of the library where he was conferring with Cyrus Butler, at the same instant found a new and rather keen delight in scrutinizing, unobserved, the individual who had spoken with such levity about the clue which the detective still had in his coat-pocket.

Then Hollins walked casually over toward Doty and the girl. Ten minutes later Yvonne was driving him back to Tecumseh, chatting earnestly with him.

CHAPTER IV.

MISSING—A POTATO AND A MAN.

TWO days later when Thomas Baker paused at the humble but, to him, entirely joyful routine of putting his master's sleeping-room in order, he unwittingly disturbed a large envelope lying on the top of the wardrobe-trunk which served as an adjunct to the rather anemic dresser in the same room. It fell to the floor.

As Baker stooped to replace it, he saw that it contained a series of photographs. Baker was entirely cured of his recent forebodings concerning his master's mental condition, and he was heartily ashamed of the fugitive suspicions he had harbored. Mr. Hollins and he had exchanged certain confidences, and all was quite serene. Nor had he the slightest intention of prying into things which Hollins, for reasons of his own, did not confide in a mere servant.

Therefore Baker's glance at the photographs was merely incidental to his replacing them in the envelope prior to replacing the container itself on the top of the wardrobe-trunk.

The operation, however, entailed his visualizing them in order to accomplish even this simple feat. And as he glanced down at them, Baker saw that one of them was the first view which Hollins had taken of the six potatoes over in the ravine two days before.

There could be no mistaking them.

They were certainly plain enough, only —Baker rubbed his eyes to be sure they were not deceiving him—there were only *five* tubers in view.

The thing was very odd, and to make sure that he was in error, although he could not be sure how or why he could see but five when he had personally placed six in place, he looked again.

His wonder grew.

The six sticks were there, just as he remembered placing them.

But, try as he would, Baker could not see the missing potato.

He looked around the room again. He wanted to test his eyes. Something unaccountably uncanny had happened to that missing potato, for it had surely been in position every time Hollins had snapped it with the camera. Baker was positive of this, as positive, in fact, that he was sure he was alive.

Everything appeared to be normal.

Baker looked again at the photograph. The potato was still absent. In his now almost frantic mystification, he permitted himself a glimpse of another photograph.

There should have been six potatoes there also, for it was the second exposure, evidently taken some twenty feet from the place of the first one. The six sticks were still visible, as were five tubers, but the sixth potato was not visible.

Baker here temporarily forgot the habits and conventions of a lifetime.

He rippled the balance of the photographs through his fingers. In each and every one, save the last one, which was of two sticks and one potato, the result was invariably the same. Only five potatoes could be discerned.

And weirdly enough, in the final photograph, which was as clear and sharp as any of the others, where there should have been two potatoes, because he certainly had placed the two in position, as directed, there was only *one* to be seen.

At the edge of the picture, also, appeared the hood of an automobile, with a man peering over at the apparently empty stick. The man possessed an iron-gray mustache and a pair of keen, almost corrosive, eyes.

Baker replaced the photographs with a feeling of sublime awe, approximating terror. No wonder his master had behaved so curiously that forenoon. But what lay back of the peculiar incident and the incongruous reference to the eyes of the potatoes and "other functions" which the servant recalled?

He went back to his work, shaking off the mood shortly, and rejoicing that his routine duties did not require of him any explanation of such a thing. It was simply unexplainable—and that ended it.

Baker was very glad, though, in a way, to hear Tom Lee crooning a Chinese melody in the kitchen; the voices of the master and another man who had come down from New York to join the other three also reassured him. They were walking down toward the long, low, decrepit warehouse, or whatever the ancient structure was or had been, two hundred yards beyond the cottage at the river's edge, intent on something which the building contained.

Heretofore Baker had wondered what was in the building.

Now he did not care to know.

He only knew that Ned Brown, the last arrival, was a slight but stocky young chap, pockmarked of face, with his tongue in his cheek; that he looked like a mechanic, and he came up to the house sometimes with his face daubed with oil, soot, or paint.

Brown had arrived from New York the evening of the same day that Hollins and Baker had gone up-river to photograph the six potatoes, and that thereafter there had been many chats between the two, strange sounds emanating from the warehouse, and apparently continuous work in the building on the part of both.

Baker experienced a feeling of relief as he went about the house putting things in order.

Here he was the center of a little universe of his own, and, although he could not have stated it in just those terms, here he, found his faculties in equilibrium, things were on a sure foundation, and his eyesight particularly seemed to have suffered no impairment.

Then, after a time, he noticed that it was growing late.

To the west the sun was dropping swiftly toward the edge of the horizon, and judging from the cheerful hum of the teakettle in Tom Lee's kitchen, even that unregenerate burner of incense to a diminutive Joss, was likewise aware of the flight of the afternoon.

Baker hurriedly set the table for supper.

Tom Lee was a heathen, but his cooking was certainly of a kind approximating the divine. And Hollins and Brown both ate as they worked, silently but with gusto.

They would be up soon, and whether potatoes jumped into nothingness from the ends of sharpened sticks, or whether they could not be photographed although clear-

ly visualized by himself, was a matter of small importance to Baker.

His master's approbation was the compensation for the secluded character that his services had taken on during the last few weeks; and Baker took things as they came, no longer even speculating on the unexplained absences of his employer which had occurred in and about New York prior to their coming down to this infrequented section of the Florida east coast.

Action makes a theater out of life, and Baker had a comfortable sense of familiarity already with his new surroundings; and he wanted everything in perfect order when the two came in for their evening meal.

A shadow fell across the doorway.

Baker looked up, ready to greet one or other of the men he expected to serve.

The newcomer was neither Hollis nor Brown.

He was huge of bulk, with a head like a round wedge, and jaws that hung like a hound's ears. His eyes were small but piercing. His expression was neither respectful nor reassuring.

He remained silent while his piggy eyes roved the room.

The mortar of Baker's matter-of-fact life, however, was again set firmly, as of old. The man was no hallucination. He was not only flesh and blood, but considerable of both, and plenty of bone. Moreover, as Baker scanned him, he appeared to have what the staid servant would term "plenty of brass" in his make-up, for he neither spoke nor offered to move away.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Baker after a brief, wordless period had passed, "but have you any business here?"

"Have I?" sneered the visitor. "Well, if I have, what then?"

"Then, sir," said Baker, with a quite proper mixture of respect and independence, "your business will be with the master, Mr. Daniel McKay Hollins, I take it. Will you have a chair? I fancy he'll be in directly?"

"I fancy I'll have a look around before he comes in," growled the intruder.

"No, sir," said Baker, stifling his slight surprise; "I cannot allow that, sir. If you have any desire to explore the premises, you must first ask and obtain Mr. Hollins's permission. I am in charge of the house, and those are his strict orders, sir."

The intruder leered.

"I give orders myself sometimes," he sententiously observed.

Baker made a slight, deprecatory gesture.

"Not to me, sir," said he, with growing obduracy. "I am in Mr. Hollins's service, sir, and, as I said before, in charge of his house. You may either wait for him or you may go outside."

"Very kind of you," rumbled the big man. "Now, see here, my man. I'm going to have a look around this house before Mr. Hollins comes back. Get this?" He swung back the lapel of his coat. A gold shield, with letters indiscernible at the distance, gleamed on his breast. "Now that's settled. And meanwhile you'll come with me."

"This is most unusual, sir," said Baker. "If you are an officer, and have a legal right to invade—"

"Shut up!" growled the other. Baker started to back away.

"My name's O'Hara and I'm a detective," added the other man. "Now, you'll do what I say—regardless, or I'll break you in two pieces and leave you to think it over. Come with me."

He waved Baker to precede him into the bedroom opening off the apartment in which the supper-table was being laid. His piggy eyes scanned every detail of the room. There was little in sight save the usual accessories to a gentleman's toilet and some neckties neatly arranged on a line.

O'Hara frowned.

He yanked over several of the drawers of the dresser; he rumpled the linen fruitlessly; he peered under the bed. Then he approached the trunk, caught sight of the

large envelope, and picked it up before Baker could object.

He shook out and scanned the photographs intently. He replaced them in the container, and a livid, noxious smile contorted his heavy, brutish face as he thrust the envelope deliberately into his pocket and turned on the stunned servant.

" Where is Mr. Daniel McKay Hollins? I've got pressing business with that gentleman. Get me? No monkeying now, or I'll arrest you along with him. I've got a warrant for him in my pocket right now—and the evidence to hold him, too."

Here Mr. O'Hara paused to tap the pocket into which he had just thrust the photographs of the five potatoes—five where Baker knew there should have been six.

" He's outside somewhere," said Baker. " As I told you, before I knew the purpose of your coming here," he continued a little more stoutly, " I'm expecting him to come in any moment."

O'Hara gestured for silence.

The sound of voices came faintly to the servant's ears.

Mr. Brown and Mr. Hollins were chatting outside the old warehouse, it seemed.

Then, without another look in his direction, O'Hara turned and strode back to the door of the house through which he had entered and stepped outside.

Baker followed mechanically. Again his little world of the commonplace was illusion, and illusion, conversely, almost immediately became reality, as he padded after the great bulk of the man who was striding like a big bear in the direction of the speakers.

As they rounded the old warehouse building next to the river, the glory of the flawless Florida sunset flooded the scene with crimson and auriferous rays. Even the ripening oranges flung back their hues defiantly.

The familiar stream blazed responsively, like the facets of innumerable jewels, from a series of ripples created by something perhaps six hundred feet from the shore. The dingy wharf, with its tethered canoe, a hundred yards farther up, stood out with cameolike clearness.

Ned Brown, grimy but jovial, stood on the strip of sand, grinning as he talked.

" Turn her over, Danny!" he shouted. " Great grief—but you're a wonder!"

At the sound of approaching footsteps Brown turned with a frown.

O'Hara, advancing with his lumbering but deceptive stride, kept on, Baker, who walked a little closer to the water's edge, caught sight of a change in the heavy and odious mask which served the detective for a face.

" Who's your fat friend?" came a jeering voice that the servant recognized as his master's. It seemed to come from the direction where the smooth surface of the river was now becoming more and more agitated, now a hundred feet farther than the ripples had been a moment before.

Baker peered more closely. He even rubbed his eyes. He fancied there was something out there, but he could not discern what it was.

The mechanic grinned, and gave O'Hara a look of disdain verging on contempt.

" This fat gink?" he replied. " Oh, he's an uninvited guest. Turn her over, Danny. Let's see what you've got."

The ripples churned into miniature billows, spray shot up, then, as mysteriously, the waters quieted. Whatever had been there was gone.

And with it had gone Daniel McKay Hollins—gone, evidently on the oily smudge which trailed for an instant above the now serene surface of the river—gone amid the thunderous reverberations that tore apart the brooding twilight like a rat-a-plan of fifty well-matured, energetic pneumatic riveters.

Undoubtedly Mr. Hollins was gone.

" But *where?*" muttered Baker with a shudder.

He turned to gaze stupidly at Jeremiah O'Hara. The detective was gasping like a fish withdrawn from its native element, or more like a yokel who has witnessed the black and alembicated art of some smiling, chatty wizard of the stage, who has trans-

formed a beautiful young lady into a canary in a tiny cage amid a guard from the audience holding the cloth he has just thrown over her.

Even Baker's somewhat moribund sense of humor was revived as he saw O'Hara, clutching in one hand a bit of paper with a flaring red seal, and with the other the pocket containing photographs of six sticks and five potatoes.

CHAPTER V.

COINCIDENCE, THE OCTOPUS.

AT the very moment that Hollins vanished in so extraordinary a way, the man who had hired detective O'Hara from the Wicks Agency, and on whose behalf O'Hara had tried to arrest Hollins, was preparing to duplicate the " vanishing stunt " on the veranda at Miramar, which faced the sea.

In Butler's case, however, there was a marked difference from that of Hollins's.

Hollins knew what he was doing. He had planned to do that very thing; only, of course, he had not expected O'Hara to be " among those present " when he did it.

Butler intended to do nothing of the kind, but something far different. The old banker was, in fact, planning to do something which those who knew him most intimately would never have believed he would try to do—not even Yvonne.

The husk of his fifty-eight years had cracked open, as if ravished asunder by the color and fragrance of a new perspective of an old, old ideal.

The bare thought of it a few weeks before had stripped off a half-century of time, breathing into him fresh courage, disclosing new beauties, and the texture of life had taken on a new weave—the weave it possessed when, as a boy of eight, little Cy Butler laid in the hay-mow back on the farm and read the story of the boy in the apple-barrel in " Treasure Island."

If Hollins had a secret which he was careful to guard, even at the temporary expense of allowing Yvonne Butler's father to worry another forty-eight hours, Butler had a no-less precious secret, for he had come to the east coast of Florida on the search for " buried treasure."

Not that the banker needed the " treasure," in one way, for his fortune was already very large; but he needed something—something which neither travel, politics, horses, yachts, paintings, or any other plaything of other multimillionaires could give him.

And as he paced back and forth on the veranda a little impatiently, waiting for Vernon Doty to " show up," the banker carried a copy of " Treasure Island " in the baggy pocket of his coat. For Doty was also there to hunt buried treasure, by Butler's invitation; and so was Alphonse de Mars—because it was the treasure belonging to the de Mars family which they were hunting.

That treasure had been on the Hispania, a gallant ship, so called after the ancient name of Spain, whose flag she flew when, loaded with plunder, jewels, gold, and rich loot of every sort taken from the new continent of America, the Hispania had gone down off the east coast of Florida some two hundred and seventy-five years before.

Cyrus Butler had stumbled by sheer accident across the young Spaniard, whose attorney, one day at luncheon at the Lawyers' Club in New York, had told Cyrus Butler's lawyer, casually, the story of the old ship, its precious cargo, and of the papers his young client had to back up the legend.

A month later, quite by accident, Butler's attorney, while visiting his client's office, happened to refer, equally casually, to the matter.

Butler heard his attorney through, then changed the subject.

But he at once secretly investigated Alfonso de Mars, his story, and his papers, as warily as if about to make a ten million dollar loan. He found it without a flaw—even to the ancient arms of Spain—the crown, the shield, the triple turrets of Old Castile, with the rampant lions of Leon as well as the sculptured " Order of

the Golden Fleece" above the motto, "*Reyanado en España.*" Experts pronounced the papers genuine; other investigators, secretly hired by the banker, declared Spain had taken *more than three hundred tons of gold from America in one generation.*

After which young de Mars—who was very poor—Cyrus Butler, and Vernon Doty made an agreement to seek the old hulk off the ancient fort of San Marco, and to share and share alike, if they found it.

Doty was taken in by Butler principally because he was a frequent visitor at Butler's house to see Yvonne. The banker would have preferred Danny Hollins, the son of his old friend. He tried to get Danny, but could find no trace of him. Hollins had disappeared completely.

Butler knew Doty well in a social way. Before taking him in, he also looked him up.

He found Doty to be a man of thirty or thereabouts, with English antecedents; a junior partner in a young Wall Street firm dealing in arbitrage orders for stocks in London, principally; that he shot well at the traps, drove a coach-and-four or an auto with like skill, played good poker, and was popular with the set in which he moved, despite his rather unprepossessing personal appearance.

The entering wedge broadened in Doty's favor as a substitute for Hollins the night Butler overheard Doty chatting with his daughter and lamenting "the good old red-blooded days."

Next day at their club the banker invited Doty to lunch with him; showed the young broker some of the papers, including the chart with the Order of the Golden Fleece, *et cetera,* whereat Doty laughed and declared it was most appropriate as a design for a treasure hunter. Butler explained his proofs; Doty grew thoughtful, then enthusiastic, and the compact was secretly sealed by the three men.

Not even Yvonne dreamed anything of this the afternoon that Hollins, following the receipt of his congé from the ubiquitous O'Hara who had effectually carried his employer into the library to further discuss the mystery of the half-painted potato, walked over to greet the banker's daughter where she stood talking to Doty on the edge of the tennis court.

Hollins greeted Doty with quiet formality. Doty whinnied.

"Fancy!" he exclaimed, "seeing *you* in Florida!"

"Yes, it's an odd coincidence," returned Hollins.

"Well," returned Doty, "if Yvonne and you will excuse me, I've got a set or two to play with de Mars."

Hollins turned to Yvonne and explained how O'Hara had terminated the chat with her father, then, deeming the time and place propitious, he implored her pardon for his behavior while calling on her in New York the previous New Year's night.

"You know, I rarely imbibe," said he. "I was fairly kidded into drinking a tiny glass of punch while making my first call New Year's Day. It was punch with an unsuspected punch, and every one else seemed to have punch as well. I intended to wind up at your house. They tell me that I got as far as the door, then slid down the front steps—and that you saw me."

Yvonne laughed merrily and, offering to drive him back to Tecumseh herself, she said:

"Why, I never even thought of it again. You afterward called twice, I believe. I was out, but it was merely a coincidence, like our meeting to-day in Tecumseh."

During this mutual explanation, O'Hara was quizzing Cyrus Butler in the library until that gentleman almost lost his temper. O'Hara knew nothing as yet of Butler's real purpose in Florida, and his hectoring of the banker regarding Hollins and others of his acquaintances grew intolerable at last.

"Confound it, O'Hara!" roared Butler at last, "Hollins isn't one of my intimidators. Our meeting here was purely chance. I've known the boy for years." He was fairly purple at the slight but

deliberate insinuations with which the detective had been goading him. "What's the idea?" he demanded.

"I hain't got a thing on Hollins," returned O'Hara. "But, Mr. Butler, in the banking business you use all the figures from one to zero, don't you—and a lot of combinations?"

Butler nodded with a surly air.

"And in my business," went on O'Hara, "I can't get along without figuring my own way. I can't stop with six figures when there's ten. I don't know a thing about your friend, but I do know that somebody's after you—somebody's hot on your trail—here's the evidence you brought me yourself—a potato white underneath. They stuck it up in the road and you brought it to me. What's the idea of a potato? And why did Hollins give it the pooh-pooh so hard? Does he know anything about it? I don't know. But if he *did* happen to know and kept still, is that anything to his credit?"

And of this, too, Hollins, perforce, knew nothing, for he was on his way back to Tecumseh in the machine with Yvonne, chatting with their old-time freedom and humming a bit of verse:

"I'm a dreamer of dreams and of stories
That life has not wearied of yet.
Faustine, Fragoletta, Dolores,
Felise—and Yvonne—and Juliet—

"By the way," said he abruptly, "who's the other chap on the tennis court with Doty?"

"A Mr. de Mars," she explained; "a friend of Vernon's."

"I thought he had a trace of Continental breeding when he bowed from the hips as we passed," mused Hollins. "Now, Yvonne, I'm coming out to see you in two or three days, and I want you to take a little trip with me."

"All right. But there's not much to see around here, is there, except swamp and forest?"

"This trip will be a marvel," he assured her. "You've never had one like it in all your life before. Neither has any one else. Yvonne, I give you my word that I'll show you something new—absolutely new—before this week is out."

She pleaded for some hint of what it would be. But Hollins was inexorable. He merely told her to wait his return to the Ryndenham estate and to tell no one that he was coming.

"You are the only one in the world to know," said he, "barring an assistant of mine, who's been helping me prepare a surprise for you. I just hit on the last fantastic, elusive combination to-day—I am sure I've won out. I'll know to-night or to-morrow. Well, here we are. Thanks, ever so much, for your forgiveness and the delightful hours since I blundered into you here."

Thus, beginning with the hay-mow and a copy of "Treasure Island," perused by a tow-headed lad who saw visions of himself in the boy-hero penned by the deathless imagination of Stevenson, down to the humble tuber with the snow-white stomach, through the dovetailing years the various links were blended which brought Thomas Baker, Ned Brown, and Jeremiah O'Hara to the banks of the sluggish Florida swamp river, near its mouth, at the moment when the conversation ensued between the mechanic and Hollins.

Baker, striving with might and main immediately afterward to recoordinate his scattered faculties, remembered this one thing clearly:

There had been a shadow—a pronounced, black silhouette—on the relatively placid surface of the stream the moment before the water had been so mysteriously churned into foam, and an instant or two before the chattering roar shattered the silence with its unwonted dissonances.

It was a long shadow, reaching far out on the water, and cast by *something*. But the curious and inexplicable thing about it was that whatever it was that cast the shadow was even more intangible than the penumbra it caused. In fact, it was practically as invisible as the mysteriously

missing potato. There was no doubt at all about that.

O'Hara, chagrined and completely mystified, stood staring open-mouthed at—invisibility.

His swagger was gone, and he was limp from amazement and the vindictive irony of his failure to arrest Hollins.

His efforts in the interim since seeing Hollins on the veranda out at Miramar two days before had been typical of one as dogmatic and unimaginative as Hollins had shrewdly divined the detective to be.

He forestalled Hollins the same afternoon by returning to Tecumseh, and from there had " shadowed " him to a photographer, a paint - store, and finally to the railway-station, where O'Hara watched Hollins as he met Brown.

Brown, O'Hara fancied, he had seen before—in New York.

It was " no trick at all," as O'Hara assured himself gleefully the next day, to " flash his tin " and coerce a country photographer into an admission as to the character of the prints which Hollins had ordered made from his negatives.

O'Hara, gloating over his clue, first went back to Miramar, however, to drop a few more cryptic remarks and goad Butler a little further, before he realized that, in law, there was no real proof of either a crime or criminal intent in a man painting a potato if he was so minded, and photographing it also, in a public highway. Nor, if he was intent on some nefarious purpose, would he be likely to leave so broad a clue, O'Hara was forced to admit.

Then, after a careful questioning of Butler as to the time of day when he had met Hollins talking with Yvonne, and a further interrogation of the photographer as to the time when the prints had been left with him for development, he reversed the process of reason, and concluded that Hollins had left the prints before being seen by the girl, which, in fact, was another of the coincidences that actually existed.

" But," reasoned the wily O'Hara, " if he wasn't crooked and such a friend to Butler as the old man pretends he is, why didn't he come across with the facts and relieve Butler's mind. Only one answer—the girl mugged him from behind, when he wasn't expecting to be mugged. The nerve of him, settin' there and tellin' me to my face that he couldn't see no connection with that potato and the story the old man was tryin' to spit out! No wonder he was so cocky! He must 'a' thought he had somethin' on me. Well, I'll put somethin' on him—lemme see, what 'll it be?"

O'Hara finally decided, after looking up the records, that he could " get away with it " by merely arresting Hollins for running an automobile in the State of Florida without a license.

" I'll slam him in, and once he's in with them black boys and champeen cockroaches—I'll put the bud to him, with the chief of Tecumseh on my staff," he ruminated.

Thus vowing, Mr. O'Hara came out to Hollins's cottage, and thus he still stood, staring blankly at the ripples which were once more as decorous as if they had never been disturbed.

O'Hara, however, would have been more disturbed than the ripples had been could he have foreseen what was transpiring at the same time at Miramar.

The same sun was, coincidentally, throwing other shadows.

One fell athwart the veranda, where Cyrus Butler was chewing the end of his dead panetella, and fuming inwardly because Doty was now an hour overdue. It wasn't like Doty. Usually he was as punctual as a time-clock.

Then Alfonso de Mars came up. He, too, was seeking Doty.

" I'll go over to his house and look for him," said the young Spaniard. " Maybe he's overslept. He takes a nap every afternoon, late, you know."

" Thank you," said Butler. " I'll read until you return."

He sat down and opened " Treasure Island."

A pall of silence settled over the place.

No servants were about. Yvonne was out on the other side of the house, reading the story of Ponce de Leon, and his futile quest for the " Fountain of Youth," now and again pausing to glance up into the somber eyes of that statuesque hero, in bronze, overlooking the fountain in the court.

A tall, tawny negro came around the veranda, where the old banker was deep in an exciting scene between *Long John Silver* and the boy hero of " Treasure Island." The hero, *Long John,* the treasure, were all very real.

So Cyrus Butler saw neither the tawny negro nor the bed tick he took from a wheelbarrow nor the coincidental shadow cast by the sun across the veranda as the negro came up the steps, without sound, in his bare feet. Likewise, he was oblivious to the itching fingers of the black as he stretched out his hand.

The same negro, a few moments later, was wheeling the bed tick, but no longer empty, down the winding back path of the Ryndenham estate, leading along the rear terraces toward the sea. A swift shadow swept the terrace and fell upon the negro and his burden. The big black paused, set down the handles of the wheelbarrow, and looked aloft. He saw nothing. Puzzled, muttering, he picked up the handles and wheeled stolidly on.

Ten minutes later Daniel Hollins, who had been making a coincidental shadow on the river in front of his house at the same time the negro's appeared on the veranda, came up the same path—by a coincidence.

The long arm of coincidence was no longer merely long. It was also multiple. In fact, coincidence was exhibiting as many arms as a devil-fish. Hollins gazed at the empty veranda, went around the house, saw Yvonne, and coincidentally the twilight grew more auriferous as she rose, smiled, and extended her hand in her cordial, girlish greeting.

" Are you ready for that trip?" asked Hollins. " I'm ready. Everything else is ready. By the way, when we get back I'm going to tell you something that I want you to tell your father for me. It's a huge joke, in a way, and, in another sense, it's serious. I've discovered the true secret of a certain half-white painted potato — and let me assure you it's not half as black as it's been painted by the dingy imagination of Mr. O'Hara."

" Isn't it a bit late?" asked Yvonne.

" We'll not be gone long. And we'll travel fast. Get a cloak, will you? The night air is apt to be chill."

CHAPTER VI.

TWO COINCIDENTAL CONVERSATIONS—AND EVENTS.

HAD Jeremiah O'Hara lived in a Spanish castle at the time the Hispania sank somewhere off the old Spanish fort San Marco, and had he possessed a coat of arms in keeping with his present state of mind, it would have consisted, in part, of a black-jack rampant, handcuffs couchant, with bars sinister in the background, on a field of gloom, with the motto: " When in doubt, be brutal."

Just at present, staggering as he was in the mists of his own shattered self-conceit and the inexplicable nature of the thing he had heard and not seen, O'Hara turned on Ned Brown, who was grinning. The grin made O'Hara show considerably more ferocity than the occasion warranted.

" Say, what's been pulled off around here, anyway?" he demanded. " Where's my bird?"

" Your what?" inquired Brown acidly. " What do you take me for? *Your* bird! Say, do I look like I ran a quail foundry or shoveled out canary candy? Back up, you big walloper! Who are *you,* anyway?"

" I'm an officer—" began O'Hara truculently.

" Well, I ain't interfering with you, am I? Go on and romp around the lot—enjoy yourself. You ain't got a thing on me—lemme give you that straight."

"I don't know about that," equivocated O'Hara in an ugly tone. "We'll have to look into things a little around here, I guess."

"Have a good look—go as far as you like. You don't see me handing you any blinders, do you?" replied the peppery mechanic.

O'Hara began to see that he was as likely to get information by this course as gold dust by beating a tenement-house rag carpet. So he modulated.

"Wasn't Mr. Daniel McKay Hollins here a minute ago?" he asked.

"Well, if he was you'd have seen him, wouldn't you?"

"I thought you and he were talking," parried O'Hara.

"There ain't any law that keeps you from thinking what you like," retorted Brown. "What's the idea?"

"I've got a warrant for his arrest. I came here to serve it."

O'Hara waved the paper. Brown merely gave a shrug.

"My name ain't Hollins. I only work for him. Go ahead and serve it."

"Now, see here—"

"See nothing!" exploded Brown. "You try to pull any of this third-degree stuff on me, and we'll go to the mat. And you'll go first, with this cute little wrench banging that bean of yours. You're too fresh—get me?"

"You helped him escape from the custody of an officer!" flustered O'Hara.

"Where was he? Where did he go? Where was I? Right here. I ain't moved since you came around the corner of the building. Besides, I didn't know you were an officer until you began to pull this emery-dust chatter of yours. Back off, cull. You're in 'way over your head, now."

"Did you see him?" demanded O'Hara, whirling on the stolid Baker.

"See who, sir?"

"Your boss—this Hollins!"

"I did not, sir."

"Well, did you hear him speak?"

"Until I have further proof of your authority, sir, I must refuse to answer any questions. If you really are an officer—"

"Lamp this again!" grated O'Hara, swiftly wedging into what he fancied was his first advantage, as he stepped toward the servant and displayed his gold shield the second time.

"And even if you are," placidly continued Baker, "I must refuse to answer any questions, sir, until I have the benefit and advice of counsel."

Brown, possessing a temperament bordering on the neurotic when excited, again drew cards in the conversation.

"That's the stuff, Baker. Call his bluff. He's got nothing on you or me. His warrant calls for Mr. Hollins. The world is wide — let him ramble around until he throws the hooks into him."

The sardonic humor of the doughty little mechanic's sturdy support of the more rabbitlike Baker rekindled O'Hara's ire anew.

"I guess I'll just take you two birds back to town with me," said he, whipping out his handcuffs. "You're accessories, either before or after the fact, of this escape. I want that man for a felony—attempted blackmail."

"Are you sure we ain't accessories between the facts, and is the male black or only yellow?" jeered Brown. "You're eyesight don't strike me as being above the average. You'll look nice going into court with a charge against us like that—and then admitting that you was looking right at a man and couldn't see him. Some squirrel must be using your hair for storage."

O'Hara started toward him. Brown balanced his wrench and appraised the distance between them with a critical eye.

At which the detective pulled his automatic.

"Smoke-wagon stuff, eh?" caustically continued the mechanic. "Mr. Baker, go back to the house. I've got something to say to Mr. O'Hara which I don't want you to hear and which he won't want you to hear, after he's heard it from me."

"Now," resumed Brown, when Baker was out of ear-shot, "you'd better forget this artillery practise idea. I know you, O'Hara, and I knew you when your name was something else. I knew you when you hung out around St. Mark's place—"

O'Hara went livid. He thrust the pistol, however, back into his pocket.

"Good old Fido!" grinned Brown. "And now, on your way. Mr. Hollins will be back in the morning. Call about ten and serve your warrant. But you better put in the night soldering up any leaks you find in it, for Hollins is a white man, O'Hara."

Scarcely had this edifying passage-at-arms gotten well under way when, at another point on the coast some eighteen miles as the golden vulture of the coast flies, the much-wanted Hollins was leading a demure but exceedingly pretty girl down to the water's edge.

She watched him pick up the end of a rope which led out into the comparative quiet of a coral-bound cove, on which the breakers, a thousand feet beyond, were drumfiring against the fortifications the tiny polyps had so laboriously erected.

"Where's the boat?" queried Yvonne Butler. "And, Dan—I mean Mr. Hollins—surely you don't intend to try to ride out through that surf!"

"S-s-h!" said he. "There's no surf that will bother us. We're going over it, not through it. Ah!" He stopped pulling on the line and turned to the girl.

"But I don't see anything," she protested.

"You flatter me — Miss Butler — I mean Yvonne," he laughed. "Well, bid a fond adieu to formality for a little while."

He swooped suddenly, caught her in his strong, lithe arms, and waded out into the sea. Yvonne, although tremendously embarrassed, was too well bred to scream and too sensible to struggle. In six steps, moreover, she found herself ensconced in what seemed to be the cockpit of a rather novel type of motor-boat.

It had an unusually high prow, with a transparent shield, and over it was what she fancied was an awning—although it extended some distance laterally, instead of longitudinally, of the boat's structure.

Depositing her on the cushions, Hollins climbed into the seat beside her. He buckled her into place after bidding her don a curious garment, dull brown in spots, alternating with white. Also, he similarly attired himself, and added a cap, likewise as mottled as an ill-bred hen's feathers, and gloves to correspond.

"This," he explained, "is a hydroaeroplane. You've never had a flight in one, have you?"

"No," said Yvonne. "Is it—is it quite safe?"

"Quite. And, I may add, I'm rather proficient in its operation. That's what I was doing for some weeks in New York practising off the coast at Cape May, while every one was trying to find out why I'd disappeared. But, Yvonne, that's not all. When we get back I'll let you in on something really new. Hydroaeroplanes of themselves are rather recent. This one, however, is different from any other in the world in two essentials. Now, while we wait for the tide to rise a little more and float us clear of the sand, I'll tell you some of the things they taught me."

Which Hollins did, in no small detail, during the next fifteen minutes. He told how important it was that the water should be comparatively smooth in order that the plane could get under headway; he explained the slight obduracy of the machine, at the first start of the motor, to steer in a straight line, owing to the fact that the air pressure in the rudder was scarcely sufficient to hold the boat steady and true in the denser element in which she floated at the time.

"It's designed primarily for two elements, but its efficiency depends more largely on air-flight. So at present we dispense with a water rudder. In the air, however, we leave nothing to chance. There are just three factors, fundamentally, which we have to take into account

for flying. One is structural stability. The first flying machines were frail things compared to the rigid, heavy models of to-day. The pioneer designers didn't realize how friendly the air really was."

"Friendly?" queried the girl.

"Friendly. Air is an element. All the elements are friendly, when you comprehend their powers and devise ways to harness them. We build for structural stability — meaning absolute safety — first; the next factor is adequate power. An aeroplane is like a man. Both succeed in proportion to the power they possess. A six-cylinder man beats a one-cylinder dub. The more power, the more reserve force at command."

"Are they ever equipped with too much power?" she asked.

"Are men?" he countered. "Besides, it's the way the power is used which makes or mars a man's career. And whether a hydroaeroplane or a man, the final factor is the skill of the pilot. That factor, of course, is one that varies with the individual. On it all else depends, however. He must be cool, confident, ready to meet emergencies if they arise. In the aviator's case, also, he must love to fly, otherwise he'd better remain earth-bound. Look at that moon, Yvonne! Isn't it gorgeous?"

"It's too beautiful for words," she said softly.

They drank in the scene, as the sea seemed to quiver to the emerald of the trees facing the beach. In the shadows of the large wharf where the owners of Miramar sometimes anchored the Ryndenham yacht, the water seemed as deeply green and glossy as the surface of a magnolia leaf. But in the path of the magical moonlight, its sheen was silvery, striped with violet bands, changing to a steel tint near their prow, palpitant with life omnipresent, as if betraying the mysterious currents of the silent, stealthy tide.

They were rocking now gently from side to side.

"I'm going to start the motor," said Hollins quietly. "Don't mind the noise when I first turn her over. Somewhat like an automobile climbing a heavy grade with muffler cut open—only much more so."

There was a premonitory sigh; then a voice of brass behind Yvonne seemed rolling through the world. The boat quivered, as if it, too, partook of her expectancy — moved slowly, then more swiftly, out upon the miraculous bosom of the sea, with spray flashing high in torrents.

Gently they rose from the water.

The machine quivered anew, the frightful clamor of the motor dropped from fortissimo to a purr not unlike a well-bred limousine, as the long promontory at their left began to drop.

As they swept around, Yvonne discerned the villa at Miramar, even to the circle of its broad, shaded balconies, with white lounges on the upper floors and trim awnings, like the lashes of a diffident girl, where they shaded the windows.

They darted higher.

Presently the ocean itself seemed unruffled, and mirrored back tints of sea-green like a monstrous marine painting, while shoreward were sap-greens of the grassy lawns and the more somber greens of the unbroken forest.

Westward the sun had dropped over the edge of the world into a lake of orange lights; above it were lilac bands in the sky, and above the lilac ghostly greens.

Then the great indigo darkness came, stars sprinkled out to challenge the young moon, and below them came the faint but discernible chant of a steamer's siren, signaling for a pilot, as it hesitated before the pin-pricks of yellowish light dotting the channel leading to her wharf.

Yvonne, smitten with the enchantment of it all, turned her pure, sweet profile to look at Hollins. He was grinning as he remembered the baffled expression on O'Hara's crestfallen face, scarcely an hour before, as he stood clutching a paper with a red seal and peered at the shadow of

the man he had been "shadowing" so assiduously two days before.

CHAPTER VII.

A TOAST AT THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH.

YVONNE looked again.

All the white cavalry of the ocean seemed to be charging the long coral coast, but no mighty drum-roll of breakers now sounded from the harbor bars. Even the mad clarion winds of the Atlantic were hushed, as if awed at the two presumptuous mites of humanity speeding across the bivouac of the night.

They were flying with almost absolute silence now, and Yvonne wanted to speak, until suddenly it came to her that mere vapid words would be a profanation.

Their swift, swimming motion took on the nature of a light beam floating vaguely through the iris of the human eye. It transcended belief. Their soundless pinions never bent nor veered, save to incline at rigid angles, as, now and again, Hollins "banked" the plane sharply to confine their first flight to an upward spiral. Yvonne had watched other aeroplanes, which incessantly chattered or hummed. This was almost as silent as the foot of Time.

They banked again, one moment presenting to the meridian their whole breadth, like a banner flaunting toward the apex of the heavens; then next, only the razorlike edges of the planes. They were now so high that even the ordinary plane of similar dimensions would have seemed merely a mote—a fleck of soot—against the façade of the new moon, hanging like a fat banana against the easterly sky.

A verse of Job came into her mind, and unconsciously the girl repeated it aloud:

"There is a path which no fowl knoweth and which the eye of the vulture hath not seen."

"Yes," replied Hollins, speaking for the first time; "and when we think back on the countless millions of our earth-bound progenitors, and their descendants from generation to generation who have watched the faces of the continents wrinkle in the revolution of centuries after centuries, while crimson history wrote the record of a hundred thousand wars, this path we're climbing seems the gateway to the city celestial by comparison, doesn't it?"

"I have no words for it," said Yvonne, "but my thoughts are surely sublime. Whatever led you to take it up, Dan?"

"Well, I read a quotation once from Anatole France. It stuck by me. And it grew on me. It seemed so true. Would you care to hear it?"

"Why, by all means."

"He said:

"If the will of those who are no more is to be imposed on those who still are, it is the dead who live and the live men who become the dead ones.

"It had always seemed to me that the archaic ideas of the past—traditions, conventions, customs—ghosts of other men's minds—had entirely too much to do with the world of to-day. That's why men by millions are murdering each other in Europe. That's why crime and misery and poverty still grip the human race. I didn't stop with merely learning to fly, either," he added sturdily. "That paragraph kept spurring me on—and on. Can you guess what I've achieved in the past six weeks?"

"I think part of it," said she, with an ingenuous smile.

"Well, what, for instance?"

"Why, you've got an aeroplane that's practically silent, for one thing."

"You're a smart girl," he approved. "Can you guess the rest?"

Yvonne meditated.

"No, I'm afraid not. Look! Why, how terribly high we are!" She glanced downward. "We seem to move without volition. And we're right in the path of the rising moon. If we go much higher, and if people below could see us, we'd look as if we hung on one of its tips."

Hollins smiled.

" I've already cut out the motor," said he, " and we're sliding down in wide circles, so the changes in air pressure won't come suddenly enough to affect you unfavorably. Now, the real adventure of the night is about to begin once we pick up Tecumseh again. See that scroll map under the glass case? And the little arm projecting out over my knee? Well, when I press that, after we arrive at the lower level, it synchronizes with the landscape beneath us—or should. You know, in the air there are no mile-posts."

" What, aren't you going to take me home now?"

" Not just yet—after a while. Remember that old chap in armor, in front of the house, peering down somberly into the fountain?"

" Yes; that's Ponce de Leon."

" I recognized the gentleman," laughed Hollins. " He was disappointed in something—remember?"

" The fountain of youth?"

" You are as unerring as you are beautiful," he jested. " Yvonne, I've always admired you tremendously. To-night I worship you. Somehow, you seem a creature of the air, plus all the caprice, the fire, and the elusive charm of the eternal feminine. If I dared to go on—"

" Don't. After this amazing and incredible experience, I'm afraid I couldn't survive it. Tell me, instead, what you had in mind about Ponce de Leon."

" In a minute. There — can you see Miramar—over yonder?"

Yvonne peered downward. " I'm not sure," said she.

" Try again," said Hollins, shifting the plane to a fresh angle of incidence.

" Oh, yes—now I see it. Hadn't we better go home now?"

" In an hour or so I promise you that you'll be climbing the hill. Now for the real surprise of the evening: Yvonne, that fabled fountain of youth really exists. What do you say that we fly down upon it and sip of its waters?"

" You're joking."

" I'm not. If that's the only objection I overrule it, here and now."

" Won't father be worried?"

" I've a thermos bottle, which we'll fill and bring back to him. Isn't that compensation enough?"

Without waiting for her reply, he gave a quick glance at the compass, sheered off to the right, rose a little, then tapped the scroll map in the case gently with his knee-lever, and they darted landward.

Immediately a new ecstasy of vision greeted their eyes. The moonlight shrouded the earth beneath them, like the amorous mouth of a girl awaiting her betrothal kiss. Yvonne's ivory-tinted face took on the shade of the rose; the fire of her pupils deepened.

The man at the pilot-wheel caught his breath sharply, then bent to the serious business of his newest objective.

The golden violet sheen of the azure ocean was now replaced by the dark bulk of the land. Only the young moon, curving over the dreaming sea and sparkling the last fugitive wave with its effervescence through the archway of the stars, remained the same.

The breath of the night billowed up to them, perfumed with the scent of the magnolia blooms: then broad bands of translucent green edged the surface of a river along and above which they were shooting like a lost star; and its surface was blotted out, time and again, by nations of water-liles uprearing their perfumed heads, some whiter than the moonlight and some more yellow than gold.

A warm, damp wind seemed to sweep apart the robes of the night, fragrant with jasmine and other blossoms, whose odors woke in Hollins the memory of a bridal morning when a college chum of his had gone to the altar.

Higher and higher crept the moon. The spell of the night in its new phase intoxicated Yvonne afresh. She knew they were flying as never two human beings had flown before; but the incredible speed of the overlapping systole and dyastole of the magnificent motor behind

her, and the stout shield ahead, made her as unconscious of the manner in which they were annihilating space as a passenger in a steel Pullman is unconscious of the true meaning of the onward, thunderous rush of the monster locomotive, dragging its burden across a continent—earth-bound, true—but, nevertheless, at intervals forging forward a hundred and twenty feet in a second of time.

The necromancy of the woods heightened the spell in the illusive light, preternaturally heightened as in a dream; a grove of palms flashed beneath the girl's vision, still beautiful, as those they passed between Miramar and the little village in daylight, but with a sinister beauty, their crests horrent with menace.

For the first time since leaving her home Yvonne shuddered with a nameless fear.

The mood passed, although the forest widened itself into a more tremendous vista and the chill of the heavy dews, distilled in the atmosphere of morasses where never foot of man had trod, hung around them one instant, like the death-sweat of foliage strangling in the embrace of oxygen-devouring plants.

It slithered behind them, and Hollins with one hand tendered Yvonne a pair of small but powerful binoculars, and pointed ahead.

Obediently she raised them to her eyes and adjusted the focus.

The shadowy terror of the night had fled.

Before her, with an infinite restoration of color, gleamed a flood of fluid crystal, a river of molten diamond—a current of liquid light.

Yvonne did not know its extent, but in length it comprised eight miles of magic—eight miles of glory.

They shot down upon it. As they came nearer and nearer, the unspeakable beauty of it grew.

It was not alone its surface.

The moonbeams seemed to dive and riot beneath the other element.

Whether it was fifty feet deep or five, Yvonne did not know. The height from which she rode in the hydroaeroplane, aided by the light-devouring lenses through which she gazed, the nether zone of the celestial stream was different from all other water. Every pebble, every vein of water grass, every atom of sparkling sand, was as clearly visible as if viewed through merely sun-filled air.

Iridescent myriads of darting fish, conscious only of life abundant, darted here and there in pairs, in groups, in shoals.

The channel was also clearly marked by a dark verdure composed of water grasses and slippery moss.

"No wonder," sighed Yvonne, after the hydroaeroplane had dived and rested on the water like a graceful swan, "that Ponce de Leon dreamed of the Fountain of Youth, and died, still seeking it, here in Florida. Is this *really* the place he searched for?"

"It's wonderful water, and they have named it the Fountain of Youth," replied Hollins mischievously. "But as Ponce de Leon never found it, who knows?"

"But is it, *really?*" she persisted.

"What do you think?" he laughingly evaded. "Does it look as if it might be? It's the finest water in Florida I've ever heard of. Why don't you try it and note the effect twenty years from now?"

Yvonne made a *moué*.

"Aren't you horrid?" Then, with true feminine change of front: "Isn't it funny?"

"Funny?" he echoed.

"I was thinking of father," she explained. "I wonder if he ever came over here with Mr. Doty? They're always exploring around—and as mysterious as mice with the cat close behind them. They won't tell me a thing! But father's growing younger—he was reading 'Treasure Island' before we left, and his face was positively boyish. Suppose this was really the Fountain of Youth? Wouldn't it be a marvelous thing to *be* young, and to drink it to *keep* young, and to never, never grow infirm or—or ugly? Just like Ponce de Leon dreamed?"

The undercurrent of pathos of her voice touched Hollins.

It was the subconscious protest of youth and beauty against inevitable change. Yvonne had not mentioned death —but he knew from her manner that she was thinking of that, as well as of old age.

" No, Yvonne," said he in quiet but emphatic accents, " it would not be marvelous—it would be hideous."

" How hideous?" she iterated, her still clouded but piquant face upturned insouciantly in the magic of the young moon's rays.

" Life would pall upon us," said Hollins with slightly more emphasis. " It would become abhorrent — the most terrible slavery that it is possible to think of.

" Just suppose," he went on, " that this was the *real* ' Fountain of Youth.' Suppose that I had found it hidden safely in this morass, and brought you to it tonight, that we two, alone of all the human beings of earth, could drink of its marvelous water—and thus defy the ravaging hand of time as we to-night have defied the laws of gravitation which have bound the rest of the human race to earth —what then, Yvonne?"

" Then it would not be slavery to death," said she, " even if it were slavery to life, would it?"

Hollins smiled gravely, as an indulgent parent toward an inquiring child. Yvonne was very young, very appealing, very unsophisticated.

" And Ponce de Leon didn't want to die—he didn't even want to grow old," went on Yvonne with slightly increased pathos. " But he *had* to grow old—just as we all have to grow old; although he hoped to find the fountain and grow young again, didn't he? And at last he had to—to die!"

" Do we ever die?" asked the young man, bending ardently over toward her. " Did Ponce de Leon really die? Or did he merely change form and enter upon a more divinely beautiful existence? Yvonne, dare even you aver that the real Ponce de Leon, for instance, might be bound forever in that mass of bronze standing in the courtyard at Miramar?

" That," went on the young man, " is not unlike what *we* would really be if we could not grow old and die, as we term it. But do we ever die? You see, we're back to the same question. Did Ponce de Leon ever die? Or, to-night, does that old adventurer who dreamed the wonderful dream that keeps his memory alive until this day roam at will, as we have roamed to-night? Only with far more infinite freedom? Through profundities of space, it may be, unfathomed by the sun?"

Yvonne's face lost a little of its somber shadow.

She seemed like a child-seraph, frightened by vast spaces, who suddenly catches a glimpse of the thing it is seeking.

The young aviator bent closer to her.

" Who knows, Yvonne?" he whispered.

" Who knows?" she echoed, so low as to be all but inaudible.

" We know so little, after all," went on the pilot, after another pregnant pause.

She was so celestially young, so divinely unsophisticated.

" Then there is no real Fountain of Youth, except we find it," she queried, " within ourselves?"

" Not entirely," replied Hollins. " There is something, I think, beside what we are able to find within ourselves—or to achieve. Its source is as much a mystery as that of this water."

" But where does the water come from?" she asked again.

" Ah! Where, indeed?" he parried. " Ask the gnomes. From whence comes the witchery of a Naiad or the blandishments of an Undine? From our dreams, Yvonne. Which is another way of saying from our thoughts, unsullied by the doubts and disasters of life—just as this water is unsullied by the dismal morass all about it. And whence, again, come our clear, undefiled thoughts? Again—who knows? The thought that Ponce de Leon had when he dreamed of the foun-

tain which he never found? Or the thought of the first poor, naked savage who longed to fly, but never did? Thoughts are things. They must come from somewhere. Or dreams, if you prefer the word. And all dreams come true some time, somewhere, just as the dream of the first poor savage who wanted to fly came true to-night for us. For the dream or the thought precedes the effort which brings the realization, even though the first dreamer has been dead ten thousand years."

"Why," said Yvonne, with a dazzling smile, "isn't that the *real* Fountain of Youth, after all?"

"Yes — as real as the thoughts hereafter to come to human beings in the unborn hours of time will one day crystallize into realities vaster and more marvelous than ours to-night have been vaster and more marvelous than the dream-thought of the first man who wanted to fly."

He leaned over the prow, filled a cup, and tendered it to her.

"A toast," smiled Hollins.

"To the *real* Fountain of Youth!" said Yvonne, raising it to her delectable lips.

She passed it to him to be refilled.

"You give another," she pleaded.

Hollins, in turn, raised the cup, brimming with the pure, sparkling liquid:

"To Life and Love—and to those who come after us, who will one day ride the measureless spaces between sun and sun!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DE MARS GOES OVERBOARD.

"THAT'S beautiful," said the girl. "Now let's take some water back to father. He's found something, too—just as we did. For he is growing young again."

"I'll fill my thermos flask. It will keep it just as it is now," assented Hollins, suiting the action to the word. "I think we'll be going back now. By the way—did you leave word with your father that you were coming out with me?"

"No. He looked so happy—so really boyish—that I didn't have the heart to rouse him from that book. So, just before you came around the corner, I told Sally, one of the maids, to tell him; because, when I looked for him on the veranda, he was gone. I didn't just understand her manner—it puzzled me, somewhat. She stared at me, and then I heard her mutter: 'O, Lawdy, Lawdy!' as she went into the house. But she's always been tractable, so I guess she obeyed me and gave him my message. But, for a minute, her actions gave me a rather creepy feeling. Then, you came, before I really had time to think it over, and go after him, myself."

"I understand," laughed Hollins. "But don't let a moody servant get on your nerves. My own man, Baker, had a spell like that the other day. I caught him looking at me in the most peculiar manner. Something else had happened that morning that rather set me thinking, too. Baker's conduct was so odd that, at first, I thought he knew something of the other matter. But he didn't."

He thrust the container with the crystal water into a locker, buttoned the flap, drew on his gauntlets, pulled down his cap, and settled himself anew in his seat.

They were off with a delicious rise, in their wake a cascade of liquid jewels, and, almost at once, headed out over the sea, breasting the rising breeze. The taut wires keying the wing strets in place hummed a higher-pitched note, but the stout, transparent shield deflected the pressure from both of them.

"We'll get altitude and volplane in, at speed," explained Hollins, "with the wind at our backs until just before we alight in the cove at Miramar. This will save a few minutes."

Yvonne nodded and leaned back. She had experienced so much that was weird and new that she wanted to relax a bit. The binoculars hung idly at her wrist; she gazed at the luminous signaling of the stars, flashing deep unto deep, and pondered the mystery of it all. To the farth-

est flung burning constellation it was and always would be unfathomable to the human mind, until our own day-star has yielded up its ghost of flame.

The sharp tonic of the sea breeze roused her, after a bit. Her languor was gone. Once more she looked about her. The young moon hung near the zenith, and the exhilaration of the speeding hydroaeroplane aroused a new interest in her to know more about its operation.

It seemed to meet the will of its pilot as if endowed with a reasoning mind. She asked Hollins how it was controlled.

"Well, on the ground, with a vehicle like an automobile," he replied, "the driver must steer only in the horizontal plane — that is, on the surface of the earth. He goes straight ahead, or swerves from side to side, or turns at nearly right angles. In the air, we steer in two planes —the horizontal when in what we call lateral flight, or in the vertical plane when we descend or ascend.

"The rudder back there, set exactly like a boat's rudder, enables us to turn the machine from side to side; another rudder, set at right angles to the first, which we call the elevating rudder, by moving up or down catches the stream of air and deflects the prow of the aeroplane up or down."

"It sounds simple," said Yvonne.

"That's only a part of it," said Hollins. "In turning a wagon or an auto on the ground, the wheel inside of the curve runs much slower than the outside wheel, because it travels much less distance. In the aeroplane, the inside corner must practically stand still, while the outside corner travels around, until the straight course is resumed.

"Right there, turning a corner with an aeroplane becomes a very different matter from turning a corner with a wagon or an auto, because the inside corner of the aeroplane had nothing on which to pivot, except the thin air, which is not very substantial, when that corner slows down. So, to prevent that corner slipping off, and plunging the machine sidewise to earth, we lower the inside corner and elevate the outside corner.

"The Wrights, down at Kittyhawk, found that out, as well as other things about flying. They studied the way a bird turns in the air, and made the tips of the wings on their machines flexible, so the tipping and lowering could be simultaneously controlled by one movement."

"I see," said Yvonne. "Do they follow that idea still?"

"Some do and some do not. Curtis invented a different method. He placed two smaller wings between the larger ones, and by raising one and lowering the other, he claimed he got a more sensitive control—that is, the machine seems to respond more quickly.

"Also," continued Hollins, "in alighting we always try to alight against the wind. Otherwise, and in sea-coast flying particularly, a gust may get under the elevating rudder when we point down, because it is then higher than the front of the machine. If that happens, the tail is liable to be blown forward and over, which, of course, turns the machine upside down, with disastrous results to it and the pilot. In rising from the water we also face the wind, always, because that increases the amount of air which banks up under the slight curve of the wings, making it much easier for the motor, and, hence, a faster climb into the air.

"The same is true in descending. If we face the wind, it renders all the various controls more sensitive, because of greater air pressure, and thus the machine responds more quickly. Novice flyers often make the mistake of trying to descend too straight. When they slow down their motor to alight, the aeroplane loses headway, gravity clutches it, and there ensues what we term the 'pancake flop' —it falls flat down. The right way to descend is to point down, sharply, until near the water, then flatten out, gradually immerse the prow and come to rest on the surface. Watch this when we come into the cove—it's not far away, now."

Yvonne turned her glasses down upon the ocean beneath them. She caught sight of some dark object heaving on its surface. As they raced toward it on the breast of the rising wind, it grew rapidly larger. Then she saw it was a small motor boat.

She spoke to Hollins, asking if it were possible to fly a little lower, as she wanted to look at it. Since sighting the coasting steamer at the beginning of their flight, this was the first hint of human beings they had descried upon the sea.

With an odd, cryptic smile, Hollins complied.

They hurtled down upon the craft with incredible velocity, dropping nearly a mile in twice that lateral distance. Yvonne, however, experienced no discomfort and felt only more curiosity as they neared the craft.

"A little lower," she pleaded.

With another enigmatic smile, Hollins responded. He brought the hydroaeroplane down toward the bobbing craft, with an accuracy as unerring as a billiard champion's touch on his cue. His judgment of speed, distance, and height seemed unerring.

They were not more than two hundred feet high, and perhaps three hundred yards from the craft, when Yvonne gave a shrill cry of terror. Hollins saw, in another second, a large figure on the roof of the motorboat pitching a body into the sea.

As Yvonne sank back limply against the cushioned seat, he mechanically glanced at the map. The contour of the coast seemed to burn itself into his brain. The hydroaeroplane leaped upward, twisted sharply, came around in a corkscrew curve, then pointed seaward, almost perpendicularly.

They slithered to a stop in the phosphorescent foam.

Hollins threw off his seat-straps, grasped the glass from Yvonne, stood up in the pitching prow, and scanned the surface of the water.

Then he plunged over the side of the craft, leaving the girl alone in the swaying, plunging machine, without control, and a stream of liquid fire marked his progress. Fifty feet or so to her left she saw him clutch the body of the man. In five minutes more he had regained the craft, and Yvonne, leaning forward, held the insensible form by the collar, while Hollins swam around and clambered aboard on the other side.

Then, between them, they dragged the figure into the prow.

It was Alfonse de Mars, whom Hollins had last seen on the tennis court at Miramar.

CHAPTER IX.

TREASURE TROVE.

CYRUS BUTLER looked around the room in which he wakened with dull eyes. It was a grim, gloomy, strange place. A rainbow lizard scurried across the floor at his feet. He rose hastily, but with faculties confused and a body that ached.

His throat felt sore. He touched it gingerly.

This he did not understand at all. His health had been very good of late. The complete change of scene, the mild but invigorating Florida climate, the exertions in the open air while planning the search for the wreck of the Hispania, had all helped to restore the glow of his lost years.

He tried to recall what had happened, how he came to be there.

At first he could not. So he gave it up and looked around the interior of the place. It was a grisly locality, with a smell like an old tomb. There was some sort of a colored bas-relief on the walls which he could see, although only partially, because of the festoon of spiders' webs woven thickly across it.

He brushed these away, revealing a great door, barred on the inside, above which gleamed the arms of Spain. The banker was no expert on heraldry, but

this device he knew well. It was the same as the one on the legend of the treasure which Alfonse de Mars had turned over to him.

He could not be mistaken. The crown, the shield, the triple turrets of Old Castile were all there, with the rampant lions of Leon, as well as the sculptured Order of the Golden Fleece, above the motto:

"Reyanado en España."

"The Golden Fleece," muttered Butler. "H-m. The last time I heard those words was when Doty and I discussed the voyage of the Argonauts and—"

A sudden dizziness seized him.

He felt he needed air. Beams of bright light came from a barred window at the other end of the room, and he staggered in that direction. Half-way across, his strength failed him and he sank down on the dust-covered stone floor in an inert heap.

For a time he huddled there; then a sharp twinge of pain in his head stabbed him back to semiconsciousness. He rose, clutching at something for support, and his hand came in contact with a curved bit of wood. He gripped it, swayed, but remained on his feet.

Gradually the vertigo left him, although the pain grew more frequent. The twinges, however, seemed to give him a fictitious strength, and impelled him to move on. After a while he wavered again in the direction of the light, gripping, now and again, other curved and cold surfaces.

Finally he was able to press his face to the bars and inhale the cooler air. It was as delicious as the sweet scent of aromatic grasses—clover and timothy—on a summer morning after a heavy dew, following the swing of the scythe across the field in his young arms the day before.

He began weaving the thin fancies of old memories out of his still muddled brain. The scent of the breeze brought back the smell of new-mown hay; the hay recalled the mow where it had been stored, and the mow, in turn, conjured up the story of the boy who hid in the apple barrel, and the one-legged villain who knocked men down by striking them with a crutch, before hopping over to stab them.

It was all very real one moment, at the next far away.

For, at his feet, was lying a baglike bit of cloth, with dark-blue and white stripes. As he picked it up to see what it contained, out dropped the book itself.

Across the gray years of struggle his mind flashed to where he had last seen that bit of cloth. The book had been on the veranda at Miramar; the bag, as he held it to the light, was a bed-tick, and he had last seen it—

A door opened, and suddenly the slanting rays of the sun from the east blotted out the spectral shadows of the great room in which he was standing, bearing with it the elixir breath of this tropical land, itself eternally young with luminous youth of the gods.

A figure cut across the flare of light and a man came into the room.

"Good morning, Mr. Butler," said Vernon Doty.

"Morning!" rumbled Butler. "Say, where am I, and how did I get here?"

"You're in the old chapel of the ancient fort of San Marco. Didn't you recognize the coat-of-arms — with the Golden Fleece," said Doty suavely.

"The light was rather poor until you opened the door," said Butler, looking around. "Oh, yes. Those are the pews."

"Yes, and over there is the altar," continued the velvet tones of Doty, "even to the holy-water fonts, where once the swordsmen of Old Spain dipped their sinewy fingers. Quaint old place, isn't it?"

"Yes. But, Doty, I don't remember coming up here. You didn't keep that appointment yesterday. You told me you'd be on hand to bring me up."

Even in the gloom Butler discerned an enigmatic expression cross the young man's face.

"Come outside," he replied, "and get the air. You slept heavily, I guess."

"I'm all bunged up," admitted Butler, as he limped behind him. "Funny—I was all right yesterday—never felt better in my life than when I waited and waited and waited, out on the veranda, for you to keep that appointment."

Doty took a long breath and gazed seaward.

"Well, you're here, now, and I'm here," said he cryptically. "Now we can get down to business, after you've had your coffee."

"But how did I get here?" persisted Butler. "I don't remem—"

"We came up by motor-boat, as I told you we would come. I was—was delayed, and when I got to the wharf, you were on board the boat, and sleeping so soundly I didn't have the heart to waken you. We didn't leave it until it was time for the tide to turn, this morning, and then we had to leave it, or wait twelve hours more to land here. I came ashore with some of the stuff, and you were again taking a nap when I ran across you in the chapel. So, I let you sleep on."

"I guess the coffee will clear up my wits," said Butler. "Let's have that first. Where's young De Mars?"

Doty stooped to pick up an iridescent bit of shell and study its vivid colors before replying.

"He's indisposed. By the way, Mr. Butler, we may have to change our plans somewhat before we go on."

"All right. We'll talk it over." Butler leaned against the rampart of what had once been pine, but, under the ceaseless pounding of the shallow seas, was now stone-clad and almost the hue of marble, owing to the presence of the coquina shell-rock solution in the water.

He turned an appreciative eye on the bastions, the towers, and the curious lines of the ancient fort.

"The Spanish government spent about thirty millions of good dollars on this old ruin," he observed, while Doty, who had been frowning at the bit of shell, as if endeavoring to concentrate his thoughts around it, lifted his eyes suddenly, tossed the shell away, and snapped at the last statement as if he were a turtle.

"You could almost build it yourself, couldn't you?" said he tentatively.

Butler frowned. He disliked such pointed references to his fortune, the amount of which was greatly exaggerated by public report. His strong jaw clamped, then he grinned.

"If I could, I wouldn't. They must have been an awful lot of rummies. But, Doty, what's this about the change in our plans? I thought it was all settled. I was going to look around here to-day, and after I took soundings and got the lay of the land—or rather the water—to wire to New York for the divers. Is there any change needed in that part of it? Or what change do you contemplate?"

"Well," began Doty slowly, avoiding Butler's eye, after a swift glance at the discoloration on his throat above the collar, "I don't know just how to make myself plain without too much of a shock to you. De Mars told me last night that he was going to quit."

"I thought you said he was sick."

"Yes, he's sick—sick of dubbing around, at least he said so."

"But I've got his agreement," returned Butler warmly. "If he quits, that leaves all the more to be divi—"

He did not complete the sentence. Around one of the angles of the wall against which he was leaning came a gigantic tawny-colored African with a scarred face, carrying in his hand the same bit of bed-tick that Cyrus Doty had found in the chapel.

Again his mind, now cleared of the mists which had fogged it in the chapel, reverted to the bed-tick. He had last seen it on his veranda at Miramar. His hand went slowly to his throat. It still pained him, unaccountably. It felt swollen. He caressed it, meanwhile watching the negro, into whose eyes a look of primal savagery was stealing.

Doty gave a short, mirthless laugh.

" Mr. Butler," said he, " I may as well tell you the truth. De Mars has been faking you all along. The story of the treasure ship isn't—"

" Wait a minute," interrupted the older man. " Doty, don't dare lie to me. Who's that big yellow brute over there, and what does he want around here? I remember—"

" Excuse me," said Doty, in soft, silken accents. " I understand that my share would be increased—but, unfortunately, there is nothing to share. De Mars, now that the end is so near, will not dare deny to you that the story was a fabrication from beginning to end."

" What makes you think so?"

" Well, why didn't he come up here last night? You came, as you said you'd come. So did he say he'd come, but he isn't here. What else is to be inferred? De Mars is gone! If there was a treasure, why did he go?"

The banker was nonplused. He leaned against the ruins of the shell-coated, old wall, originally built of pine, now sheeted with stone, grasping at the bursting bubble of his boyhood dreams. Until this fateful instant he had not realized just what the dream had meant to him—it had not been a dream at all, but a compelling urge, whipping his flagging energies through the long years, in the hope that he might, perhaps, some day make the dream come true.

He shook his head as a lion shakes his huge mane, when hit hard. His paw-like hands clenched.

Doty's voice came again, as if from a distance, but clear and suave. The older man looked at him incredulously.

" It hit me hard, too," said Doty, with a deprecatory gesture. " I guess I'm harder hit than you are. I couldn't rebuild this fort, Mr. Butler, out of my private purse. Business hasn't been good with us; the war abroad tied up my resources; I've been harassed for taxes instead of receiving income checks—you know how it is!"

Butler thought he discerned a faintly ironic smile on the usually smug, horse-like face of the speaker. He could not be sure. However, he resolved not to give up entirely until after he went back to Miramar to substantiate this story. The last time he had seen De Mars was when the young Spaniard went back toward Doty's house to see what was delaying the clubman from keeping the appointment to start in the motor-boat for the old fort where Butler and Doty now were.

Then the fatal flaw in Doty's story burst on him.

" Why did we come up here?" demanded Butler, " if you knew De Mars was faking?"

He expected the blunt query to perplex Doty. There was no truthful, logical answer to it—whatever. But Doty only smiled blandly.

" You wish me to be entirely candid, I take it?" said he.

" Why do you ask that?" retorted Butler.

The disingenuous query made him vaguely uneasy. Likewise the long, black shadow of the huge African, falling across the white sand of the big quadrangle.

Butler followed the shadow to its cause. The tawny, feral face was forbidding. The watcher subconsciously raised his hand to his bruised throat, which seemed rather swollen.

Then another shadow flecked the sun-drenched space — a shadow with two broad bands, and a blot midway of the lower and a trailing shadow, much smaller, but which kept pace with the other portion—and no more.

The big African shuddered and looked aloft. So did Doty and the older man. Butler caught one vagrant glimpse of what might have been a golden vulture—that ghoul of the high air—outlined against the edge of the sun—then it melted into the deep azure sky and was no more.

He glanced at Doty, who should have replied ere this. That sleek gentleman was focusing a powerful glass in an en-

deavor to see what Butler knew he had seen. For several minutes he swept the sky at all points, scrutinizing it with care. Then the sea. Part of the time his back was toward Butler.

But there were no more shadows; and when Doty lowered his glass and turned again to face his questioner, his smile was more than bland—more than ironic—it was sardonic. His voice, however, was as silky as ever, as he replied:

"Well, since frankness will expedite matters, my dear friend, and, as I have hinted, my own financial needs are rather urgent, I may as well inform you that my own object in keeping on up here was to discuss with you ways and means by which I might recoup, if possible, my lost time, because of my belief in *your* representations. The place is ideal in that we shall be neither interrupted nor overheard. De Mars never came to me, you'll admit. Inasmuch as he deceived you, don't you think I'm entitled to some consideration. I went into this, at your earnest request—to help *you*. You have lost, as well as I, but you can well afford to lose—in fact, I have prevented you from losing a great deal more ready money, by this discovery. But what have I gained?"

"But how did you expect to recoup by coming here?" insisted Butler. "What's the idea?"

Doty appraised him coolly, deliberately.

"You don't mean to say you don't get it?" said he suavely. "My dear fellow, you should go back into the chapel and study that coat-of-arms of Old Spain—the way we studied it together at the club in New York, on the documents De Mars turned over to you. I particularly commend for your scrutiny that part of it called 'The Golden Fleece.' You remember it, don't you?"

Butler gestured impatiently.

"Of course. What else?"

"Well," said Doty, "I had been thinking of organizing an active local branch of that historic association, if forced to do so, to protect my own interests. I should much prefer, however, to arrange matters on an amicable basis. Opportunities considered," he nodded sidewise slightly, toward the tawny negro, "I assure you, you will not find me unreasonable."

Butler looked past him at the other figure.

The hands were still fingering the bedtick, but they seemed to itch for other action. Likewise the blend of brown skin into the white of the fellow's palms brought back another idea.

They were strikingly similar to the painted potato he had shown Danny Hollins on the veranda, at Miramar, three days before.

Butler understood now. The painted potato had been a warning and he had been blind. His fingers touched his bruised throat. He understood, also, how he came to waken in the chapel of the old fort, and why he could recall nothing since reading "Treasure Island," on the veranda at Miramar.

The negro had strangled him into unconsciousness the night before and would repeat if given similar orders again.

Doty's smile became a leer.

CHAPTER X.

THE FANTOM FROM THE SKY.

DANIEL McKAY HOLLINS, much perturbed, ran down the stairs from the sleeping-room usually occupied by Cyrus Butler. Prior to this, after a swift flight, with unmuffled motor during half the distance, from where he had picked up young De Mars into Miramar, help had been summoned, the still insensible youth hurried to Doty's house, and a physician called by telephone in Tecumseh.

The doctor had arrived and was still professionally engaged with his patient. Meanwhile, Yvonne insisted on staying by him. When the doctor came she went over to her own home, and Hollins rushed

up to inform Mr. Butler of the peculiar, not to say sinister coincidence, and found the room untenanted.

"He's not there!" said he to Yvonne.

Her eyes widened with surprise. Then fear crept into them.

"He's probably somewhere around," began Hollins reassuringly. "I'll find—"

"That'll be about all from you!" came a voice from the shadows of the veranda.

Hollins recognized the half-strident, half-triumphant voice before O'Hara, covering him with a pistol, stepped into the hall, and with his free hand lit the rest of the bulbs.

"You won't pull nothing on me this time, will you?" he added, reaching up under his armpit with a hand which reappeared with the gleaming cuffs.

He started to step toward Hollins.

"Back up," said the aviator, in a tone quite new to the startled Yvonne. "You're on a dead card, my pig-eyed friend."

"Mebbe I am, and then, again, mebbe I ain't," returned the other, with no alteration of his heavy, sententious manner. "But you're going to submit to this arrest—dead or alive, Mr. Hollins. Come on, no monkey business—I mean what I say."

"Do you!" said Hollins in a level tone. "Well, then, it'll be dead. O'Hara, you've been staggering around in the mire of your own self-importance too long to waste my time. Mr. Butler is not here. Another man is at the point of death. I'm going to get busy—and stay busy."

"I've got the goods on you—" began O'Hara, shoving the muzzle of his automatic toward Hollins, who stood his ground until Yvonne interposed her own personality and bruskly thrust aside the menacing pistol. "I knew he was gone before you came back with Miss Butler. He was on this veranda—and then he faded out. No one saw him disappear. I saw you—I mean," he amended, "I heard your voice, and you faded out. If that ain't enough—I've got this."

He thrust the potato with the painted surface forward, in an eager, ugly gesture, while Hollins tried, repeatedly, to get Yvonne out of range of the weapon.

The young lady, however, was very obdurate.

She turned an imperious face upon the detective.

"This is nonsense. Mr. Hollins has been with me all the evening. And what is that, pray?"

"This is some of the evidence," arrogantly went on O'Hara. "Your father, Miss Butler, gave it to me three days ago. He said the gang that was after him had sent him a sign. They followed him down here from New York."

He thrust it into his pocket and withdrew his hand again with a photograph.

"If that ain't enough, Miss Butler, lamp — I mean — look at this! There's the potato on a stick—there's your dad, looking right at it, ain't he? Well, I got that out of this gent's bedroom—but he beat me to it with that fade-out of his by an eyelash, not ten minutes afterwards. Come on," he truculently continued, as Yvonne lifted the photograph nearer the light to study it. "You can't hide behind this girl's skirts any longer."

"All right," said Hollins, with a slow, deadly smile.

O'Hara stepped forward, still covering his man, handcuffs poised.

"Wait!" exclaimed Yvonne, "this potato in this picture isn't painted. The one you showed me was. How do you account for that?"

O'Hara chuckled.

"You're a credit to your dad," said he. "Here's a lot more—take your pick. He done it, all right—he must 'a' been within twenty feet of him, hidin' in the brush, when he pulled that last snap-shot.

"That ain't all," he continued, noting the expression of growing dismay on Yvonne's face. "He actually had the nerve, that first day you mugged—excuse me—I mean the first day you seen his back, down there in Tecumseh, to ride out with your dad and you, and set on

that same veranda where your dad was settin' to-night before he faded out, and sneer at me, and try to say he couldn't see no connection—"

Just here Mr. O'Hara failed to see a connection, but he felt it—felt it as if six elephants had rammed his jaw in one line.

The blow would have felled a bullock.

It was the old "Australian swing," made famous in the prize-ring by a certain former premier blacksmith of that Antipodean land; and copied eagerly by the instructor in athletics who had trained Daniel McKay Hollins how to "set," and deliver it with an effect somewhat similar to its originator.

O'Hara went down so limp that his trigger finger did not even discharge the weapon—a fact which Hollins had foreseen, in part, when he struck with the weapon pointing at the pit of his stomach.

It was a long chance, as he realized, when he disentangled the weapon, shot the "safety" back into place, and thrust it into his own pocket.

He turned to Yvonne. Her face was drawn and white.

"I had to do it," said he. "There's no reasoning with him. Don't you remember how I told you I'd explain about that potato when we got back here to-night?"

"Yes," said she faintly. "Is he dead?"

"For a time," replied Hollins grimly. "If he isn't back on his feet by the time I'm back—get the doctor that's looking after De Mars. Yvonne, order out your car. I've got to get into Tecumseh and see the chief of police—let's pray that he's no mutton-head like this."

He glanced at O'Hara, who moaned.

Yvonne seemed to hesitate. Hollins, his face drawn taut, winced, as she asked:

"Why must you go?"

"I can't stop to explain now! Yvonne, you can't believe—"

"I don't know what to believe, hardly," she faltered. "If father were only here to advise me!"

"Very well, I'll not go, then," said Hollins, with a bitter note in his voice. "I only know your father isn't here. Doty isn't about, either. We picked up De Mars from the sea, as you know—"

"Yes, I saw him thrown overboard."

Hollins said no more, but called to a thoroughly frightened negro woman, peering over the banisters.

"Bring some water!" She made no move. "Did you hear me?" he reiterated sharply.

Yvonne repeated the command, calling the girl by her name, "Sally," but in much kinder tones. Hollins bit his lip, took the water, bent over O'Hara, and when that worthy but somewhat misguided gentleman squirmed, Yvonne spoke again:

"I've ordered the car sent round. You can go for the chief of police now. I—I was distrait—"

"Thanks," curtly returned Hollins, "it isn't necessary, for I can telephone instead. Look up his number, while I get O'Hara on his feet, please. I'd quite forgotten the phone," he added.

The connection was ready before O'Hara sat up. Hollins asked the chief to come at once and bring all the men he could spare. Explanations would be made when he arrived.

"And hurry!" concluded the aviator.

Sally, meanwhile, was sobbing softly in the corner of the hall, and occasionally moaning "O Lawdy!" with Yvonne trying, in her kindly way, to reassure her.

"'Tain't that, Miss Butler," almost screamed the mulatto woman. "I's thinking of what that big nigger from de norf will do when he comes back—the one that works for Mistah Doty. He'll kill us all. He 'mos' choked de life out of me to-night, when he stole suffin off'n de veranda."

The rest, for a time, was simple.

The reviving O'Hara, overhearing the remark, found full vent for his police powers in eliciting the story of the bedtick. Hollins, with the detective's gun in his pocket, hurried over again to Doty's house, and found De Mars still uncon-

scious. The physician pointed silently to the bandaged head.

" Concussion of the brain—maybe a fractured skull," said he tersely.

Hollins went back to the beach.

He reentered his plane, flew to his own cottage, and found the solicitous Baker waiting up for him.

" Begging your pardon, sir," began that worthy volubly, " for my presumption, but I 'appened to see the photographs the detective took away with 'im, and I made so bold as to go up to the ravine where we took 'em, sir. I took a flashlight with me, the electric, and found 'em. Also, I found a 'ole in a tree. I wondered how the 'ole came to be there, sir. So I 'ad a bit of a look around, and I found—this!"

He dangled a huge pair of shoes before his master's eyes.

" Some one must have been 'unting something—or somebody—around there recently," said Baker solemnly.

" No doubt," returned Hollins with a slight smile. " But why did you go up there to-night, Baker?"

" Well, sir, I 'appened to see the photograph of those potatoes, when I knocked 'em off the trunk in your room this afternoon, and when I went to pick them up I could only see *five* potatoes, when there should 'ave been *six*. I was that mystified, sir, I wanted to just look the place over—"

" Thank you, Baker. You're not the only one the potatoes have mystified. Now, I'm going away again. If any one calls, you don't know when I'll be back. I didn't say."

" Very well, sir. I 'ope that detective didn't make you any annoyance, sir. Mr. Brown gave him a dressing down. He was quite lamblike afterward."

" Good night, Baker."

The servant gazed at the door with a perplexed look.

" He didn't say a word about ' Silver Dick,' " he muttered, as he prepared to retire. " Yet he was very much interested when I told him about 'im, only the week before we photographed those potatoes."

Hollins hurried to the old warehouse, where his plane was swinging at the water's edge. He refilled the tanks, carefully straining the gas, as all good aviators do. A little thing may foul a spark-plug —and little things count, in flying.

He was off, flying seaward, then circling around, high up, and over the swamps, when dawn filtered across the sky. The scroll map was unrolling; he had only a few miles to go to pick up the spot where De Mars had been thrown into the sea.

" Why should De Mars be thrown into the sea?" Hollins was asking himself, when, without warning of any kind, his engine stalled.

The one rule in such cases is " get down." Hollins volplaned for a shimmer of light, indicating a small stretch of water, in the otherwise dark and impenetrable forest over which he had been flying.

He landed safely, and thanked his lucky star.

Then he examined the engine. It was hot. The pipe to the lubricating tank was clogged. A bit of waste was dislodged, after an hour of hard work, unscrewing various connections.

Another fifteen minutes passed in replacing them, and Hollins was rather warm, inside and out, in the secluded spot, where no breeze penetrated, and the swarms of gnats made him exceeding wroth, beside the delay. He took time, however, to test out the motor, with its nose against the bank, before venturing aloft again.

The bayou, also, was rather small from which to reascend.

The heavy fetid air added to his difficulties for a quick " take-off," but Hollins made a " Hobson's choice " toward a spot where the trees were smallest. On three sides they banked on ridges—ranks of pine, cypress, and oak. On the fourth there were only a few palms, known as " Spanish bayonets."

He rose and almost scraped their fronds, although tugging at his elevating lever to

vault over them. He could not know, until he had passed, that he had entirely avoided them, but when the motor settled into the old, familiar stride, he thanked his star again, and settled himself to the business in hand.

He kept climbing.

Somewhere there was a motor-boat.

De Mars had been hurled from it, after being struck on the head. The intention was to murder De Mars. And Hollins recalled, only too vividly, that some one had tried to murder him a few days before. That some one had been a negro, for no white man ever wore shoes like those Baker had dangled before his eyes.

Yet why would a negro try to murder him, unless hired?

Why had the mulatto girl cried out about "the northern nigger that works for Mr. Doty?"

That negro had choked her. Why was one of Doty's colored servants hovering around the veranda at Miramar?

O'Hara had emphasized the fact that Mr. Butler had disappeared, mysteriously disappeared—"faded out," in O'Hara's slang—from the same veranda that same night, and had accused Hollins of being responsible.

"And last, but by no means least, was it a big negro that I caught a glimpse of over that motor-boat, when I swept over it? I'm not sure about his color, but I am sure he was a big fellow."

He swept the vast expanse below him with the binoculars for some trace of a boat of that kind. The sun was already well up. He had been in the air for at least three hours, since leaving his own cottage, counting the time lost in the swamp.

The surface of the water was wonderful from the height. He could see fathoms into the depths below it. But its tropical charms of coral, shells with iridescent sheens, fish that vied with the rainbow, were all lost on the man circling high up in the vault of blue, for all he wanted to see was a boat like the one that De Mars had fallen from, and there was no boat of that kind in sight, nor any other, save a hundred miles to the north, more or less, where a faint stain on the horizon showed a steamer lay hidden under the rim of the world.

Hollins turned his glasses landward, and scuttered over to have a closer look at a peculiar, low-lying, yet massive and extensive something that huddled, foreshortened by the great height, in the foreground.

He whipped over it, still peering downward.

He watched his own shadow and grinned joyously as it traced a fleeting path across the trees and earth. It was all that any one could see from below, unless he was sharply silhouetted against the orb of day itself.

"Good old half white potato! What a hell of a rumpus you've caused. If you'd been a giant Mariposa and crashed down into the villa at Miramar, you couldn't have done much more damage. Yet, here I am, riding on your back—*invisible to all the world.*"

He was directly over the squat mass now, and refocused the glass, still flying at the same level. Heretofore, since leaving the swamp, he had been climbing constantly in order to broaden his view of the sea.

What he saw made him gasp!

Three tiny specks, mere motes, far, far below, were caught in the field of his vision.

At his great height he could not discern if they were human beings or not. He turned the nose of the hydroaeroplane down and dived headlong.

In another two thousand feet, still diving, but now over the sea, he could make them out.

They *were* human.

He continued his plunge, with unabated speed, motor thrumming.

He peered again.

Two were white and one was a gigantic African!

Then his dependable plane suddenly sagged off to the left.

There was a hiss of tearing cloth. Through a wide rent in the lower wing-fabric darted a spine of the " Spanish bayonet " caught from the fateful palms, over which he imagined he had risen in safety.

In a flash Hollins comprehended what had happened.

The steellike spines had stuck into the lower fold of the double wing-fabric and held there tenaciously. When he dived at such appalling velocity they had been driven through by the cumulative air-pressure.

The rents widened across the intervening ribs of both wings with diabolical velocity, despite his efforts to " flatten out " and descend at the natural " gliding angle."

He could not even bring the machine back on an even keel.

Hollins realized that, despite all his skill, he was sideslipping to the sea—to death.

Yet he remained perfectly calm in his extreme danger.

He cut out the motor, threw off his restraining shoulder-straps, which steadies the aviator and gives him his firm " seat " —a most vital thing when in the air, owing to gusts which " bounce " the plane up and down or sidewise—and—plunged out and away from the wreck of the most marvelous hydroaeroplane the world had ever seen.

So it transpired that as Vernon Doty, scanning old Cyrus Butler's face for some sign of weakness on the part of that old lion of finance turned in wild alarm at the sight of a careening object which, fluttering and diving like a monstrous wounded bird one moment, at the next plunged headlong beneath the second element it had been built to ride in safety—and disappeared.

But he did not see anything else.

Hollins still wore his curious brown-and-white mottled garb that he had donned the night before—and his swift descent to Avernus occasioned no splash large enough to cause attention, nor did Doty, scanning the surface of the sea, behold his body reappear.

CHAPTER XI.

OUT OF THE INVISIBLE.

THE big African, however, had seen the hydroaeroplane, because, in his haste to test out his new scheme of " protective coloration," Hollins had left the painting of the upper side of the upper wing to a later time.

In flight it could hardly be visualized, anyway, because it was already a dun-brown. Afloat, it would be above the level of the eye, unless from the deck of a steamer, and this chance Hollins took to avoid breaking his promise to Yvonne to show her " the most wonderful thing in the world "—an aeroplane with a muffler that rendered it practically silent and also practically invisible on the sea or in the air, against a background of sky or land.

His last conscious thought was of her.

" She doubted me last night!" said Hollins, as he dropped. " After all, what matters? In the infinite, does the death of a man or the death of a sun weigh more or less? Fountain of—"

He struck the sea. Strange thoughts for a man plunging to death.

But the bird-man thinks not in terms of the earth-bound—else he would never fly.

Vernon Doty thought in different terms.

" Well," he said blandly to Cyrus Butler, " I'm waiting."

" See heah, Mistah Doty!" broke in the voice of the alarmed African. "Didn't you see nuffin'?"

" Certainly not!" lied the kidnaper. " Did you?"

" I seen de same shadder a while back dat I see las' night when I brung dis gemmen down de hill in his bag, lak you done tole me to. Nuffin' to make dat shadder neither."

Cyrus Butler stiffened as Doty whipped out a pistol.

"Shut up, you d—d fool!" he grated.

"I hain't sayin' nuffin," retorted the African in a querulous tone, pitched absurdly high for one of his huge build. "But dey's ha'nts around dis yere place. I seen dis gemmen's daughter last night, jus' her face, right over my haid, hangin' in de air, when I—"

"Shut up, I tell you!" reiterated Doty, purple with rage. "If you open your mouth again, I'll shoot—and you know how I can shoot, don't you?"

"Yassah. 'Scuse me, Mistah Doty, but I done seen suffin' else—right ovah your shoulder."

Doty grinned.

"None of that, Sandow. I won't turn around and let you get me by the windpipe. So, don't try it."

Butler peered.

"But there is a boat, Mr. Doty," said he in tones as bland as those of the clubman's a moment before the negro's first remark. "And it's stopping. Yes, they're pulling something into the boat."

Doty turned, cursed, and shoved his pistol into his side-pocket.

"By God!" he bitterly exclaimed, "but it's hell to be poor. I'm broke and desperate, and I took a chance on getting even on this treasure-hunt, you're own idea—and lost. You've got more money than you'll ever spend in ten thousand years," went on Doty venomously, "and now, just because I was half insane, I suppose—"

"You're wrong," said Cyrus Butler. "I've been broke myself, Doty. Go out and go back to work. I won't make a charge against you. I'm too bitterly disappointed myself. Why, man, I've *lived* on that story of 'Treasure Island.' It was real to me. You're only *Long John Silver,* in another guise and with both legs. Forget it, Doty. I've had a scrap of genuine romance this morning, anyway. I guess I'm cured. But I don't understand how De Mars came to fool me—"

"He didn't fool you," broke in the African. "I's done got myse'f in one hell of a jam for dis yere pore white trash. Three days ago he done sent me ovah to kill a man in de woods—I missed him by an inch. I dassen't shoot agin, 'cause why? 'Cause you come along de road and picked up a potato jus' then. Your machine made so much noise I tuk one chanst—"

"You're lying'" shrieked Doty.

"Oh, well, you missed him," laughed Butler. "It's getting to be a realistic story, isn't it, Doty? According to this fellow, *Long John Silver* didn't have much on you. And I've been the boy in the apple-barrel, right along, only I didn't hear anything at all—which makes me a bum hero. Never mind—"

"But I knocked dat De Mars in de haid, and then drownded him!" protested the negro, "right out dere, las' night. Dis boat's full of policemen. Our boat kain't git away from them. I'll have to hang—I'm only a nigger, from de norf, and I done time, too. Dat's where I first met dis yere man. I thought he was *smart.*"

"Well, that's for you two to thresh out," said Butler, although his face grew stern. "If De Mars is dead—"

The boat grated on the sand. Out tumbled O'Hara and the chief of police.

"Well, chief, we've bagged 'em all," began O'Hara. "This Hollins guy, he like to put me out of commish last night. But here I am, right side up, with no damage. He sprung himself loose from custody twicet in twenty-four hours. That's going some. He made his first getaway into the invisible—and he dropped out of the same a minute or two ago, making a big splosh in the ocean, not two hundred feet away from our boat.

"When he come up, I see it was him—his hat was gone. I gaffed him through that spotted nightgown of his with a boathook, and he's wearin' bracelets right now. Oh, he'll come around, all right," he rippled on, in answer to Butler's frown.

The banker was stroking his mustache, as the maned lion of the Nubian desert washes his face with his paw—for all lions have similar traits.

" I've no charge to make against Hollins," said Butler shortly, with a cryptic glance at Doty, who was looking uneasily at the chief of the Tecumseh police, who was eying him, as if only waiting for O'Hara to finish.

" Oh, well, just as you say," shrugged O'Hara. " But I made good. I got him with the goods, too, all the way. Potatoes, photographs, everything. Only—"

" What have the potatoes to do with it?" demanded Butler acidly. " They sent me a sign—that's all. I didn't think it of Dan, though," he added.

" I've got a note for you about potatoes," said the Tecumseh chief. " Mr. Hollins left it for me at Miramar last night, after phoning me you'd been kidnaped."

He tendered it to Butler, who broke it open and read it avidly.

" Well, I'm damned!" laughed the banker. " I must show this to Yvonne. What a silly ass I must have looked to Dan Hollins." He whirled on O'Hara. " Your part in this affair isn't so much to your credit, as you seem to think," said he dourly. " I'll explain later on."

" All set?" genially queried the Tecumseh chief of police.

" I've got no charges to make," returned Butler, " against any one around here, to-day or ever. But I understand Alfonso de Mars is drowned—"

" You're wrong, Mr. Butler," said the village police head. " He's coming around nicely, back in Mr. Doty's house."

He turned to the individual whose name he had mentioned with a grave face.

" Well, Silver Dick," said he, " I'm sorry, but I've got to place you under arrest. They want you up in New York."

" My name's not Silver Dick," said Doty suavely, " although you're not the first person to make the error of confounding me with that criminal."

" Well, if you're not, you're free as soon as we get back to Tecumseh. I've got his thumb-prints—right in my pocket. Mebbe yours are different. Would you mind letting me look at them?"

Doty submitted with ill grace.

Once more his face was livid with rage.

On the whole, it had been a rather trying morning for Mr. Doty—far more trying than he had ever anticipated any morning would be, in fact—least of all the morning that he had watched the big, tawny African, who had once been his cell-mate, carry the unconscious form of the man who had given him his confidence ashore to the old Spanish fortress of San Marco, with the fixed purpose of " organizing a local chapter of the ancient order of The Golden Fleece."

" Sorry!" murmured the Tecumseh police chief, in professional accents of regret, commonly used by all policemen, " but they're rather like."

" Yes," bitterly returned Doty, " society incarcerated me for one mistake, then the cops of New York hounded me for years, after I'd paid for it, and I was forced to forge a draft to keep from starving. There's romance for you—in the raw, Mr. Butler!" he sobbed. " And now, second offense, I'll get twenty years. Do you wonder I told you I was eager to hunt buried treasure?"

" Get out!" scoffed the Tecumseh officer, as he handcuffed him. " Why, you've been a crook all of your life. No one knew that you'd ever pulled that forgery down here until Thomas Baker, servant to Mr. Daniel McKay Hollins, who was the butler for Sir Richard Lonsdale, in Dorchester Court, in London, fifteen years ago, recognized in you the famous ' Silver Dick ' Demarest, who tried to blackmail his lordship out of fifty thousand pounds by threatening to defame Lady Lonsdale, because she'd been foolish enough to write you, a scheming young scoundrel, a few foolish letters, in which she mentioned her admiration for you.

" You've been in jail in Germany, you did four years in New Zealand for bigamy. you were in jail in Wethersfield, Connecticut, for burglary—you've never done anything since you got that thirty thousand dollars on a certified check in Brooklyn, two years ago, but lay around and pose

as a society guy and a clubman—watching your chance to trim somebody else.

"It was Hollins that uncovered you. But he was white about it, too. A week and three days ago the servant saw you here, and told him. He wrote to New York. He had the record by return mail—this record. But, you seemed to stand high with Mr. Butler, and with his family, so he laid off. He gave you a chance! What did you do, Doty?"

Silver Dick made no reply.

Out of the invisible past—fifteen years of time and with an ocean rolling between him and the scene of his first cowardly "trick"—the same ocean now lapping at the prow of the boat that would carry him back to jail, had come this bolt from the blue.

Even Cyrus Butler's kindly, leonine countenance set like flint at the mention of Lady Lonsdale's name. For he had a daughter who was a woman, as well as the man across seas had a wife.

"I guess I'll go back to Miramar," said he, "and see how poor De Mars is getting on. Bring Mr. Hollins over to the other boat. Come on, Sandow," he turned to the negro, "you come to. Mebbe there's a little romance left—but it's awful raw, close up, like this."

"His name wasn't Long John Silver," said Mr. Butler to Hollins that evening on the veranda at Miramar, "but he was a superb villain, wasn't he? Confound it, if his name was Long John, instead of Silver Dick, I'd bail him out—on my word of honor. I always had a fondness for *Long John,* in the book, in spite of his gory habits. By the way, Hollins, I haven't thanked you yet for giving the Tecumseh chief the locality where you thought you'd find us yourself. Great grief! What a busy four days. Well, Dan, I'm much obliged. Now, tell Yvonne about that potato. It's great stuff."

Hollins complied.

"It all began with a bird, instead of a potato," said he. "I am fond of bird life—always was. I was photographing some birds in an old, abandoned stone quarry, at Millersville, near Lancaster, in Pennsylvania, one summer.

"To get the photographs of some of them I used artificial tree-trunks, and hid in them for hours until the birds came back to their various nests.

"But there was the ground-thrush—a very shy but lovable bird. She nests on the ground. So, I devised an artificial hay-rick, and, after a few trials, I photographed a brown thrush one day, within fifteen feet, with a corking good lens.

"When the plate was developed, there was no thrush at all. I couldn't credit my eyes. Human eyes are defective, the camera is not. Whatever the camera can see it can, and does, record.

"I tried again and again. Then I found out a curious thing. The bird would be clear and distinct on the ground-glass of the focal-plane camera I used. The instant it clicked—presto!—she became invisible.

"One day I got within a few feet of a brave little thrush, sitting on her eggs. I watched her, instead of the camera, and clicked the shutter. Then I saw a remarkable thing. Her feathers, of course, are a potato-brown color. The instant she was alarmed she ruffled them, and they were white underneath, but brown on top. That's how she faded out.

"When I began to fly, and realized the disadvantages of being seen, particularly in warfare, and of being heard, I set to work to correct the roar of the motor, first. I succeeded beyond my expectations with a compound type of muffler, of no interest to any one, beyond that it does the work without too high a 'back-kick' on the straining engine.

"To make the plane practically invisible while in flight or at rest was a knotty problem. I came down here to figure it out. In some old traps I ran across the photograph of the thrush. I began to experiment, using different things—potatoes were the last I tried.

"You know how well I succeeded.

Even the big black saw Yvonne's face as we whirled over him—'hanging in the air.' The rest of the machine was practically invisible—only Yvonne's face showed."

"Lucky for me, too, that it did," said Butler. "And lucky for me that they didn't see you, or Doty would have put back, and framed up an *alibi* that would have been good. Sandow almost ruined my neck. How do you feel, Hollins? I wonder that tumble to-day didn't kill you."

"It wasn't my day to die, Mr. Butler, evidently—that's all. I would surely have drowned had the police launch not come up, just as it did—and thanks to Mr. O'Hara's famous eye. I've forgiven him for his past errors—in view of his grabbing me and handcuffing me. Better to be handcuffed for a half hour than have the coral working on your shroud."

"When De Mars gets around again, I'm going to have a look for the Hispania," said the banker doggedly. "I think it's there. What do you think, Dan?"

"I don't know enough about it to think. But I know my aeroplane's there—and in a locker is a bottle of water from the Fountain of Youth, that I brought back for you to quaff! I'm going to grapple for it to-morrow."

Cyrus Butler laughed.

"It was invisible to Ponce de Leon, but I've got it on him. I found it in 'Treasure Island.' Well, we all have our whims—potatoes or buried treasure. I'm going to bed, Hollins. See you to-morrow."

Yvonne remained. Hollins leaned over toward her and said:

"Having made such a catastrophic finish earlier to-day, as the inventor and pilot of the noiseless, invisible aeroplane, I'm going to invoke the invisible from a new angle."

"Are you, indeed?" she demurely replied. "What's the new angle?"

Out of the invisible, but quite audible, had any one cared to listen—which, of course, no one did—came the sound of Daniel McKay Hollins forgiving the lady of his heart in a very practical way for her slight doubts of him the night before.

And there was no sound that indicated that Yvonne had any objection to being forgiven—that way.

(The end.)

MY WIFE'S HANDS

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

SOFT little hands—they can't handle a hoe,
They can ne'er swing a golf club or racket, I know;
They cannot wield a pen in a masterful way,
They cannot do a man's part in work or in play;
But oh, the embroideries, the laces and flowers,
The dainties they make—they have quite magic powers!
If some one's hurt, how deftly they can bandage, soothe, and heal!
I tell you what, I just can't tell the happiness I feel
When work is over for the day and I sit down to rest,
While the sun is redly setting over in the golden west.
Then those little hands, soft little hands, coax music from the keys—
Oh, you know, I think the angels must have little hands like these!

Greywold

by Elisabeth Sutton

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

MISS CARTER, a middle-aged governess and companion, goes to Greywold, the queer and mysterious home of Mr. John Campbell, whose wife is insane and who has a daughter named Carmen who is never allowed to leave Greywold. This restriction applies to all members of the household. Apparently something in Campbell's past has made him shut himself up as he has done; and then, out of that past, comes Jim Kidd, a one-eyed man, who seems to take charge of everything without a murmur from Campbell, who is palpably afraid of him. Kidd wrings the neck of a parrot belonging to Mrs. Campbell because the parrot cries "Dead fingers" when it looks at Kidd. Miss Carter is suspicious of the Jap butler, who seems to be a Chinaman one day and a Jap the next. She sees the butler try to kill Campbell with a cut-glass bowl; but Campbell won't credit her story when she tells him about it. She thinks he doesn't want to believe it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BARS.

I WAS at breakfast with Carmen and Jim Kidd, Mr. Campbell not having put in an appearance at the morning meal. Just before we were ready to leave the table Kidd suddenly flung the necklace I had seen him showing to Mr. Campbell across to the girl.

It fell, a glittering, scintilling heap upon her plate, the most wonderful chain of diamonds I had ever seen. They were all large as a carat and a half, steel-white stones, that sent out fiery flashes of the most exquisite colors.

Carmen regarded the gorgeous piece of jewelry with mingled astonishment and admiration, held by that affinity that seems always to exist between woman and diamonds.

"How do you like it?" asked Kidd carelessly.

"It's beautiful—beautiful!" Carmen cried, carried away by her enthusiasm.

"Well," announced Jim Kidd, settling back in his chair comfortably, "it's yours if you want it."

I arose from the table so hastily, and my indignation was so great, that it carried me out of the room, leaving Carmen there alone to face the proposal that followed. The man actually asked her to marry him!

Carmen flew from him up-stairs to me. She was very much upset by it. She begged me to tell her if there had been anything in her manner toward, or her treatment of Jim Kidd, to have brought this unwelcome proposal down upon her head. I assured her there had not been.

Later in the day Carmen came to me in still greater bewilderment and trouble. She had gone to her father, informing him of Jim Kidd's proposal, expecting of course that he would be quite furious at the man's audacity. What was her astonishment and dismay when her father informed her that it was quite in accordance with his wishes that she accept Kidd's offer!

I was amazed. What a terrible thing

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to hand a lamb over to such a wolf! I comforted Carmen, who was now weeping hysterically, as best I could, and then sought Mr. Campbell.

I demanded if it were true that he approved of Jim Kidd's proposal for Carmen's hand. He told me that decidedly he did, and he hoped moreover that Carmen would accept him. But in spite of his words it did not strike me that he was as enthusiastic over the situation as he tried to imply.

I declared bluntly that I was appalled at his attitude; that I couldn't conceive him wanting his daughter to marry a man like Jim Kidd; that I should have said that he would be most indignant over the offer.

"It is the last fate you should wish for the girl," I asserted severely.

There was a worried, haunted look in Mr. Campbell's eyes, and his face seemed drawn with misery.

"But you don't understand, Miss Carter, you don't understand," he stammered.

I informed him boldly, not mincing matters:

"Jim Kidd has some sort of a hold over you, and you are sacrificing your daughter to this hold. Why don't you stand up like a man and fight him?"

"Hush, hush," he begged me; "don't speak that way. You don't understand. Please don't interfere in the affair."

"Well, Carmen won't marry him," I retorted, "and I want to tell you that I shall back her up in her stand just as strongly as I can."

Mr. Campbell first looked carefully toward the dining-room, then, bending toward me, whispered:

"I advise you, Miss Carter, to have nothing to do with the affair."

His words in nowise constituted a threat; they were unmistakably a warning. And it was more through his manner than his words that I gained it was a warning.

I followed his gaze into the sitting-room, where Jim Kidd sat.

"I am not in any way afraid of Jim Kidd," I announced rather loudly.

Mr. Campbell's hand shot out and grasped my shoulder, as he begged:

"Please, Miss Carter, don't interfere with what does not concern you."

"Anything that concerns Carmen concerns me," I told him firmly.

"I can do nothing, say nothing," cried Mr. Campbell in a voice that was almost a moan.

Immediately I was satisfied upon one point—that Mr. Campbell's position in relation to Jim Kidd was such that he was compelled, undoubtedly very much against his will, to countenance the man's proposal to Carmen.

I realized that there was nothing to be gained discussing the affair with him, so I left him standing there in the hall, a broken-looking, sorrowful-faced man.

When Carmen understood the stand her father was taking she became panic-stricken.

Jim Kidd, not in the least discouraged by her flat refusal, pursued her daily with it. Neither her pleading request that he leave her alone, nor her disdainful refusal of his proposal, made the slightest difference to him.

After a few days her father went to Carmen with tears in his eyes and begged her to marry Jim Kidd, intimating that she would relieve him of a great worry if she would.

Carmen came to me at once, begging me to do something to help her out, for marry Jim Kidd she would not.

The only thing I could think of as likely to meet the situation was for Carmen to get away from Greywold, and not to return to it until Jim Kidd and her father realized that she was mistress of her own mind.

This would probably bring both men to their senses.

It was the only way I considered would be a convincing one, and Carmen was immediately pleased with it. But how would she get away, and where would she go?

As to the latter, I knew a family in New York City, and nothing would please me more than to help her get to them.

I would delight in the adventure the affair offered. I would be glad to assist her in a difficulty, and at the same time be overjoyed to outwit Jim Kidd.

So we began plotting and planning her flight from Greywold. I decided at the very beginning that I would accompany her to New York and see her safely lodged with the people I knew there.

Then I would return to Greywold, refusing absolutely to give out any information concerning her until the condition inducing her flight was removed, when she would gladly return to her father's house.

We would order the carriage ostensibly to go to Boisville to shop, but when we left it we would board a train and go to New York City. When I returned to Boisville alone I would depend upon getting back to Greywold by telephoning for the carriage to be sent after me.

Of course my position would be most difficult returning without Carmen, but Carmen insisted that I do this. She had a fear of her father being left alone in Greywold with Jim Kidd.

At last the day came when we were to put our plan into execution. We announced that we were going to the village on a shopping expedition and ordered the carriage. Meanwhile, Carmen got some of her clothing ready, the two of us carrying it in bundles, not daring to use a bag or suit-case.

As we drove off, Carmen was very high-spirited over the prospect of getting away from the hated Kidd, I being equally elated over the chance of disentangling the girl from such a sacrifice and at the same time punishing Kidd for his audacity.

When we reached the gates that guarded Greywold the pale-eyed man did not promptly appear from the lodge to open them for our carriage to pass through, as was his wont. We came to a halt, and waited there for some time, calling out to attract his attention.

When he finally came into view he did not hurry in the least. Instead he stood there, lounging in the most indifferent attitude in the doorway, his pale-gray eyes making so little display in his face, it would take the closest attention upon the part of an observer to even perceive them, and a most fiendish grin twisting his mouth.

"Open the gates instantly," I ordered.

The man stood stock still, that tantalizing grin still displaying itself upon his face. His inactivity in spite of my command seemed to give him intense satisfaction. I was exasperated.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" I demanded. "Can't you see that Miss Campbell is waiting for the gates to be opened?"

"Well, they're not going to be opened." This with evident pleasure.

"What?" Carmen and I cried out together.

"No, ladies," the gatekeeper went on coolly, still maintaining his indolent lounging position; "them there gates ain't goin' to be opened. And why? Because the boss told me not to, that's why; and I guess little Johnnie won't be obeying him. Oh, no."

Carmen now leaned forward in the carriage, her pretty, dark little face aglow with anger at the man's insolence.

"I bid you open the gates immediately," she commanded. And then she added: "You may sure that I shall report this outrage to my father."

"Go ahead, miss," he advised her carelessly. "I don't care, I'm sure, bein's how it was your father himself that sent down orders that the gate wasn't to be opened to Miss Campbell or Miss Carter when they came to them. I guess I'm just obeying orders."

Carmen and I looked at each other, speechless.

The girl then directed the coachman to get down and open the gates.

"Take the key away from that man and open the gates for us to pass through," she cried excitedly.

Whereupon the gatekeeper, without a word, drew a revolver from his pocket and pointed it at the coachman.

The latter never stirred in his seat. The weapon might have been aimed at some other than he, for any emotion he displayed.

He didn't even look in the slightest degree interested. I shouldn't have been in the least surprised if he had suddenly yawned.

And he paid as much attention to Carmen's command as he did to the gatekeeper's threat. Perhaps he had not understood either.

When the coachman refused to stir, Carmen, jumping out of the carriage, ran up to the gates and began beating them in a perfect frenzy of disappointed rage. But she could do nothing. Even her great anger was of no avail against that locked iron, and finally bursting into bitter tears she turned slowly away.

I helped her into the carriage, striving to soothe and to comfort her, and told the coachman to drive back to the house. This order he seemed to understand readily enough.

It was the only thing we could do now, as certainly we could not get through locked gates, and the gatekeeper evidently had no intention of opening them for us.

As we drove back to the house, I turned in the carriage to look back at the gatekeeper. He was standing in the middle of the driveway, as he stood, I remembered, the first day I came to Greywold, looking after the carriage, a malicious grin clearly discernible upon his face.

When we reached the house the front door was thrown open to us by the Japanese butler who apparently awaited our speedy return.

In the beautiful hall, with its marbles and exquisite color scheme, Jim Kidd and Mr. Campbell stood watching our humiliating entrance.

I looked at Mr. Campbell, then looked again. Why, the man seemed to be disappointed, annoyed, if his expression were an indication of his emotions. I was sure that there was also sorrow, and the greatest anxiety exhibited in the glance he bent upon Carmen.

Jim Kidd's one wicked eye gleamed malevolently, triumphantly, a sardonic smile distended his loose-lipped mouth.

" Your shopping expedition was a short one, Miss Carter," he said to me meaningly as I swept by him on my way upstairs with Carmen.

" Thanks to your activity—yes," I retorted.

Suddenly he stood directly in my path.

" Don't you ever fool yourself with the idea that I don't know everything that's goin' on in this house, and also you can bet your life that where it's anything that concerns me I'm on the job every time."

" People who are on the job in other people's affairs sometimes find themselves nuisances," I told him, looking him straight in that one evil eye of his.

" Take care, take care that I don't find you in *my* way," he growled at me.

Whereupon I whisked by him to join Carmen on the stairway, whence we proceeded to my room, where we sat down to discuss ways and means of Carmen getting away from Greywold or putting an end to Jim Kidd's annoyance.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MACHINATIONS OF KIDD.

AFTER this episode things ran a little better in Greywold, Jim Kidd annoying Carmen less with his attentions, to the intense relief of both the girl and myself.

Then two strange happening befell me, that worried me not a little.

One afternoon I had to go to Boisville on some business relating to Greywold, alone of course, Carmen and I being allowed no more trips together since she had tried to get away.

The gates were thrown open readily enough by the keeper as soon as I drove up to them.

In the town where I had to remain for

a few hours I dismissed the coachman, with instructions where and when to pick me up when I was ready to return to Greywold.

After my business was finished I went to the drug-store, there to await the carriage. I remained there for some time, when suddenly I awakened to the realization that the appointed time for the coachman to call for me had come and gone.

I telephoned to Greywold, unfortunately getting Jim Kidd on the wire, and explained to him what had happened. He advised me to begin walking toward Greywold, assuring me that the carriage would meet me on the way.

Of course I should have known better than to trust Jim Kidd in the slightest degree, and should have insisted upon talking with some one else in the house. But that is the way. It is always easier to know the things you should have done than the things you ought to do.

However, I acted upon his counsel and started out immediately toward Greywold to meet the carriage. I walked along leisurely at first, expecting every moment it would come into view, but to my astonishment nothing appeared upon the road that led to Greywold.

I had gone too far now—more than half-way—to return to the village; so I hastened my steps, and in a walk that consumed the remainder of the afternoon I reached Greywold.

The man with the disconcerting eyes and flaming hair swung the gates open to me. To my indignant query concerning the carriage he protested that he knew absolutely nothing, in fact seemed to find a great deal of difficulty in understanding what I was complaining about.

I left him abruptly and started up the roadway that led to the house. Dusk was just beginning to fall, when the world is enveloped in that mysterious afterglow that quickens the mind to strange fancies, that endows the vision with imaginative exaggeration, so that one sees lurking behind every tree a menacing shadow and every object transformed into something uncanny or threatening.

I walked along rather slowly now, for I was beginning to feel the fatigue of my long foot journey from Boisville.

My thoughts were upon Greywold and the strangeness of the place; upon Mr. Campbell, who seemed a likable and normal sort of person, but who in some unaccountable and mysterious way was under the dominion of the detestable Jim Kidd; upon his evidently immense wealth, and the oddness of the fact that I was unable to discover the source of it, although I had been curious enough about it to institute inquiries; upon the staff of foreign servants and the reason for it; upon Mrs. Hudson's sudden and unexplainable departure, and her mysterious warning to me about the butler, and lastly my puzzlement about the latter, as to whether he was a Japanese, and the man who had been in the house all along, or a new man and a Chinese, who had in some way managed to take Saiki's place without any one in Greywold being aware of the change.

Then all of a sudden my mind, that had been dwelling upon these things, became detached from them, and I was acutely conscious of my surroundings.

It was growing dusk rapidly and I was passing through that thick grove of trees that in daylight presented a rather pleasant if gloomy prospect, but now seemed haunted by some sinister influence, as if malignant spirits of long dead Druids walked abroad in it, searching for their prey, and their prey of long ago, forever fled before them, bemoaning their unhappy lot on earth when they had been cut off from life to be offered unhappy victims to dread gods.

I hurried my steps. With my hurry a feeling of fear gradually but certainly fastened its clutch on me. I couldn't define it; I couldn't say from whence it came, what it was. It was nothing tangible, nothing that I could name, nothing I could see; but it had suddenly grasped me, this terrible paralyzing dread.

It pressed upon me from every side, it smote every nerve, every fiber of my body, and it whispered in my ear, hurry, hurry, conveying a subtle warning of imminent danger to my brain.

I started to walk faster and faster until at last I was running like a mad thing, terror now having full possession of me, and I obeying its behest.

I ran and stumbled and panted, and the one thought that filled me was to reach Greywold and reach it quickly.

And then I caught it, and the sound of it almost crumpled my heart up! It was the noise of footsteps—footsteps running after me as fast as I ran, and I realized with horror that some one, something, pursued me.

Terror lent wings to my feet. I ran as I had never run before in my life, as I never hope to run again. I put forth every effort. Whatever the thing was that pursued me I was determined that it should not reach me.

So we sped on, that something that I could not see and all the more terrible that it was unseen, behind me, and I flying before it. I could hear its panting breath, the sound of its swift foot, gaining slowly upon me. Every muscle, every nerve in my body had reached the point of bursting.

And now we were out of the grove of trees, within sight of Greywold, looming up a huge dark mass in the dusk.

The thing was so near to me now that I felt every second it would reach me. This thought gave me superhuman strength and drove me into a frantic burst of speed.

At last I reached the porch of Greywold. It is no exaggeration to say that I fairly flew up the steps.

I had expected to pull frantically at the bell. To my great relief, the door was opened to me by the butler almost as soon as I reached it. In another instant I was safe within the hall.

With Mongolian stolidity, Saiki apparently paid no attention to my sorry plight —disheveled, exhausted, terrified.

When I recovered sufficiently to articulate, and asked him if he had seen anything in pursuit of me when he opened the door, all I could get from him was: "No see. No see."

After a while I regained my composure sufficiently to open the front door and peer out. It was quite dark now, and of course I could see nothing.

Jim Kidd came into the house about a quarter of an hour after I did. This was, of course, unusual, as he never stirred abroad, and I was sure that he directed toward me a most peculiar look as he passed me in the hall.

I stopped him, demanding to know why the carriage had failed to meet me. For the first time since I had known him he seemed actually embarrassed. But it was the same insolent Jim Kidd that told me he had forgotten all about it, with this explanation walking away from me.

I stood looking after him. Was he in any way connected with my unpleasant adventure? I was sure that he was. I said nothing. I would wait and carefully watch.

The next day befell my second exciting adventure.

About five o'clock in the afternoon one of the servants brought me a verbal message that Miss Campbell was down at the gatekeeper's lodge, and would like to have me join her there immediately.

Presuming, of course, that the girl had discovered some new way of getting away from Greywold, without making inquiries, or having slightest suspicion that everything wasn't all right, I hurriedly donned my hat and coat, leaving the house carefully so that no one should see me.

I walked along rapidly. So interested was I and so overjoyed at the prospect of Carman getting away from Greywold that my adventure of the day before actually entirely slipped from my mind.

The day was dying in a gorgeous riot of colors. I remember being quite impressed by the beauty of it all. As I walked along the sky changed its colors

many times, each hue more beautiful and more splendid than the one preceding it.

Watching it, I thought of jewels; splendid, flaming, exquisite jewels. At one moment it was a chrysoprase, a leek green chrysoprase, then a dark green velvety tourmalin, a pale pink sapphire, a rich red ruby, a wonderful opal, shot with pink, green, yellow, and amethyst. And then, after awhile, all these colors faded out, giving place to a deep blue sapphire vault, with the pale ghosts of golden stars, and the silver crescent of a new moon haunting it.

I reached the cottage. Judge of my astonishment when I found no Carmen there, and that Carmen had not been there either so far as I could discover. The gatekeeper knew nothing about a message sent to me.

Bewildered and angry, and not at that moment giving the incident any more importance than that there had been some misunderstanding, I started back to the house. When I reached the grove of trees, for the first time, I recalled my experience of the day before.

On the very heels of this thought came a sound that brought me to a standstill. I listened intently. Yes, there it was.

The cry of the wolfhounds—the wolfhounds loose in the grounds of Greywold!

This was extraordinary. The dogs were never unchained until late at night, at least this had been the custom since my arrival in the place. And now here they were, those great, ferocious dogs, unchained apparently, and roaming at large before the day had quite faded out.

I realized my danger instantly, also knew how foolish I had been in responding to a message that had brought me down to the gatekeeper's cottage, and outside the safety of the walls of Greywold.

The cries of the animals were coming nearer and nearer. Judging from the sounds I would soon run into them.

To do this I knew meant for me either certain death or a terrible mangling, for the dogs, I was well aware, were extremely savage, and would instantly attack any one but their keeper.

I stood still and considered. My mind was never so clear, my reasoning faculties never so acutely alert. I could not get back to the house now. That was clearly impossible, for they would run across me somewhere upon the road, and if I turned and tried to reach the gatekeeper's cottage they would in all likelihood wind me, and be upon my track hot-foot before I had traveled far. I looked around at the trees surrounding me, and noted with a clear realization of the means to safety they held out, that some of the branches grew rather low. Starting for a tree, thankful that with increasing years I had grown lean instead of fat—although I had often resented it, and had been unduly envious of decidedly plump women; and also thankful that in my girlhood days I had been excessively fond of climbing—which dexterity I hoped would stand me now in good stead—I found out that I still knew how to climb.

In a minute I was quite a distance up a good-sized tree, where I sat upon a limb, uncomfortably and awkwardly enough to be sure, but at least safe from the fangs of those savage dogs, whose cries were coming nearer and nearer.

In a little while I was looking down at the pack, snarling and leaping at the foot of my tree, in a perfect frenzy that they could not get at me.

I thought they would fuss a while, and when they realized I was unattainable, go off, perhaps giving me a chance to get down and safely back to the house.

But in this I was mistaken. The huge dogs deliberately surrounded the tree, evincing no inclination of immediately leaving that vicinity so far as I could see. Of course I was safe while I could stay in the tree, but I was very much worried.

How long would the siege last, and what would be the outcome of it? Would they miss me in Greywold; and if they did, at once institute a search for me that would include the grounds?

There was no doubt of it—Jim Kidd's hand was in this. He had sent the message purporting to come from Carmen, and then when he guessed that I would be returning to the house, he ordered the wolf-hounds to be released, expecting them to meet me on the road, and so sweep me from his path forever!

I looked down at the dogs. Some of them were lying at the foot of the tree, as if they intended staying there at least a week; others were walking about restlessly, and now and then one of them would stand, and lifting his head, send forth a deep-throated, terrifying howl.

I hoped that Carmen would miss me, and missing me, insist upon a search being made for me. I felt that it was my only means of deliverance. And I knew that if Jim Kidd could prevent it, nothing would be done, and that Mr. Campbell would in all probability be unable to act, much as he might wish to.

It was upon Carmen's resourcefulness and bravery that I relied. And I was right. Help came from Carmen.

She had not missed me until she discovered that the dogs were loose in the grounds. This surprised her, it being so early. Immediately she sought for me. She found my room empty. Then she searched the house, whereupon, realizing that I must be outside somewhere, she at once sent for the keeper of the hounds, ordering him to call his dogs together, and shut them up.

This the man did, protesting he had received orders to unleash them from Jim Kidd.

I was considerably relieved when I heard the keeper calling to his dogs, for the animals below me heeded the summons instantly, and bounded off.

Then Carmen, with a number of the servants, began a search of the grounds, I directing them by my shouts to the tree where I was ensconced.

Finally, amid a perfect babel of excited and different languages, I was assisted down from the tree and brought back to the house.

Jim Kidd was not around when I returned, but there was no doubt in my mind, nor in Carmen's, after I had told her of my adventures of the two days, that his hand had been in both happenings, especially since we knew that it was his orders that had unloosed the savage Russian wolfhounds in the grounds of Greywold while I was out in them.

There was absolutely no doubt about it when we discovered later that it was he who had sent the servant to me with the message, purporting to come from Carmen.

CHAPTER X.

THE SILENT INTERRUPTION.

FEELING certain that Jim Kidd had designs upon my life, I made up my mind to speak with Mr. Campbell of the situation that very evening, after dinner, pointing out to him that either this man or I must leave Greywold, as it would be impossible for me to remain even for Carmen's sake, under such nerve-trying conditions.

Dinner had been a bit delayed because of my adventure. I resolved to go to the table, just as if nothing had happened, determined not to show so much as the tip of the white feather to Jim Kidd. So I put on one of my prettiest evening gowns, with a big bunch of violets at my belt, and went down to the dining-room.

There was clearly an attitude of constraint characterizing the attitude of every one there, with the exception of Jim Kidd, who seemed never so gay, never so talkative. He rattled on volubly and determinedly, although every one else was undisguisedly averse to engaging in conversation. He paid no attention whatever to the fact that his questions were either answered by monosyllables or not at all.

Toward the end of the dinner he ordered the butler to bring liquor to the table. This was unusual. It was always put on after Carmen and I had gone.

Saiki left the room for a few minutes, returning with a wine bottle, from which he filled glasses for Kidd and Mr. Campbell.

Then the former suddenly jumped to his feet with a toast, I remember I thought it was going to be some sickening, sentimental effusion, addressed to Carmen, and averted my eyes. The girl evidently expected the same thing, for she flushed red as a rose and looked extremely embarrassed.

But Kidd, raising his glass high, directed his glance across the table to Mr. Campbell.

"Here's to the Reina Celeste," he bellowed. "Blast her deadlights if I don't wish I was on her again, an' a runnin' free for Hop Sing's island."

He lifted his wine to his lips to drink this strange toast. The next instant we were all startled by the crash of broken glass, and beheld Jim Kidd, empty-handed, his wine-glass shattered to bits upon the table, the liquor it contained trickling like a stream of human blood over the white linen cloth.

And his face!

I looked at him in amazement. He was standing there, his jaw fallen, his countenance a ghastly lavender tint, his one eye fixed in a bulging stare upon a corner of the table.

I followed his gaze, and saw something lying there upon the white cloth that looked to me like a cigar. Next I heard Jim Kidd's voice. It sounded as if some one held him by the throat, determined to strangle him.

"Dead fingers, Campbell! My God! Dead fingers!" he gasped, and fled from the room.

Mr. Campbell had risen from his chair. His eyes were also upon the thing that lay upon the table and looked like a cigar, and his face was the face of a man who had just died.

Then he also left the dining-room, going out of it unsteadily, as if he were intoxicated.

Carmen was regarding me in utter astonishment.

"What is it, what has happened?" she cried.

"I don't know," I told her, and rising from my chair I reached over and picked up from the table the object that had so startled the two men. Carmen got to her feet and stood beside me.

"What is it? Oh, what is it?" she was crying excitedly.

I looked at the thing. It was a human finger, preserved in such a way that it was exactly like the fingers one sees on the hands of Egyptian mummies in the museums. It was a long, slender, dark brown finger, somehow giving one the impression of aristocracy, of blood.

I remembered to have seen a hand, with just such elegant, slender fingers in the British Museum, and deciding that I should have liked very much to have known the old Egyptian it belonged to, and also having felt quite certain he had been a thoroughbred.

"What is it; what on earth is it?" came Carmen's querulous inquiry, breaking in upon my thoughtful contemplation of the finger.

I held it out to her, resting upon the palm of my hand.

"A finger, a human finger," I said.

Carmen turned away from it in horror.

"What does it mean?" she faltered, white faced and trembling.

I certainly had not the remotest idea what it meant, but I tied it up carefully in a corner of my handkerchief, determined to take charge of it, for the present at least. I then proposed to Carmen that she and I share the same room that night, a suggestion the girl joyfully assented to. Neither one of us wished to be alone.

We went up-stairs to my bedroom.

I recalled afterward, as we left the dining-room the butler was bending over the table working with the wine stain. Neither by his expression nor his manner did he indicate in the slightest degree that anything unusual had happened during dinner that evening.

We were no more than seated in my room when we were aware of the voices

of Jim Kidd and Mr. Campbell in a violent altercation, evidently in a room somewhere on the same floor with us. Mr. Campbell's voice was loudest, for in this instance the host of Greywold seemed to be the aggressor, pouring forth a perfect torrent of abuse upon Jim Kidd. He shouted and he swore in a berserker rage, as if he were suddenly gone mad with anger.

And now I knew why Mr. Campbell's eyes gave one the impression that they had always looked over great expanses, always had the horizon in view. He must have followed the sea some time in his life, for his tirade was studded thickly with startling oaths.

Indeed, that was about all we could hear of the dispute, those strange sea oaths that came to our ears from time to time. When Jim Kidd retorted, which he did every little while, in language as violent as Mr. Campbell's, it was also the idiom peculiar to the forecastle that he used.

The quarrel was so violent, and so protracted, that Carmen and I, fearing that the men would attack each other, were upon the point of appealing to some of the servants of the house. But upon reflection we decided not to interfere.

We sat there, in dread and apprehension, listening for hours to a wrangle that ebbed and raged, and was a most bitter one. We, however, managed to get from it nothing definite enough to inform us what it was all about. From time to time we caught Carmen's name mentioned, and then mine, and also the name Hop Sing, that Jim Kidd introduced in his toast at dinner that evening.

Finally we prepared for bed, and Carmen, with that light spiritedness of youth that rises above the worries and troubles of life, was soon sleeping as soundly as a babe.

Two things I paid little but not overmuch attention to just then, I was to remember forcibly afterward.

Carmen over her night-dress wore a beautiful kimono of Japanese silk with an unusually striking design. She explained to me that she generally so attired herself at night to be ready to go to her mother at a moment's notice if she were needed. Another thing that I noticed, Carmen used a heavy foreign perfume.

I lay wide awake for hours, listening to the quarrel between Mr. Campbell and Kidd, until at last it lost the edge of its fury, and after a time petered out entirely.

Perfect quiet now held Greywold, but I could not close my eyes. I was awake, fully awake, my brain and every nerve preternaturally and acutely alive.

I thought of my exciting adventures and realized that Kidd wanted me out of the way on account of Carmen, because he knew that my influence over the girl counted, and understood that I must be hostile to his matrimonial intentions.

I tried to puzzle out what the dried finger meant, and why it had had such a startling effect upon the two men, but could come to no conclusion concerning it.

Then I became suddenly conscious that there were noises, stealthy noises in the hall outside. I sat up in bed, listening. I was sure that I heard a footstep stealing slowly along the hall, and, yes, I also caught the sound of some one breathing. There was the noise of a door carefully opened and closed, and the shuffle of a cautious foot. Somehow I gained an impression of something sinister taking place. However, in spite of my apprehension and alarm, my curiosity as to what was going on outside in the hall overcame all other feelings.

I arose from the bed and placed a table in front of the bedroom door. With the aid of a chair I managed to get on top of this table, and then I was in a position to get a very good glimpse of the hall through the transom window.

There was no one in sight just then, but in a few seconds some one came down the hall from the south end. I craned my neck very inelegantly to see who it was.

By the single electric light that was always left burning during the night I had an excellent view.

It was Mr. Campbell, fully clothed, with the exception that he was in his stocking feet. He was running down the hall, in a queer, crouching position, and I caught the gleam of something bright which he carried in his hand. What it was I could not say.

At the minute he passed my door, the door of a room diagonally across from mine—and at once I remembered that it was occupied by a French dressmaker I had placed there rather than in the servant's quarters — was guardedly, very guardedly opened, and I recognized the plump figure of the little lady in the opening, with some one standing just behind her.

She stuck her head out, glancing up and down the hall. Then, catching sight of Mr. Campbell, she precipitately disappeared into her room again, closing the door softly.

Mr. Campbell evidently had neither seen nor heard her, for he went right on, in that odd, crouching fashion, and entered a room down the hall.

Then, presently, the door of the dressmaker's room was cautiously opened, the little Frenchwoman going through the same process of darting her head out, looking up and down the hall, after which an assistant in the kitchen slipped out and went scurrying toward the servants' quarters.

With that leniency that characterizes the attitude of woman toward woman, I made up my mind to get rid of mademoiselle the very next day, notwithstanding that she was a good seamstress, and that both Carmen and I would miss her very much.

Disgruntled and vexed with what I had seen I got down from the table and slipped back to bed without awakening Carmen.

Then I dismissed the Frenchwoman and her problem from my mind and fell to wondering about Mr. Campbell, where he had been, why was he running down the hall in that queer panicky way, and in his stocking feet, and what had he carried in his hand that when the light caught it gleamed like polished metal?

Somehow the incident gave me a feeling of extreme disquietude, and I fell asleep to troubled dreams. When I awakened early the next morning, Carmen had already risen and left the room. Only that powerful, overwhelming, and, to me sickening, perfume remained, permeating everything, and far from pleasant, to my thinking.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT HAPPENED TO KIDD.

MR. CAMPBELL and Carmen were seated at the breakfast table when I reached it.

I was at once struck by the former's unusual vivacity and cheerfulness of manner. He looked and acted like a man who had suddenly cast aside some worriment; from whose shoulders a burden had been lifted, and who, of a consequence, found life once more worth living. Actually, his face seemed to have lost some of its lines of worry; it certainly no longer looked so haggard and careworn.

And Carmen, she who as a rule had the rosiest cheeks, now appeared decidedly pale, and there were circles underneath her eyes. Had I not known the contrary to be true, I should have said that she had not slept well the previous night.

Mr. Campbell greeted me cordially, almost jovially. There was nothing in his manner to indicate that his quarrel of the night before with Jim Kidd weighed upon his mind in the slightest degree. As for that individual, he had not put in an appearance yet, and we began the meal without him.

I wondered if Mr. Campbell had worsted him in the encounter of the night before, and hoped grimly that he had.

Then I received a most curious shock that went far toward spoiling my appe-

tite for breakfast, and started me thinking very hard.

Happening to glance at the butler's hands as he was serving me something or other, I gasped, wondering if I were aright, or if something had gone wrong with my brain.

For again I was beholding long, slender fingers!

Gone were the short, fat, plebian ones I had looked at as late as during the evening meal.

I leaned back in my chair, staring openly. Yes, absolutely, these were the thin, nervous-looking fingers, indicative of civilization, of race culture, that I had noticed when I first came to Greywold.

I lifted my eyes to the man's face. Was there a change here also? But I could not be absolutely sure, scan it carefully as I would.

There were the slant eyes, the high cheek-bones, the wide nostrils that were all typical of our butler's face of the evening before, but was it the same face?

The more I scrutinized that calm, Oriental mask the more puzzled did I become.

Was I right in what I thought all along? Had our Japanese butler changed places with some one, a Chinaman, perhaps, for a time, and now was he returned to us, relying upon our unfamiliarity with the Mongolian countenance to succeed in deceiving us? If this were so, the secret had been betrayed to me alone because of my interest in human hands.

After a while Mr. Campbell instructed Saiki to go up-stairs to Jim Kidd's room and summon him to breakfast. He told him to go to the *north* room on the second floor, where he would most likely find him.

The butler came back in a few minutes, announcing that Kidd had not occupied the north room. Whereupon Mr. Campbell sent the man back to the same floor, bidding him to try the south room.

It seemed to me that Carmen suddenly looked startled, nervously conscious. She turned weary eyes, with an expression that I could not define, upon her father.

In a short time the Japanese returned to the dining-room, and in the same voice, and with the same manner that he might have announced that a visitor awaited one of us in the hall outside, he stated:

"The honorable Kidd, him dead. One sharp, long knife gone through his honorable heart."

No one spoke. Dead silence reigned in the room. I looked across the table at Carmen. The rings under her eyes stood out terribly. I could see that she was trying to control the trembling of her lips.

Mr. Campbell arose from his chair. He turned to me.

"Miss Carter, will you please come with me?" he said quietly. I got up at once and followed him out of the dining-room.

Carmen was coming with us, but I advised her not to, and so she turned back into the dining-room again, where the butler, in most composed fashion, was going about his duties. I remember thinking, concerning him:

"What poise. Only centuries could produce it!"

We proceeded up-stairs, Mr. Campbell leading the way. He walked along with a resolute, steady step. My mind *would* keep going back to the night before, and how I had seen him skulking along the hallway of the second floor, from the *south* end, like a haunted or a guilty thing.

We reached the bedroom, the room on the south end. The door was partly opened. Mr. Campbell, after a moment's pause, pushed it against the wall and entered, I close on his heels.

Jim Kidd was lying across the bed clad in his pajamas. It did not take a second glance for me to know that the man was dead. One could tell it by the unnatural twist of his limbs, by the queer way his head was thrown back upon the pillow.

And in the pajamas, just over the man's heart, there was a slit in the silk.

"He has been stabbed," I thought, and marveled at the absence of blood.

But more startling to me than the dead man lying there upon the bed was the fact that the instant I entered the room I was assailed by the heavy odor of the perfume Carmen affected. I wondered about it uneasily without, however, being able to ascribe any definite reason for my disquietude.

I glanced around the room, and then at the body upon the bed. I was looking for a weapon. This superficial examination, however, disclosed to me no knife that had made a slit in the dead man's silk pajamas, and reached his heart.

But it did reveal to me two other things.

One was a small object that lay on the bed beside the body and looked like a brown cigar.

Peering at it a little closer, without touching it, however, I saw that it was a mummied finger, just like the one I had picked up from the dinner-table the night before, and which had so upset Mr. Campbell and the man now dead.

This time it was the index finger, a trifle shorter, more slender, and more pointed than the second finger that I held in my possession. This finger and the other thing I noticed I made no comment upon just then.

There was no weapon I could see, and absence of one indicated murder, not suicide!

I turned to Mr. Campbell.

"I think that Jim Kidd has been murdered," I told him.

Mr. Campbell stood just within the door, his eyes fixed in a steady, almost fascinated stare on the dead body. He tore his gaze away from the corpse and fixed it abstractedly upon me. He seemed too dazed, too bewildered, to actually grasp what had taken place under his roof. He nodded his head slowly to my statement, then asked me:

"What shall we do?"

"The first thing to be done, according to my notion," I informed him, "is to call the chief of police of Boisville up by telephone, and apprise him of what has happened. I believe this to be the ordinary procedure in such cases."

I was beginning to grow impatient with the man. He seemed so weak, so inefficient. However, I reflected, it probably was not to be wondered at. He had been under Jim Kidd's dominion long enough to render him spineless, and it was not possible for him to immediately recover himself.

He asked me in a very quiet voice:

"Jim Kidd has been stabbed, hasn't he?"

"Jim Kidd has been stabbed," I answered him, "but I don't know that that has killed him. Have you noticed his neck?"

And this was the second thing I had observed when I looked around the room and at the body for the weapon that had done the killing.

"No, no!" Mr. Campbell cried, and for the first time since he had been in the room showed some feeling about the tragedy.

"Look," I told him, waving my hand toward the late Jim Kidd.

Mr. Campbell slowly, very slowly, approached the bed, and, bending over, peered at the dead man. Then he saw what I had seen! Twisted around Jim Kidd's neck was a cord, a fine cord that was barely visible, so swollen and discolored was the victim's flesh.

This cord was knotted in a most peculiar way.

"I have never seen a knot like that before," I informed Mr. Campbell.

Campbell was backing away from the bedside to the door. His face was haggard, and there was a ghastly light in his eyes. I suddenly picked up the dead finger from the bed. I held it out to him.

"What does this mean?" I asked him.

He gazed at the brown finger lying across the palm of my hand for a full minute without speaking. Then he turned away from me, hurriedly leaving the room, and as on that day when Jim Kidd first came to Greywold he appeared bent and old-looking.

I did not place the finger back beside the body of the dead man, although I knew that I had no business to disturb anything before the coroner or his physician arrived to view the body. I carried it to my own room, where I placed it very carefully beside the other withered brown finger.

And somehow it seemed to me as I looked at these two fingers that stirring and mysterious events and strange happenings of human life were connected with them, that would be far beyond the ken of ordinary detectives and policemen to puzzle out.

A short time after this I ran across two of the servants conveying the trunk that had been Jim Kidd's to the cellar of the house. I stopped them, asking them whose orders they were obeying. They told me Mr. Campbell's. They were taking the trunk down to the furnace-room where it was to be left.

Later, when every one was out of the way, I went down to the cellar to investigate.

The trunk had disappeared. A heap of grayish white ashes in the furnace pointed to its end.

I looked around the room, and on the stone floor over in a corner I saw a white scrap of paper. Picking it up, I discovered that it was part of the page of a letter that had been torn in two, this half evidently having escaped the burning. It was an illiterate scrawl that I took some time in deciphering. Finally I got this from it:

The place — Greywold — from — Boisville. —He has — gatekeeper. — Come along — gold, Reina Celeste—Hop Sing Spigel.

Spigel! That was the name of the man at the gate with the queer, light eyes and vivid hair. The letter signed by him had evidently been written by him, and addressed to Jim Kidd, for without doubt this was a fragment from the murdered man's trunk that had been overlooked in its destruction.

" —position—gatekeeper—"

Evidently this alluded to Spigel's occupation in Greywold.

" Come along—"

The pale-eyed man apparently extended an invitation to Jim Kidd to come to Greywold.

" Reina Celeste—" That was the name Kidd mentioned in his toast last night at the dinner-table.

" Hop Sing!" This name also Jim Kidd had mentioned when drinking his strange toast.

I folded the sheet and took it up to my room, where I placed it with the two dead fingers, my other exhibits, for future reference.

CHAPTER XII.

DEEP COMPLICATIONS.

IT devolved upon me to announce to the Boisville police news of the tragedy that had taken place in Greywold.

Mr. Campbell had disappeared somewhere, without having performed this important and not very pleasant duty, and when I sought Carmen for instructions I found her in her room, the victim of a violent headache, and, a most unusual attitude on her part, my presence seemed decidedly unwelcome to her.

I left her, going down-stairs to the library where there was a telephone. I called up Boisville police headquarters. The chief had not reached his office yet, but some one else who was in charge took my message, becoming convinced, after I had done a good deal of talking, that something very serious and worthy of the attention of his department had taken place in Greywold.

The telephone was near one of the windows. As I hung up the receiver and turned away I faced this window. I gave a start when I beheld a pair of pale, colorless eyes looking at me.

Spigel, the gatekeeper, was standing on the porch outside, his face glued against the window-pane engaged in the occupation of watching me. So absorbed

was he, and so quickly did I turn, that apparently he was given no chance of getting away before I had seen him. However, immediately that I turned he faded away.

It seemed to me that long after the man had gone I could see those uncanny eyes of his. He had evidently been watching me, and listening to my conversation with the police. I wondered what had prompted his interest.

Still, when I reflected, it was not extraordinary. Possibly he was stirred up about the murder, just as the whole household was by this time, and was curious about anything pertaining to it.

However, it gave me a queer feeling, and a creepy sort of shock, those peculiar colorless eyes of his watching me through the library window.

After this I wandered through the house awaiting developments, and feeling decidedly puzzled every time I recalled the dead Jim Kidd lying up-stairs, with the odor of the strong foreign perfume Carmen was partial to filling the room. Also I thought of the two dried fingers I had in my possession, and of Mr. Campbell in the dead of the night hurrying from the direction of the south room—Jim Kidd's room—with something in his hand that glittered as the light fell upon it. Certainly strange things were taking place in Greywold.

I learned from one of the servants that Mrs. Campbell, the night before, had in some way managed to elude her caretakers and had gotten out of her room and the house.

They found her in the grounds early in the morning, and that special providence that seems to exercise itself particularly where the insane are concerned had looked after her and protected her, for although the wolfhounds were loose and roaming around as usual, she was unharmed.

Within an hour after my message had been sent to the Boisville police department the coroner and his physician arrived at Greywold in a fast automobile, and viewed the body. The physician, it seemed to me, made a very hurried examination, and his verdict that Jim Kidd had died from a knife-wound in the chest that had pierced his heart I did not agree with.

It was audacious upon my part undoubtedly to disagree with the findings of a coroner's physician, but I did, and moreover I was certain that there were some details having an important bearing upon the manner of Jim Kidd's death that he was overlooking, or if not overlooking, at least slighting their relative importance.

Later on in the morning a coroner's jury was summoned and assembled, sitting in the room where the dead man lay, undisturbed, upon the bed.

The chief of police of Boisville and the one detective credited to his department were present. Nearly all the household of Greywold were called into the investigation, I, because of my familiarity with the various jargons used by the servants, being there all the time, acting to the best of my ability as interpreter.

All sorts of questions were asked, some of them decidedly silly and foreign to the subject in hand, I thought, and none of them calculated certainly to throw any flood of light upon the tragedy.

Toward the end of the proceedings, when every one of us was beginning to feel tired of it, notwithstanding its tragic importance, and most of the jury were yawning and looking bored to death, the coroner, a stout, red-faced man, with bulging blue eyes behind silver-rimmed spectacles, suddenly called upon me to be sworn as a witness.

Then, when all eyes were attentively fixed upon me, and every one was bending forward expectantly, feeling that something of importance was at last about to take place, he began questioning me.

How long had I been in Greywold? In what capacity did I serve? To this last I answered:

"As a companion and a teacher to Miss Carmen Campbell."

"Then you were with Miss Campbell most of the time?"

"Yes, I was with her most of the time."

I wondered what this interrogation was leading to.

His next question put me very much upon my guard, and I resolved to answer less frankly.

"Being with Miss Campbell most of the time, and being a woman, you would naturally be familiar with Miss Campbell's clothing. For instance, you would have observed and be able to recognize very quickly any article of clothing she had ever worn?"

I was cautious.

"Oh, I don't know that I should. I am not a very clever observer of clothing. In fact, I don't believe that I pay much attention to it at all."

"H-m-m," the coroner grunted loudly, and bestowed upon me a long, speculative stare.

Then he walked over to me, and suddenly flung open a very red and big-fisted hand that he had been keeping closed. Shoving it offensively close to my face, he demanded loudly

"Miss Carter, who does this belong to?"

When he opened his hand a strong odor of heavy perfume filled the room, and I was looking at a piece of Japanese silk with unusual design torn from the beautiful kimono Carmen had worn the night before when she shared my room.

I was dazed by it! That and the odor I knew so well! A great dread filled me for Carmen. What did it mean? Did it menace the girl? The piece of Japanese silk seemed suddenly a sinister thing lying there in the big red palm of the coroner's hand.

Therefore, to be upon the safe side, for Carmen's sake, after looking at the piece of silk carefully, I announced that I did not know to whom it belonged.

Immediately the coroner sent the detective out of the room to find Carmen and summon her to the proceedings. In a few minutes she was ushered in, so pale and haggard-looking that I felt genuinely concerned for her.

After she had gone through the process of being sworn, the coroner abruptly opened his hand in front of her, with the piece of Japanese silk lying in it, and asked that she state to whom it belonged. I held my breath as Carmen's answer came clear and distinct in the quiet, listening room:

"To me; it's a piece of my kimono."

"When and where did you last wear your kimono from which this piece has been torn?" the coroner asked softly.

"Last night in Miss Carter's room," Carmen stated.

The coroner cast a glance in my direction; in fact, I believe that every one in the room did that, and then with a beaming face he turned to the jury and informed them in a slow, distinctive voice:

"Gentlemen, this piece of silk, torn from a kimono, was found in the dead man's hand, when my physician and myself made our investigation this morning!"

This caused something of a sensation. Instantly all over the room one heard the rustle of people moving nervously in their chairs, and every eye there was fixed in an inquiring stare upon Carmen.

She looked a very pretty and pathetic little figure, and I marveled how on earth a piece torn from her kimono had got into the dead hand of Jim Kidd. Also I wondered if the girl realized what a grave position her recognition of the piece of silk placed her in.

Why hadn't I noticed it that morning when I had gone into the room and removed it?

And then the coroner sprung another sensation. He produced a knife, a long, double-edged Toledo blade, with a beautiful handle of damaskened work, that I had been accustomed to seeing ever since my arrival in Greywold as an ornament on a table in the library.

He compared it with the slit in the dead man's pajamas to show that it was the knife that had done the stabbing.

Then he held it out to Carmen, asking her if she had ever seen it. To my amazement, she declared positively that she had never laid eyes upon it.

Following this assertion, the French seamstress, being called and sworn, stated in broken but convincing enough English that the knife had always been on a table in the library, and that it was there the last she had seen of it, which was the day before.

I was so sorry that I had not packed this woman off that morning, but so much excitement over the murder had made me forget all about it.

The coroner then explained to the jury that the knife had been found in the room that Mr. Campbell had occupied the night before. I thought of Mr. Campbell running along the hall from Jim Kidd's room with something that glittered in his hand when the light caught it.

The coroner also called attention to the fact that the knife was absolutely free of blood, evidently having been carefully cleaned.

This ended the examination of witnesses. The jury, after a short conference, announced the usual verdict, that

"We, the jury, come to the conclusion that one Jim Kidd came to his death by a wound in the heart caused by a knife in the hands of a person unknown to the jury."

Not one word said by any of them about the cord twisted about the dead man's neck and knotted in such a peculiar way.

And in my humble opinion this cord could have strangled Jim Kidd, and I was strongly inclined to believe that it had, in spite of the knife and the wound in his breast.

After this the coroner, his physician, and the jury departed, but the chief of police of Boisville and his detective remained in Greywold.

And now I will tell something of the chief of police and his detective.

John Liggett had been chief of the Boisville police department for over thirty years, working up to that position from the ranks of patrolman.

As Boisville was a small place, with but few men on its police force, that ascent had been quite devoid of competition and an easy one. Liggett was a big, stout, good-natured looking man with kindly blue eyes and a very bald head. One could imagine him selling sausages or hams behind some counter or as the comfortable host of a prosperous road-house.

But as a keen bloodhound in the employ of the law to hunt down criminals, as a solver of crime and its perplexities, an analyst of complex human motives and unexpected human actions, one would not immediately have come to the conclusion that Mr. Liggett would be a shining success.

His kindly face indicated contentment in, and approval of, the world and the people inhabiting it. He probably had more pity than any other feeling for those unfortunate ones who stand apart from their fellow men, transgressors of the laws society has made for its welfare. In his heart perhaps was the prayer—"O God, be kind to the wicked. To the good Thou hast already been sufficiently kind in making them good."

His assistant, Peter Gilbert, was a decided contrast, physically and mentally. He was a little, alert, keen-looking man, with small, glittering black eyes and a remarkably long and thin nose.

It was clear that he had lost all faith in mankind long ago and evident that he regarded every one a criminal and a suspect until he had proven to Mr. Gilbert's satisfaction that he was neither the one nor the other.

He questioned me about telephoning in news of the tragedy to headquarters, and gave me a most uncomfortable impression that by so doing I had actually become accessory to the crime.

Then I had to give him a detailed sketch of my life, and when he had finished with me somehow I felt that I had been guilty of a most suspicious act in coming to Greywold at all, and at any

rate I was a woman well worthy of surveillance, since in my life I had preferred seeing races of people and animals in their native haunts instead of down in Coney Island or in some zoological garden, where the majority choose to view them.

Later in the day a detective from a well-known agency in New York joined the two men in Greywold. It seemed that neither John Liggett nor his department had ever solved a crime that had been committed in Boisville—and Boisville had its quota of murders in ratio to its population, as every other town—and the good citizens were of a consequence dissatisfied and murmuring against him and his assistants.

And now in this case, which the chief had made up his mind was going to be a sensational one, he had sent to a crack New York agency for a man to aid him, preferring to take no chances, and so do Boisville credit as its chief of police.

The new man, Philip Corder, was a gray, colorless-looking individual, whose quiet manner, in some intangible way, suggested keen ability and power. He conferred with the chief of police and his detective for some time, then he viewed the body, and after that wandered through the house, giving some attention to every one in it.

He was the sort of man that, without any persuasion upon his part, one wanted to tell everything one knew.

Only I kept my lips firmly sealed.

CHAPTER XIII.

MANY ACCUSATIONS.

THE next day, the day of Jim Kidd's funeral, came in dark and dreary, with a cold, drizzling rain falling. Mr. Campbell and Spigel, the gatekeeper, were the only ones to accompany the murdered man's body to its last resting-place.

Meanwhile, the three men interested in the crime got together in the library to discuss it, and I, having expressed to the outside detective my desire to be at the conference, through his kindness was present, although I well knew that Peter Gilbert resented this intrusion of a woman into an affair worthy only of men to consider to settle.

Well, it turned out that each man, after having carefully considered and weighed the evidence presented, had come to a different conclusion concerning the tragedy.

The chief of police had fastened upon Mrs. Campbell as the perpetrator of the deed. He found out all about the poor lady's mental condition, and the fact that she had eluded her caretakers the night of the murder, being at large many hours without any one in the house being aware of it. She had a grievance against Jim Kidd for the killing of a bird of hers, some time before.

Insane people more frequently than not were obsessed by a fixed idea. It was supposable that because of the killing of her pet Mrs. Campbell's obsession might have been a determination to take the life of Jim Kidd at the first opportunity that presented itself.

The chance coming the night she found herself free, she undoubtedly had availed herself of it.

The chief went on to picture graphically the murder as he was convinced it had occurred. Mrs. Campbell, as soon as she had gotten away from her room, had gone down-stairs to the library, securing the knife that she was familiar with lying as it always had upon the table there. After which she crept softly up-stairs to Jim Kidd's bedroom and killed him as he slept.

Then she wandered around until she was discovered the next morning.

In support of this theory the chief reminded them of the dress Mrs. Campbell usually wore that they found stained with blood.

The quiet man from New York here asked Liggett how he accounted for the knife that had done the stabbing having been discovered in Mr. Campbell's room.

The chief answered that in his opinion Mr. Campbell had found the knife, perhaps in Mrs. Campbell's room or in the grounds where she had been wandering, and in an attempt to save his wife from suspicion he had cleaned it and concealed it in his own room.

Then Peter Gilbert, the Boisville detective, stated *his* suspicion.

He believed Carmen Campbell guilty of the murder.

To his notion it was quite as plain as two and two made four, especially after he had obtained a line on conditions existing in Greywold.

He was certain that the pretty little hand of Carmen had grasped the hilt of the knife that pierced Jim Kidd's heart. She had a motive. Usually in a murder case, when you discover the person with a motive you have the murderer!

Jim Kidd, an ugly, far from likable man, had been pressing a most unwelcome suit upon her—a suit that to her dismay and distress she found her father approving of. She tried to get away from Greywold, but was thwarted.

It certainly was quite within the bounds of reason to suppose that finding herself at bay, with no way that she could see of getting rid of her objectionable suitor, she had in a moment of frenzy and despair murdered him.

There was the piece of her kimono found in the dead man's hand, with Miss Carter denying she had ever seen it (here Gilbert directed a glance in my direction) obviously for the purpose of shielding Carmen, and Carmen herself identifying it, perhaps before she had grasped the significance of her avowal.

Add to this the knife she had disclaimed all knowledge of, but which she must certainly have been familiar with because its place had always been upon a table in the library.

Yes, Carmen was the proper suspect according to Peter Gilbert, the Boisville detective.

Corder had been leaning back comfortably in his chair while the chief and Gilbert recited their reasons for suspecting the person each one had fastened upon as being guilty of the murder of Jim Kidd.

He was silent for a few seconds after Gilbert had ceased speaking.

Finally he spoke.

" Gentlemen, I don't agree with either one of you that you are upon the right track. In the first place, perhaps you do not know, but I have found out, that Jim Kidd, since his arrival in Greywold, has never occupied the same room for sleeping purposes two nights running, and because of this neither Mrs. Campbell nor Carmen would be likely to know which room to go to the night he met his fate. In searching for it they would have aroused the household, or, at any rate, some member of it."

" But the blood-stains upon Mrs. Campbell's dress?" questioned the chief of police eagerly.

" Not human blood," returned Corder.

He went on to explain that he had satisfied himself upon this point by putting the spots to a simple test, which demonstrated conclusively that they were not composed of human blood. It was possible that it was the blood of the pet bird Jim Kidd had killed that stained Mrs. Campbell's gown.

As for the piece of Carmen's kimono found in the dead man's hand, while presenting a mystifying element in the case, it by no means pointed to the fact that a dying man's hand had clutched at and torn off a portion of the clothing of his murderer.

In that event his dying hand would have closed on this bit of evidence with the convulsive, tenacious grasp of death that is apt to persist for some time.

" And the fact is that Jim Kidd's hand presented only the usual stiffness of *rigor mortis*. Evidently his fingers had never closed in life upon the bit of silk he held in his hand in death!" declared Corder.

" But more important than all else," concluded the outside detective, leaning

forward in his chair, " Jim Kidd was not stabbed to death!"

The chief of police and Peter Gilbert suddenly sat bolt upright in their chairs, electrified with astonishment.

Whereupon the agency detective informed them of something that they and the coroner and his physician had either entirely overlooked or ignored.

The murdered man had been *strangled* to death!

It was a cord twisted about his neck that had caused his death and the stabbing had been done after he was dead!

This was proven by the fact that the stab wound had not bled, the blood already having ceased to flow through the veins of Jim Kidd.

As to the strangling cord, he had noticed something about it that he considered of utmost importance. This was the peculiar knot in it, a knot that he knew was used only in the East and by natives of the East.

Once, and once only in his career as a detective, had he run across it. That was in a murder mystery in Pell Street, New York City, when a Chinaman had strangled his victim by knotting a cord around his neck in this same way.

According to Corder's way of thinking, neither Mrs. Campbell nor Carmen knew the trick of this knot, but he did believe that Mr. Campbell, who had spent the greater part of his life in the East, according to his own statement, and knew the natives and their ways, probably did. Corder then proceeded to outline his suspicions and why they pointed to the owner of Greywold as the murderer of Jim Kidd.

In the first place he had discovered that Jim Kidd had come and remained a most unwelcome guest in Greywold. Since his coming he had practically usurped his host's place as head of the household, which for some reason, perhaps influenced by the fact that he was in some way in the one-eyed man's power, Mr. Campbell had submitted to.

As for Jim Kidd's attempted wooing of and desire to wed Carmen Campbell, although her father ostensibly approved of it, in reality, according to Corder's judgment, he was very much opposed to it; but, again influenced by the strange power that Kidd seemed to wield over him, he was afraid to voice his opposition. However, in the end, it led to the murder.

For the night that Jim Kidd was strangled they had had a violent quarrel. It might have been over this very thing —Kidd's desire to marry Carmen. It was a bitter quarrel, carried on principally by Mr. Campbell, who seemed to be the aggressor, and waged far into the night.

Corder ended by stating that he believed Mr. Campbell to be the murderer of Jim Kidd, and that if the chief of police should arrest him he would be making no mistake.

The New York detective's suspicion produced a profound impression upon the other two men.

They had accepted the coroner's physician's verdict without question, that Jim Kidd's death was due to a knife wound in the breast, losing sight of a common fact, that these men often make grave mistakes, either because of incompetency or a too hasty examination of the body.

The chief of police wanted to know what the stab wound in Jim Kidd's chest meant then. Corder shrugged his shoulders. That was something he had come to no conclusion concerning. There might be many explanations of it.

The chief sat back in his chair, crushed and disappointed. He had a high opinion of the outside man's skill, and he had hoped all along that he would approve of his, or at least of his detective's, solution of the mystery.

He had been devoting all of his time to the poor, mad lady, striving to gain and to direct her wandering attention; doing everything in his power to induce her to talk, especially of her adventures the night of the murder, when she was free; waiting patiently for her to make some serious admission or disclosure that would confirm his suspicion.

And now Corder was not agreeing with him, and he supposing he had such a perfect, such a beautiful case worked up against Mrs. Campbell.

It was a hard blow to him. He looked dumfounded, overwhelmed.

The truth of it was that in following up the crazy woman clue, the chief had absolutely ignored all others, and now if Mrs. Campbell were to be eliminated as not coming under suspicion he was all at sea and did not know which way to turn.

At the same time, his assistant's case against Carmen had been knocked into a cocked hat.

But Corder, the agency detective, had something more startling yet to spring upon his colleagues.

He announced to them that he was going to call upon an inmate of the house to relate to them what she had told him. Whereupon he had sent for *mademoiselle,* the French seamstress; and after she had told her story I was sorrier than ever I had not packed her off the first thing, for there was seemingly nothing left to be done, after she had given her statement, but arrest Mr. Campbell for the murder of Jim Kidd.

She came into the library directly after she was summoned. It was evident that she expected the call and was awaiting it.

Corder hurried forward to meet her at the door, then led her almost ceremoniously to a chair. Bowing low to her, he said:

"Will Mlle. Dupont kindly repeat to these gentlemen what she told me?"

He waved his hands toward the chief of police and his detective.

The Frenchwoman, after throwing a most defiant look in my direction, began, transforming a vulgar intrigue of the servants' quarters into a very romantic love episode, and casting me for the part of old maid ogress.

"Ah, yes, she and the young man who help the cook in the kitchen, they have a love for each other. But they also have the fear of the housekeeper, Mees Carter. She is, what you call him in English? Ah, yes, the ole maid; and she not have the sympathy for the lovers. They fear to meet because of thees Miss Carter. If she catch them, *mon Dieu,* they are discharge.

"Then this night, the night of the murder of M. Kidd, they want to see each other. They fear to meet in the servants' part of the house, and also anywhere else. So if the gentlemen will excuse the impropriety of it, she is oblige to have her sweetheart come to her room. She apologize.

"It is most unconventional. But what will you? When in the house there is an ole maid who cannot understan' lovers! Time flies. They forget. It grow late, even later. Then her sweetheart he is prepare to go.

"But first she open the door and look out into the hall, to make sure no one comes, no one sees. She is astonish and fall back into her room again and close the door softly, for what does she behold but M. Campbell coming down the hallway!"

"Have you any idea what time this was?" suddenly interrupted Corder.

"Two o'clock. I know, for just before I open the door I look at the clock and I am shock to find it is two."

Corder turned to the other men.

"I believe the coroner's physician placed the time of Jim Kidd's death between one and two o'clock in the morning," he said.

"From what direction did Mr. Campbell come?" The agency detective's voice was smooth as Lyons velvet. "And please be very careful how you answer this, *mademoiselle.* It is an important question to ask and an important question to answer."

The Frenchwoman declared:

"M. Campbell came from the direction of the room where M. Kidd was found dead the next morning!"

At that moment Mr. Campbell walked quietly into the room. The Frenchwoman fell back in her chair, nervously covering her face with her hands. Every eye was

bent upon the man she had given such damaging evidence against.

He walked to the center of the room, where he stopped and faced the detectives.

"I have come to tell you gentlemen," he announced in a very weary voice, "that I am the murderer of Jim Kidd. I ask as a special favor that I be taken into custody immediately, and away from Greywold just as soon as possible."

He had scarcely finished speaking when Carmen whirled into the room. She was terribly excited. I could tell it by her eyes, that looked like big black pansies against her face, white as a camellia. She walked over to her father and stood beside him, and, putting one little hand in a protecting sort of gesture upon his arm, she turned to the occupants of the library.

"My dear father is trying to shield me by confessing to the murder," she told them in a clear, firm voice. "But it was I that killed Jim Kidd!"

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

"I RESOLVE—"

BY LYON MEARSON

TO play for the sake of the game alone,
As every true sportsman should;
To play for the love of the game, nor moan
At fate—let the fight be good!

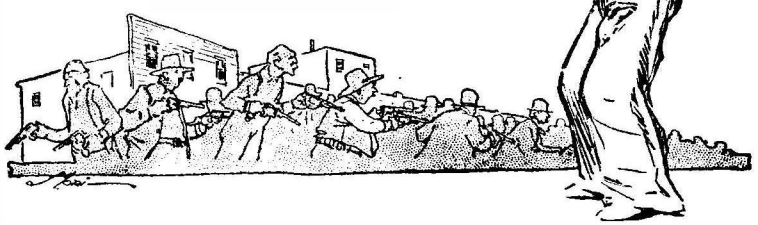
To fight for the sake of the fight I wage,
The battle of daily life,
To win with a smile, and to lose without rage,
If losing's my end of the strife.

For the man who can lose with a smile on his lips
Has vanquished himself, which makes up for the loss
Of the nectar of triumph the conqueror sips;
The gains of a victory shine but as dross
Compared to the star-glow that gleams in the soul,
And so I resolve to hold this as my goal:

To play the best and fight the best I can,
And bet my money on the other man.

Bargain Night

by Frank Condon



A "SHORTY KILGOUR" STORY

MR. JAMES CALDWELL, assistant trouble-maker and bosom companion of Mr. Shorty Kilgour of the Bar-C ranch glanced apprehensively about the bunk-room, wherein he had been discoursing to me upon the subject of Shorty's many failings.

"Didn't you hear somebody moving in the next room?" Jim asked me.

"Not a soul," I said.

"I thought I heard Shorty out there," Jim continued. "He's liable to bust in on us at any minute. You know what he's got, don't you?"

"What?"

"Thinks he's full of insomnia. Can't sleep, and he's out there walking around in the moonlight."

Jim laughed long and silently.

"Yeah," he went on, "Shorty's suffering from an absence of slumber. You know that little sucker is always boasting about himself and telling stories on me, wherein I do a lot of fool things, but he never tells one on himself. Not him. And if he suddenly slammed in here and caught me telling you, he'd be likely to start something. He's very touchy about it."

"I don't believe Shorty's anywhere about," I said encouragingly.

Jim rose, stretched his six feet of hard muscle, walked to the door, which he opened gently, and peered out. Then he returned to his bunk, still grinning.

"The little coyote ain't in sight," he laughed. "I don't know but what I'll loosen up and tell you about that other time when he couldn't sleep."

IT's likely you never heard tell of Culpepper, Arizona, and a lot of other people are likewise ignorant of it, because it's small, and has no railroad. About two years ago Shorty and I blew into Culpepper on ranch business, and about the first person we met was Colonel Bud Longslot, sole owner and proprietor of the Culpepper General Store and Supply House.

Shorty had been troubled with wakefulness, just like anybody's liable to be

at times. It might have been dyspepsia or general cussedness, but it certainly wasn't serious or permanent. If anything goes wrong with Shorty, he howls so you can hear him seven miles. He's got to have all his health or he yells. So he took this insomnia trouble to heart and opened up on Colonel Bud Longslot, Colonel Bud having plenty of time to listen to people's ailments.

" Do you know anything about insomnia?" Shorty demanded, halting in front of the general store.

" Do I!" repeated Colonel Bud. " Say! Why don't you use your brains? Do you think I could run this general store if I didn't know about insomnia? Don't I have to know all those things? Why, you poor shad, I know all about everything that can happen to the human frame. I'm an authority on measles, whooping cough, receding teeth, indigestion, gout, gastritis, and hook-worm, and I can tell what ails a man pretty nearly the minute I see him. But what seems to be worrying you?"

" I don't know what's wrong," Shorty went on, " except that I can't sleep. Seems like I've sort of lost my taste for slumber. I can't understand it, either."

" Of course you can't," Colonel Bud bellowed, lighting up one of the rim-fire cigars he affects and dropping into a chair. " Of course you can't. But if you had real brains, you could figure it out."

" How?" Shorty demanded.

" Well," the colonel went on, pulling at his rope, " figure it out by mathematics. The trouble with you is that you've overslept yourself. You're a mile ahead. Suppose you sleep eight hours a day, which is what science proves is the right time. In a week that's fifty-six hours of sleep, ain't it?"

" It is," Shorty admitted.

" Then suppose you begin sleeping ten hours a night, which a man of your loose habits is bound to do. That's seventy hours in a week, ain't it? That's fourteen hours a week more than your limit. All right. What happens? In two weeks you are twenty-eight hours overtime on your sleep. In twenty weeks you are two hundred and eighty hours or ten days ahead of your schedule, and then your outraged and overslept system begins to kick back. You've reached that stage. Right now you're two solid weeks or more of sleep ahead of where you ought to be, you poor microbe. And don't you know what's liable to happen to you?"

" What?". asked Shorty, who was beginning to be nervous.

" You're liable to go right off your nut," answered the colonel. " When a man gets overslept, he's not far from the State institution where they keep the straight-jackets. Too much sleep, like too much rum, puts many a sucker in the padded cells. Look at the way a mother watches her child. When the baby sleeps too long, the mother wakes it up by hand, and why? Because she don't want an imbecile infant. Same way with monkeys and gold fish. It goes right on down through nature. Right now, you're in grave danger, Shorty."

" What 'll I do about it?" Shorty demanded.

" Stay awake," roared his adviser. " You oughtn't to go to sleep again for at least two weeks. If you do, you're liable to wake up and begin telling people you're Napoleon."

" I suppose you're right," Shorty said.

" Right! Of course I am. I've got an idea, too. I'm not the man to show you your trouble and leave you. I'll help you. And likewise, you can be of a little aid to me."

" Glad to," Shorty answered eagerly.

" Then you take charge of this general store, beginning to-night," said Colonel Bud Longslot with cheerfulness. " You take my place and keep the institution open all night. I miss a lot of trade by closing up as early as I do, but then I'm not ahead on sleep like you are. You stay around here and you'll not only be kept awake, but you'll be doing me a real favor."

" You mean run the store to-night?"

Shorty asked in some surprise, because up to this time his experience in running stores was almighty limited.

"Sure. There's a big dance on to-night over on the Joe Crowell ranch and I'd like to go. In fact, most of us Culpepperonians are going, if we can get away. I'll turn the place over to you and you can run things."

"I'm certainly much obliged," said Shorty, shaking the colonel's hand. "And I'll just take you up. Consider this general store open all night."

Well, that conversation occurred somewhere in the early afternoon and before night every merchant in Culpepper knew that Shorty Kilgour was going to stay up all night and run the general store, all of which caused a little mild jealousy among the other tradesmen. Shorty was well and favorably known in town. Presently he began to receive visitors, the first of whom was Ike Hicks, owner of the Culpepper Garage.

"Hear you're going to run Bud Longslot's store to-night, Shorty?" said Ike.

Shorty admitted the soft impeachment.

"That ain't fair to me, is it?" Ike asked. "We compete in some things. Why couldn't you run my garage to-night, also?"

"No reason in the world," Shorty answered. "I'm a friend of yours, Ike, and I'll run that garage like it never was run before."

Then Ike gave Shorty some instructions and went away mighty pleased.

Then came Adolph Hooker of the Culpepper Hotel, and Shorty agreed to mix in a little night hotel keeping with his other duties. He was getting more popular every minute. The delicatessen man came around and begged him with tears in his eyes to assume command of the sausages and smear cheese. Likewise came the candy-store man and the owner of the fruit emporium, followed by the Culpepper druggist, Mr. Henry Spayd. Before nightfall Shorty Kilgour was in supreme charge of the town's commerce. He had consented to run Culpepper for one night, at least, and all owing to his unfortunate lack of sleep. And meanwhile the sprightly community, now free from the carking cares of business, prepared en masse to attend the Joe Crowell dance. Culpepper would be open all night for the first time in its history, the same as the jail in San Francisco.

The Crowell ranch is fourteen miles north of Culpepper and about seven o'clock the gay citizens started in motorcars and on horseback. Shorty walked down Main Street wearing the air King Menelops must have sported during his first week on the Samovarian throne. He certainly was wide awake and ready to hustle, and as the various merchants disappeared in the direction of the Crowell place, Shorty waved a cheery good-by to one and all.

Gaily the pleasure-seekers left their town in Shorty's keeping. They smiled to themselves contentedly, and thought of Shorty taking in money for them while they tripped the light fantastic, while they whirled through the dreamy waltz and deluged themselves in pleasure.

I don't know whether I mentioned it so far, but Shorty Kilgour is the worst business man in the known world. If he was a long-haired poet or a pale piano player he couldn't be a rottener business man. He has about as much business acumen as a dog-fish has fleas, and while the genial merchant princes of Culpepper contemplated his night activity with gladness, I wasn't so doggone sure about the result.

I know Shorty better than any other man, and while he is as honest as God's clear sunshine, and has a good heart and a nice disposition, he ain't gifted any at all in the way of mercantile perspicacity. He would be morally certain, by the way he is constructed in the head, to botch the sale of a two-cent postage stamp to a little girl with two pennies in her hand and an envelope. So I sort of looked for actions and eventualities as a result of the situation.

It must have been ten o'clock when

Dave Lamar blew into town accompanied by eight or nine of his assistants. Dave bought the old Biggs's ranch, and now the Lamar children, with their mother, were coming along as soon as Dave got things shipshape. The ranch needed about everything. It contained a house, but the house was devoid of furnishings, and Dave had been busy with other things. The Lamar outfit halted in the middle of Main Street and gazed upon the lighted front of the general store in astonishment.

"What's the matter?" Dave asked as Shorty came out.

"Nothing," Shorty answered. "Open for business, that's all."

"Can we buy a drink?" some one of the men asked.

"Can you!" Shorty roared. "You bet you can. That's what I'm here for. You can buy anything from a hairpin to a box-car. We sell everything offered the élite of New York, Denver, and Omaha. Come in, boys. Take a look around. We strive to please. Goods shown with pleasure and no questions asked. Nobody urged to buy, unless he feels like it. Come on in. Terms strictly cash."

Dave Lamar laughed, and followed by his henchmen, dismounted and entered the general store. Colonel Bud Longslot's place contains a bar at the back, and in two minutes Shorty had ten glasses before ten expectant citizens, who began pouring their needs.

"How much?" Dave demanded.

"Dollar," said Shorty. "That suit you?"

"Ten cents a drink is mighty reasonable," rejoined Dave, winking at Bull Kelley who stood next to him. And it was reasonable, considering that Colonel Bud's regular price was a quarter a throw.

"Reasonable!" Shorty exclaimed, the passion for salesmanship rising in him. "That ain't anything when you think of buying it by the bottle."

"If I could buy a nice bottle of Bourbon at a fair price I might—" Dave began.

"Fair price!" Shorty yelled. He reached around behind him and slammed a bottle of rare old Kentucky Bourbon on the counter.

"What's that worth?" Dave inquired tentatively.

"Fifty cents," answered Shorty, who had surreptitiously examined the Bourbon label and found it marked with five X's, which in Shorty's code meant five tens.

"I'll just take six bottles of that stuff," Dave said briefly.

"Gimme three," remarked Bull Kelley, and the other citizens piled in before the good thing vanished. Shorty cleaned out the stock of bottled Bourbon at a speed which would have got him a job in any store where the proprietor judged only by external appearances. There was only one thing wrong with that bit of salesmanship. Good Bourbon, of the quality handled by the Longslot General Store, retailed at four dollars a bottle. Inevitably Colonel Bud would discover something which was to cause him untold pain, because Shorty had determined to make out a separate sales-ticket for every transaction.

Well, after that, things sort of began to hum in Culpepper, and I'll bet that business never was as brisk before and never will be again. Quite a number of people passed into town and paused to look around in amazement. One of them was an automobilist who limped in from the West on three wheels, his right rear tire having blown up.

"Man outside with a busted tire," Dave Lamar announced to Shorty. "Wants to know if a citizen can buy a new tire in this dad-burned town."

Leaping over the bar, Shorty galloped to the rescue of the lame automobile and found its owner examining a hole in the tire as big as a squash.

"Blow out," he said. "Can I get a new one?"

"I'm here to tell you," Shorty answered, "that we've got some of the finest tires in the world in Culpepper. Never

wear out. Never explode. What size is she?"

"Thirty-seven by five," replied the prospective customer, and he followed Shorty into Ike Hicks's garage, where the anxious salesman and insomniac discovered a large, blue tire, thirty-seven by five inches, and full of treads and knobs. Shorty rolled the new tire to a scale and began weighing it.

"What's that for?" demanded the astonished motorist.

"I know what I'm doing, all right," Shorty answered. "First-class rubber 's thirty cents a pound. Sixty pound tire. Thirty times sixty — let's see." He scratched his head. "Eighteen dollars," he announced. "Exactly eighteen dollars."

"Exactly," echoed the dazed but delighted automobilist, hauling out his roll and peeling away the eighteen. He handed Shorty the cash, took his tire and skipped out into Main Street, enjoying all the pleasurable sensations of a man who has just bought a fifty-three-dollar tire for eighteen.

From then on Shorty Kilgour was as busy as a setter pup with a new flea. You could see him galloping into somebody's store, making a quick sale, marking it down, and galloping out again. He wove in and out like a shuttle in the loom, and he was piling up a record which would live forever in the hoary annals of the town.

Dave Lamar, seeing at once that this was a fine time to begin outfitting his new ranch against the arrival of Mrs. Dave, handed over his roll in sections to his men and they all began buying things. Bull Kelly halted Shorty in his rounds long enough to buy a step-ladder in the general store.

"How much?" Bull asked, staring at the ladder admiringly. Wondering how step-ladders are usually sold, Shorty sold this one at so much per rung.

"A dime a rung too much?" he asked Bull.

"Seems right to me," Bull answered.

"Take it away," said Shorty. "Twelve rungs, ten cents a rung; one dollar and twenty cents." He wrote down the sale for Colonel Bud Longslot to read the following morning, and as that ladder had cost Colonel Bud seven dollars and ninety cents wholesale, you can about figure how much pleasure Shorty's salesmanship gave him.

"I think I'll take this raincoat," remarked Jarvis Overholt, one of Dave's busy buyers. "How much is it?"

Shorty examined the raincoat as it hung from a peg and studied the material with an appraising eye. A bright thought struck him.

"It's rubber," he said to Jarvis, "and rubber 's thirty cents a pound. But there's cloth in it too. Make it forty cents a pound."

"Fair enough," replied Jarvis.

Shorty weighed the fated coat and found it four pounds heavy.

"Four times forty—one dollar and sixty cents, and you won't never buy a raincoat again at such a cheap price."

"I'll bet I won't either," grinned Jarvis, paying Shorty, who put the money in the cash drawer and the sales slip on a hook. More agony for Colonel Bud when he resumed charge of his general store and read the sale slips, because the proper and correct price of the raincoat was twelve dollars.

"Shorty," yelled Dave Lamar from the hardware department, where he was examining a reel of garden hose. "What's the price of this?"

Shorty rushed to make another sale, looked closely at the hose and found it marked AAA.

"Dollar and eleven cents," he answered instantly, and closed another deal on the spot, Dave taking him up with lightning speed in fear that he would change his mind, or find some new marks on the hose, which might raise its sale price to something nearer the sixteen dollars Colonel Bud would have received for it under normal conditions.

"How much for this ham?" demanded

Pete Klosser, coming out of the ice-box and carrying a section of pig under his arm.

" One dollar," retorted Shorty, who favored brief, snappy answers to customers.

" How much for the cooked hams?" asked Brick Coffee, another Lamar henchman.

" Two bucks when they're cooked; one buck for the raw hams," said Shorty, and some more sales were made.

"And I'll take this strip of bacon, too," continued Brick, fondling a length of that tinted delicacy. " How much?"

Shorty measured the slab of pig abdomen and found it thirty inches long.

" Thirty cents," he said, and Brick added another bargain to his already fine collection.

So it went and the minutes flew. Shorty flew also, flitting from one sale to another with the speed of a gazelle and just about as much sense. He didn't know it, of course, but he was putting the commerce of Culpepper everlastingly on the bum. Culpepper would no doubt recover from the shock, but it certainly would never look the same again.

" That's what I call a bargain," said Shorty proudly, helping Dave Lamar carry a clock out to his waiting truck, which was rapidly taking on a heavy load despite the fact that when Dave started from the ranch he had no intention of outfitting his plant.

" Sure it's a bargain," agreed Dave, " that's why I'm buying it."

" What this town always needed was a man like me to put a little ginger into it." But it wasn't ginger Shorty was injecting into Culpepper's marts of trade. It was dynamite. The clock in question was a tall one on four legs, with some weights suspended on wires, and it was further distinguished by being an eight-day clock.

" Eight dollars," Shorty said to Dave. " A dollar a day."

Jumping ahead of the story for a second, I will state that you could hear Colonel Bud Longslot's moans in Hypercide, Arizona, when he came to that clock transaction. It was a ninety-dollar clock, two per cent off for cash.

Three strangers stumbled off the midnight stage from Globe, and it was immediately apparent that they were laboring in the trough of the sea. In other words, you could have smelt their combined breaths as far as a flivver car will run on a gallon of gasoline, and one of them went to sleep in the horse-trough before the general store.

" We'd like to put up for the night," their besotted leader told Shorty.

" Strangers always welcome in Culpepper," Shorty replied, pausing in his large financiai affairs for a moment, and what he did was to give the three rum-hounds the bridal suite of the Culpepper Hotel, thus partially destroying Adolph Hooker's reason when that proprietor showed up next morning. Seems it took Adolph four hours to remove the bums, after they had mussed up his best suite and slept in the lace curtains. And they didn't have a cent on them.

About the only sale on which the merchants of Culpepper made a profit that night was a saddle and bridle, disposed of to Jarvis Overholt. Shorty knows something about saddles, and he dragged down forty dollars for this one, over which Jarvis howled a little, but sweetened his complaint with thought of the other purchases.

Shorty sold one of the Lamar men a pair of leather boots, and insisted on getting two dollars for them, a dollar a boot.

" See that red fancy work at the top," Shorty insisted when the purchaser objected, because by this time the customers complained quite freely if the price asked was more than a dollar, whether the article sold was a fried-egg turner or a phonograph. " That red decoration brings the price up a little." It did, but not up far enough, because Colonel Bud had always suspected that the boots in question would bring ten dollars flat.

He sold Dave Lamar twelve cases of canned beans for a dollar a case, and four

barrels of flour for two dollars a barrel, having found the figures eleven on top of one of the barrels. First he asked eleven dollars a barrel, but Dave showed him that there was no common sense in that, and Shorty decided that if the price-mark didn't mean eleven, it must have meant two. So at two the flour went, and Dave rejoiced, though Bud Longslot did not.

A startled stranger driving by in a rickety wagon paused before the general store, came inside to see what was causing the excitement, and bought a pot-bellied stove in the hardware department. It was a wood-burner, twelve feet around, and increased Colonel Bud's per capita wealth by twelve dollars. If all were sane it would have sold for thirty-six dollars.

I saw some of those fateful sales-slips afterward, and I will freely admit that the human mind can certainly stand a lot of shocks. That little sucker sold shoes at fifty cents a shoe. He disposed of socks, overalls, underwear, molasses, plows, and tobacco. One slab went at twenty cents. He sold shovels and picks, phonographs and parlor-lamps and safety razors.

Out into the merry night, never to return, went pork-chops, perfumes, and shingles, and in the meantime the mercantile population of Culpepper danced away the nocturnal hours, little wotting what was happening to them and theirs. I suppose if ever there was a time when those Culpepper guys ought to have gone and wotted a little, it was during that one night.

There was just one thing in that general store that Colonel Bud didn't want sold, so naturally Shorty sold it. To be sure the colonel didn't want anything sold the way Shorty was selling, but under no conditions would he personally have sold his own cash-register. A man came in some time after midnight and declared that he was going to start an eating-house in Chin Lee, and needed a cash-register.

"Surest thing," Shorty declared. "I've got the best cash-register in the world. Bell rings when you push the button. Down goes the price on a piece of paper. I can't work the dod-binged thing myself. It's no use to me, so take it away."

"What's the damage?" asked the buyer.

Shorty pondered. There is nothing on cash-registers in commercial use to indicate their sales price. But you can't stump Shorty Kilgour. He shut his eyes, reached over and punched one of the jiggers. Then he looked after the bell rang. The little black dew-flinger showed four dollars up in the space near the top.

"Four dollars," said Shorty to the man, who went away pleased almost to the point of tears.

One by one the gay pleasure-seekers returned in the wee hours from the Crowell dance, and it must have brightened them up to observe Shorty running up and down Main Street making sales. Of course, wearied by long dancing, and probably a mite tired from other causes, such as the Jupiter punch old Joe Crowell always provides at his soirés, the merchants of Culpepper felt no desire to interrupt the good work then. They all went to bed, after staring in pleasure and amazement down the street, where the lights glowed, and strangers were buying merchandise from a little man who was rushing about tirelessly like the belt on a fan-wheel.

Myself, I slumbered through the peaceful night and woke up along about dawn. I thought I might as well go and investigate the Shorty Kilgour situation, and when I reached the general store the lights were still burning, but the customers had gone. And I will say now that the general store looked like a cyclone had hit it.

Shelves once filled with gaudy packages of food were denuded and bleak, and it was a cinch that Colonel Bud would have to buy new stocks immediately. Shorty Kilgour was coming from the rear, walking very slowly, and taking off his collar. By a violent effort he was just holding his eyes open, and I decided then

and there that the attack of insomnia had passed. No wonder. I'll bet that little sand-crab had walked and run three hundred miles during the busy night.

"Where you going?" I demanded, looking at him in astonishment.

"Don't bother me," he said, "I'm going to sleep."

And he was, too, right there on his feet.

"Come on over to the hotel and go to bed," I reasoned.

"Too far to walk, Jim," he said. "Gee, I'm all in. Had a big night to-night or last night or whenever it was night. I'm awful sleepy, Jim."

He sort of stood there talking in his sleep, and I tried to drag him out and get him into a regular bed. But I had no chance. He was sinking there on my hands and struggling toward the rear. So I let him go and followed on behind to see where he was aiming. Down in the cellar of the general store is a row of vinegar barrels, and Shorty sank into a stupefied slumber behind them on a pile of bags. Above him was a window, and as he was getting plenty of air, I left him.

Maybe you have seen people sleep hard, but you never saw anything like this slumber effort. You could have shot him and he'd never have known. I went out, knowing I could go back and get Shorty any time I needed him, and certain that nobody else in Culpepper knew.

And about seven o'clock the first explosion occurred. Ike Hicks walked into his garage full of briskness and ready for a day's work. I think he was humming a blithe ditty. Then he read on the record where Shorty had sold one of his sixty-pound tires for eighteen dollars, and if Ike Hicks didn't have a fit, it was something like a fit's sister.

He dashed out into the street, wringing his hands, and in a few minutes the rest of the merchants began to find out what had happened to them. You would think a young riot had been turned loose.

Colonel Bud Longslot wandered into his general store, glanced about him in a daze, examined the sheaf of sales-slips, looked at the drawer full of money and fell on the floor in a swoon. Over in the Culpepper Hotel, Adolph Hooker was having a desperate battle with three bums who had destroyed his bridal suite and were ready and willing to destroy Adolph. The stationery-store man comprehended what Shorty had been doing, and for half an hour the man's wife poured cold water on him without bringing him back to life.

The merchant who owned the candy store came out into the street with a gun in his hand, calling on Heaven to witness that he was a sober, calm citizen, but that here was where he committed a murder. Wherever you looked you could see stunned arbiters of trade getting ready to arbite somebody, and that some one was a missing-link named Kilgour.

Most of the outraged and stuttering gents desired to take Colonel Bud's life for starting the thing, but Colonel Longslot was himself in a comatose condition and unfit for murdering, he having begun to count up the Kilgour sales, stopping ever and anon when he felt his reason tottering. And several wild-eyed merchants spoke of taking it out of my hide, me being Shorty's friend as it were. I told them that was foolish, and I wasn't such a great friend of his.

"Well," said Ike Hicks, wiping his clammy brow, "I have lived forty-one years and I have yet to take a human life. That system was all right as far as it went, but it ends to-day. If I can find this Shorty Kilgour there will be nothing to do except to decide on a mahogany or walnut coffin."

They all felt the same way about it. If ever you have seen a dreary, wobegone, desolated lot of men, it was Culpepper's Business Men's Association. And in the mean time, on a pile of bags behind Colonel Bud Longslot's vinegar barrels, the cause of all this bitter wo slumbered on serenely, knowing not the anguish he had brought upon so many. I sneaked around through the alley in the afternoon and peeked in through the window. He was

snoring gently and looked like a dead man. I knew if he got up he would be a dead man, so I leaped right in upon him and shook him back to life.

"Listen," I said in a grim whisper, as he rolled over and cussed me. "You have one chance to save your life."

"What?" he asked sleepily.

"One chance remains," I told him. "The men of this town are roaming around, armed to the teeth, seeking your heart's blood."

He waked up then and I told him that owing to certain mistakes he must have made during the previous evening, the merchants had taken a vote and decided to leave his remains to some scientific institution.

"What 'd I better do?" he asked. "They're a fine lot, after I worked all night for them, free of charge."

"You didn't work free of charge," I said. "They're the most horribly charged lot you ever saw. And you stay right here behind these barrels until I come and rescue you, which I wouldn't do if I thought there wasn't some good in you. There's a lot of real good stuff in your head, underneath the bone, and so I'll come and get you to-night. Meanwhile, you go back to sleep and try not to breathe loud."

It was just twelve o'clock that night when I sneaked out to the hotel shed and saddled up our ponies. It was a nice, dark night, too, and strange to say, the stores of Culpepper were not lighted. Main Street was as dark as the inside of a garden-hose, and I passed along, thinking how dead things looked. First I rode my own pony down to the alley leading behind the general store, because I feared what the sight of two ponies would provoke. Then I went back and got Shorty's pony. When I looked in the window he groaned.

"I can't stay here any longer," he said. "I'm dying of hunger."

"Have you had enough sleep?" I sneered. "Climb up here and make no noise."

Well, we got out of Culpepper without disturbing any of the inhabitants, and I only felt safe when the soft sand of the desert was again under our horses' feet and Culpepper was receding in the dark and dreary distance. We rode all night, and that's about the end of it. But from that day to this, Shorty has never dared poke his nose into the town of Culpepper, and if you mention that name to him, or say anything about insomnia, he usually begins to foam at the mouth.

Jim Caldwell got up from his bunk and struck a fresh match which he applied to his pipe.

"I'm pretty dog-gone sure I heard somebody out there," he said, going to the door and peering into the next room. He came back abruptly and resumed his place on the bunk. In the next room I could hear footsteps and the door opened. Shorty Kilgour stood there.

"What you two been talking about?" he demanded, with a note of suspicion in his tone.

"Oh, just talking," Jim Caldwell answered nonchalantly. "Just talking about things in general. How do you feel?"

"Pretty sleepy," Shorty admitted, opening his mouth and stretching. "I think I'll go to bed. Once I used to think I had insomnia, but I don't believe there's anything in it. Good night, you two."

We said good night, and Shorty passed on to the inner room, still the least bit suspicious. Jim Caldwell clasped his knees and grinned.

"Ain't he the limit?" Jim demanded in a low voice. "Don't you go and tell him about—about what I told you. If you do, he's liable to climb my back. And right after that I'm liable to punch you on the nose."

Knowing Jim's fist is hard and travels straight, I promised anew not to tell Shorty. But I said nothing about telling you, gentle reader. So here you are, just as I got it from Jim.

The Matrimaniac

by Octavus Roy Cohen and J.U. Giesy

Authors of "The Reckless Age," "Nothing But the Truth," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

JIMMY CONROY and Marna Lewis, daughter of Theodore Lewis, mill-owner, of Lewisville, elope, with Lewis in pursuit. Lewis captures Jimmy and locks him up in a room in the Hotel Metropole, Greenville, declaring him to be a "matrimaniac"—one who is insane on the subject of eloping. Wally Henderson, a lawyer rival of Jimmy's, gets himself mixed up in the affair, and is mistaken for the matrimaniac by the hotel people. Wally escapes after Lewis has felt compelled to knock Jimmy out, and Wally finds Marna staying, under an assumed name, in another hotel. He doesn't want to tell Lewis about it; but the chauffeur of the car he is in thinks he is the escaped matrimaniac and drives him back to the hotel in which Jimmy is a prisoner. Lewis meets him there, and, to Wally's surprise, tells him he has decided to agree to Marna's marriage to Jimmy. But there seems to be some sort of string tied to the decision.

CHAPTER X.

LAYING THE WIRES.

LEWIS shook his head.

"Yes and no," he answered. "At least, I know that she is somewhere in this town. As to exactly where, I am not as yet informed."

Wally drew a long breath. He sank back into his chair.

"But—then—how—" he stammered and paused.

Theodore's smile became a rather unpleasant grin.

"Am I going to marry her to Conroy? Quite a natural question, Henderson, I admit. Listen and I'll tell you. That's what I want to talk to you about."

Wally nodded. The thing was, of course, in line with everything else in the course of this crazy day. When would it come to an end? Once more he drew his kerchief and wiped his brow. Come to an end?

What was it that suggested? Something about a day—that was it. Oh, yes. It was a song, "This is the end of a perfect day." Suddenly he leaned back in his chair. A wholly unresistable series of uncertain chuckles rose up in his throat and began to exude from between his flaccid lips.

Theodore eyed him in some surprise.

"What's the matter?" he inquired.

"Nothing," Wally gurgled and sputtered back in silence. "I'm listening, sir. Go on."

Theodore shook his head again.

"Don't let the asinine blunder of the clerk in mistaking you for Jim upset you, Henderson," he admonished. "In fact, if you look at it right, it's rather funny."

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

" Yes—of course—isn't it," Wally bubbled. Once more he wiped his face.

" It is. Now listen," Theodore went on. " About Conroy and my daughter. You know what a penchant women have for butting into things which don't concern them, and trying to straighten out things for everybody but themselves?"

" Yes," Wally nodded. He didn't know whether it was a question or a statement, but it seemed safe to agree.

Theodore twisted his lips.

" Well, it seems that the eternal feminine is on the job to-day. My remarks concerning Conroy's mental aberration seem to have borne fruit of an unexpected sort. Since I came back from the depot I have had a talk with that idiot of a clerk out there in regard to a proposition he was asked to bring to my notice. I was just wishing you were here to go into the thing with me, when you drove up."

" Go into it with you?"

Wally stiffened. The last thing he wanted to do was to go into anything more with Lewis. He was sufficiently involved and disturbed as a result of the brief association which had been theirs to satisfy all his desire for excitement for some time to come.

" Talk it over with me—yes."

" Oh!" That was different. Henderson once more relaxed. " Well?"

" This woman," Theodore resumed, " is a nurse—a trained nurse—a nurse who has had experience in nursing the—er—insane. It seems that she managed to hear about Jimmy, and immediately thereafter all her professional instincts awoke. She got the clerk on the wire, and asked him all about the thing, and of course he told her the yarn I'd handed out concerning Jim.

" That was like giving cream to a cat. She lapped it up. But—and here is the answer to what I told you a bit ago—she came back with a few statements of her own. The funny part of it is, I seem to have picked a truism for my diagnosis of Conroy's condition. This woman claims to have known of a similar case—a—well—a matrimonial monomaniac, in which the patient wanted to marry every young woman he saw and was always alleging that this girl or that was his wife. And the peculiar thing about it was that, after trying everything for the poor chap, the doctors hit on the scheme of having him go through a mock marriage, and—it cured him! What do you know about that?"

" Not a thing!" Wally spoke quickly.

" What?" Lewis frowned.

" I don't know anything. I never heard of it before."

" Heard of what? Say, Henderson, what are you talking about?" Theodore's voice was a rasp. He was eying Wally again.

" About—that—er—case."

" Oh!" Lewis snorted. " You're a rather literal cuss, aren't you, my boy? That wasn't a question. It was a figure of speech. Henderson, you're rattled. Brace up. I want your advice about this marriage."

" This—er—you mean marrying Jimmy to—to—" Wally couldn't say it.

" Of course—to Marna."

" It would be a crime."

Theodore drew back his lips in a sort of snarl. " Of course it would, you ninny—if I had any notion of letting it come to pass."

" But—I thought—" Wally stuttered.

" Oh, no, you didn't," Theodore cut him short. " You only thought you thought. Henderson, quit being an ass, and use your brains."

" Yes, sir."

All at once Wally decided to be himself, logical, analytic, assured as he had been once. Lewis evidently really did have something in mind. He must find out what it was.

Theodore sighed.

" This mock marriage cured this poor dip," he went on. " That's what the nurse says, at least. Now "—he leaned forward and began tapping one palm with the finger of his other hand—" here is what I have in consideration—what I want your

advice about if you'll cool off and act like anything besides what that clerk thinks you. Now, we're going up to see Conroy and fix him first."

"Fix him?" Wally had a vivid recollection of their last call on Jimmy. "Say, Mr. Lewis, just what do you mean?"

Theodore again sighed.

"I should think that would be plain even to a crazy man," he said with some heat. "We're going to follow the same course this nurse woman describes in the other case."

"A—marriage?"

"Yes."

"But—Conroy isn't crazy—really."

"He will be after it's all over—perhaps." Theodore once more grinned in a gloating way. "We'll go up there and tell him I've decided to let him marry Marna, and get him to agree. That should be easy, I think. Then we'll get the clerk to tell the nurse that we'll have the ceremony; and that's what I want to talk to you about."

"Yes?"

Wally's entire attitude underwent a change. Marna was not to marry Conroy after all. Then everything else was all right. Suddenly his brain felt absolutely lucid. He began to examine Theodore's proposition pro and con. "But—can you get the nurse to do a thing like that?"

"She's already offered to do it in the interests of science. You see, she doesn't know that Jimmy isn't insane."

Wally nodded. That seemed to be settled at least.

"And how about Jim? What will he think about it when he hears what you say about—Miss Marna?"

"Oh, he already knows that I know she's in town. I was up there and told him, and as luck would have it, I told him I was going out to find her. So he'll think I succeeded and that she talked me around. There won't be any trouble about getting him to agree to let bygones be bygones so long as he thinks he stands to get the girl."

"No—" Wally considered. "He'll be all right until he finds out it isn't Marna he's to marry. Then he'll be apt to balk."

"And"—Theodore bared his teeth—"at that little stage, I'll quietly slip him the information that he can go through with the thing, or I'll actually brand him insane, and have him tied up before the commission for an examination into his mental condition."

"And if he don't agree then?" Wally's breath began to come more quickly.

"Why, if he don't—so help me—I'll make good the threat!"

Decidedly Theodore Hardwick Lewis was a bad man to cross, Henderson thought. He was a man who would go to extreme limits, it seemed. He said nothing, and Theodore went on:

"By that time we'll have the nurse on our side, too. She'll never dream we'd try the thing without believing it ourselves. She'll be a—a corroborative witness, and we'll at least get the chap tied up for a time, either that way or by the marriage."

Tied up. The word was sweet to Henderson's brain. Jimmy might be at least so involved that it would take him a considerable time to get loose. Still his legal mind was working now.

"A marriage to an insane person could not be considered binding," he pointed out.

"Who's insane?" Theodore once more grinned.

Henderson gasped. In a flash he saw something just beyond his actual mental vision, as it seemed, which lured him into speech.

"By Jove! Say, Mr. Lewis—if we could make this marriage the real thing—genuine, you know—we'd put him out of the equation so far as Miss Marna is concerned for all time."

Theodore nodded.

"Exactly. If Marna thought he'd married somebody else, to save his own skin, she would be done with the young pup from now till doomsday. We can gamble on that."

"How about the license?" Wally inquired.

"Why, I think we can arrange it for the nurse to attend to that."

"But, to be legal, the real names must be used."

"Of course. I'll explain to the clerk that Jimmy is my stepson really. That will get around the matter of names."

Wally let a slight smile creep across his lips. Lewis seemed to have things pretty well thought out.

"Yes, that would explain it, of course," he assented. "But, will the nurse agree to an actual marriage? That's going pretty far, you know—tying yourself up to a crazy person."

Theodore chuckled.

"She'll think it easy enough to get a divorce on the grounds of his mental condition, I imagine. Henderson, now you're talking. That's what I wanted you for; to raise all this sort of points in advance so we could be ready to meet them again, as they appeared."

Wally's smile grew stronger. He nodded. He leaned back and inserted his thumbs in the armholes of his vest. He beamed.

"That is all I can think of now," he averred, "except possibly—the person to perform the ceremony itself. He may have to be—ah—fixed. If he isn't he may quit at the very last, if Jimmy cuts up a bit rough."

Theodore nodded again.

"That is a good point, too. We'll get a justice of the peace, I should say. I'll explain the 'true' nature of the case to him. I'll tell him it is an experiment merely—not to mind what Conroy does—and—to make him believe me, I'll give him a good, fat fee in advance. Money is wonderfully convincing to some minds at least."

Wally's smile became a grin.

"Just who is the nurse?" he inquired, teetering now on the back legs of his chair.

Suddenly he was very much at peace with the world at large. He could even see the funny side of the mistake the clerk had made about himself. He could picture long months wherein he should lay siege to the heart of Marna Lewis, now disillusioned wholly as to Jimmy, and by degrees patch up once more her faith in the fidelity of men.

"A Miss Fraeme, the clerk says," Theodore replied. "He says she worked for several years in a private asylum. Oh, that end of it's all right."

"What's she doing it for?" Henderson came back.

Lewis winked.

"Love of her profession," he rejoined. "What do most people do things for, young man? Well, I sha'n't stick at any reasonable amount. It will be worth it to get Conroy in such a shape that he'll be no further bother so far as Marna is concerned."

Wally heartily coincided in his heart with that.

"How much does she want?"

"Oh, I haven't gone into it as far as that—yet," Theodore told him. "I was just thinking it over when you drove up. I told the clerk I'd take it under advisement. Suppose we go up and see Conroy. If he falls for it the way I think he will, why—we'll put it across."

Wally nodded. If they could "put it across," as Theodore expressed it, it would be the best joke of the year. He had thought it funny when Lewis told him about his allegations against Jimmy's mental condition. He had, that is, until he was mistaken for Conroy. But this—this was funnier still. This was a—a scream.

Already he could picture Jimmy agreeing to the proposition, and later his rage and dismay when he found himself linked to some unexpected woman—some nurse. He squinted his eyes.

The clerk had told Lewis the woman had nursed the insane for years. She was probably pretty well along middle-aged, at least, and Jimmy would be tied to her by all sorts of legal tape. It would take him months to break loose. It was about

the funniest thing he had ever heard. He chuckled and rose to his feet.

Side by side, Theodore and Henderson left the writing-room and turned toward the stairs. They went up. The clerk nodded. Seemingly Lewis had captured his son again and was taking him back to that room from which he seemed always able to escape.

He'd be glad when the keeper arrived from Charlotte to take the poor dip away. It was more or less annoying to have him always running around. He wondered if Lewis would accept the offer of the nurse who had talked to him between twelve and one, and made her unusual suggestion, which he had in turn brought to Lewis's notice.

The old man had seemed a bit impressed, and he had been a long time in the writing-room, talking to his "son." Possibly he was trying to see if the boy would take to the notion. Oh, well—it really wasn't any of his affair. So far as he was concerned, he wouldn't take any such chance as that nurse suggested in a thousand years. But nurses and doctors were funny people. He grinned at the girl back of the cigar-case and slumped down in his chair.

Theodore meanwhile had unlocked the door of room 265 and led Wally inside. Conroy lay as he had left him, and rolled his head as the two men came in.

"Lewis," he began as Theodore sat down, "I don't know whether torture is required to fully glut your hatred against me, but if so, you've done about all I can stand. For God's sake, untie me and let my hands and feet wake up. These infernal towels are stopping the blood, and —as I haven't had so much as a drink of water all day, I'm getting a little faint."

Theodore frowned. He got up rather quickly and undid the knotted towels. Momentarily he realized that he had actually forgotten such little details as that Conroy might grow thirsty or hungry. He had hardly thought of the boy as human, he had to admit. Tossing the towels to one side, he went to a bowl in the corner of the room, drew a glass of water and returned to place it in Jimmy's hands.

Jimmy drank it at a single gulp and returned the glass.

"Thanks," he said.

Theodore put the glass back in its place and once more sat down. He studied Conroy for a moment and cleared his throat.

"James," he began in rather unexpected fashion, "I've decided to permit your marriage, after all."

Of all the surprising series of happenings which had held him through that day of mental and physical torment, this was the most surprising to Conroy of all.

For a moment he could think of nothing to say. And then he thought he saw the whole answer to the riddle of Theodore's sudden switching of fronts. He had found Marna and learned of her immovable determination. His heart swelled. Bless her true, little, unwavering soul!

She had defied this implacable old man and told him that, come what might, she would marry the man she loved.

His face flamed with a proud light to think he was going to win a girl like that. He turned his eyes toward her father. He opened uncertain lips. It really seemed too good to be true.

"You—mean—I can marry—with your consent?"

"Yes." Theodore inclined his head.

"When?" The question was an eager syllable on Jimmy's tongue.

"Why—almost any time, I think. As soon as we can make the arrangements to-day, that is."

To-day! Suddenly the world was a very nice place to live in so far as Jimmy could see. Before this day had ended Marna would be his wife. His gaze once more swept the face of the man who was her father, and it seemed some way that all at once that face was not half so hateful as he had thought it. After all, it was just the face of an old man who had always had his way, and was beaten—now.

"That suits you?"

"Suits me?" Jimmy grinned. "Say—Mr. Lewis, that suits me right down to the ground. I can't think of anything in all the world that would suit me better. Honest, I can't. That listens better to me than if somebody told me I was elected president of China or had been left a million by some pauper in Montana. Lord—why—that's enough to make a dead man get up and walk."

Theodore smiled slightly.

"And—er, Conroy—I hope—that under the circumstances, you understand, you'll—er—well—overlook any of the little unpleasantnesses which have occurred between us to-day. I confess that I didn't think you the proper mate for my girl, but—she thinks differently, as you know, and—"

Jimmy got up rather shakily and stuck out a hand.

"Forget it, Mr. Lewis," he said quickly. "Why, you're Marna's father—and—well—I guess I can imagine how much you must have disliked me by the way things have gone. So if you can swallow me as a son-in-law, I guess I ought to be able to put up with an aching head. Don't say a word about it, and I'll promise you now that if I don't make that little girl a good husband—that if I am not careful of her welfare, good to her in every way, you can come down and beat me up again, any time you like."

Theodore took the proffered palm slowly, almost with hesitation, it seemed. But once with it in his grasp he shook it firmly.

"I'm glad to hear you talk that way, James," he returned. "It makes me hope you will be good to the woman you marry. It's the way for a man to speak."

Jimmy sat down. That was a lot for Theodore to say. His heart felt warm in his breast. He glanced at Wally and grinned.

"So Mr. Lewis found you again, did he?" he remarked.

Wally stared, but caught himself up quickly.

"Oh, yes. I stayed with you after the —ah—unpleasantness which *ex voto*—according to our decision—we are now to forget. But not being able to do anything for you, I left so soon as I was assured you were coming around."

Jimmy chuckled.

"Good of you to stay that long. Nobody could expect you to play the nurse's part."

Wally started. His jaw dropped open. Nurse! What did Conroy mean. Surely he couldn't suspect. He looked Jimmy full in the face. It was a beaming mask without guile. He turned his head toward Lewis. Theodore seemed wholly undisturbed. Evidently there was no cause for alarm concerning their plan. "Er—ah—no—of course not," he said. "*Non sum est*—I—er—am not one, you know."

Jimmy gave him a glance and turned to Lewis again.

"How is Marna?" he asked.

"Oh—all right—all right," Theodore assured. "She's—well—rather anxious to see you, I suspect."

"Well, can't she?" urged Jim.

Theodore shook his head.

"I think not. You know the old superstition, don't you, my boy. The bride must not see the groom until the ceremony is to be performed."

That was disappointing, but Jimmy brightened. He nodded.

"Well—let's not run the chance of any more jinx getting in their work now, then," he assented with a smile.

Theodore rose.

"I think we had best be going, then," he declared. "There are some arrangements to make, which will, of course, take a little time; the—license and things like that, you know, and the procuring of the officiating party." A grim smile once more twisted his lips.

"I hardly suppose that under the present state of affairs it will be essential to tie you up again, James?"

Jimmy laughed in his face.

"Hardly. It won't even be essential to lock the door. You'd have to lock up the whole hotel to keep me away from

it now. I'll be here any time you come. I give you my word for that."

Theodore nodded.

"I rather thought that is the way you would feel about it, James. Come, Henderson. Let's go get things ready. And —oh, yes—if you like, Conroy, I'll have some food sent up."

"I certainly wouldn't object," said Jimmy. "It was food started all this rough-house of to-day, but—well—I'm not one to hold a grudge. I wouldn't turn away from even a doughnut right now."

"I'll see you are fed," Theodore told him, and walked to the door. For the first time that day he passed through it and left it unfastened, confident now that the man inside was more securely chained to his place than at any time before. Theodore had long waged life's battles. He knew how to play his part.

Wally followed hard on his heels, and trotted by his side. His face wore the vestige of a grin. He looked at his companion with a respect fast bordering on awe.

Not once had Lewis mentioned the name of his daughter directly as one of the contracting parties in the proposed marriage, yet he had by suggestion alone contrived to firmly convince Conroy that Marna was to be his bride. Wally Henderson was beginning at last to enjoy himself fully.

"What next?" he inquired.

Theodore turned his head.

"To make the arrangements, of course. We'll go down and tell the clerk to go ahead with Miss Fraeme and find out just what she wants for her work. Incidentally I think I had best inform him that you are not my son. It is time he learned your true connection with this affair."

Wally nodded. Everything was coming out all right. He followed Lewis down the stairs and up to the desk.

And there Theodore spoke to the clerk.

"If you can put a bell-hop on the switchboard for a few moments now and come into the writing-room, Mr. Clerk, I should like to go into that matter we discussed not so very long ago."

CHAPTER XI.

READY FOR THE SLAUGHTER.

"YES, sir."

The clerk called a bell-boy and placed him in front of the switchboard. Then he opened the gate back of the counter and stepped forth. Together with Lewis and Wally he walked across the office to the writing-room door.

And there Lewis paused.

"Before we talk, suppose you see if you can arrange to have a steak and some French fried potatoes, some sort of a dessert, and coffee sent up to my son."

The clerk's eyes turned swiftly to Wally and back to Theodore.

"Your son?" he repeated almost sharply and checked himself to stand gaping.

"Certainly, my son," Theodore took him up. "Since he hasn't eaten all day, he's hungry, and even if he is crazy, poor lad, we mustn't starve him. He has to eat just like any one else."

"Yes, sir, of course," the clerk began, only to trail off in a faint-voiced ending. "But—your son."

Theodore forced a short sort of laugh.

"Oh, I see what's the matter. You haven't waked up from your notion that this gentleman here with me is the crazy man, eh? Well, as it happens, he's perfectly sane. He's a friend of mine and a lawyer, and—"

The clerk's face went red.

"My Lord, sir," he stammered, addressing Wally. "I—I fear I've been very stupid, but you looked so pale, sir, and you came down and asked me about a young lady, and Mr. Lewis had said his son was given to doing that, and so—"

"Oh, he understands," Theodore cut him short. "I should have explained to you before, after you first took him for my poor boy, but I was so harassed myself that I neglected to do so. It's all right so long as you get it straight now."

" Yes, sir. I'll not make any more mistakes of that sort, sir, of course," the Metropole's employee accepted in palpable relief. " And I can understand how with all your own troubles you did fail to tell me. If he had only explained to me himself—"

" My good fellow, I tried to," Wally began.

" Never mind," Lewis interrupted. " We all understand now. Get action on that food, Mr. Clerk, and then join us here in this room."

" Yes, sir, at once."

The clerk darted into the dining-room. Wally and Lewis went back to their former chairs in the writing-room and sat down.

" Who were you asking about, anyway?" said the latter. " What mix-up did you put over to cross that simp's wires?"

Once more Henderson found himself faced with inevitable falsehood, but—he was getting used to everything now.

" Why, I asked about a young woman whose name I happened to see on the register, and of course the poor chap thought I was dippy because I knew a lady. I see it now. I suppose my natural pallor seemed like that resulting from confinement in a madhouse, and by saying I wished to find this girl confirmed his suspicions. That must be it."

Theodore nodded.

" Quite likely. Oh, well—it's all right now."

The clerk returned with assurances that food was in preparation for Jimmy. Theodore waved him to a seat, gave him a cigar, and at once plunged into the matter at hand.

" Mr. Clerk, do you know what I've done?"

" No, sir—of course not." The clerk shook his head.

" Well, I've thought over that proposition you handed on to me. I've done more. I decided to take it up with my poor son himself, before I decided just what to do. If he took to the notion, of course, it might do him good, and if not, why it would probably only make him worse. So I talked it over with him since talking to you."

" A very wise thing to do, I should say, sir." The clerk nodded sagely and rolled his cigar across his mouth. " I trust there are hopes of success?"

Theodore beamed.

" Not a doubt of it, my dear man. The boy took to it like a kitten to milk. Why, he's actually sitting up there now waiting to become a bridegroom. He's more docile than I have ever seen him since his affliction occurred. Why—I—I even got his word not to try to run away. I—I even dared to come off and leave him behind an unlocked door."

" Fine," said the clerk. " That looks well for the final results."

" Doesn't it?" Lewis agreed. " You see, I told him we'd found the girl, and that as soon as we could arrange it we would have the marriage, and he believed it without question."

" I'm very glad, sir," said the clerk. " The human mind's a strange thing, isn't it. Funny how it gets out of plumb at times. Then—"

" Then," Theodore began again, " I want you to get into touch with this nurse—"

" Miss Fraeme?"

" Whatever her name is, and ask her if she'll go through with a regular ceremony of marriage with my son, and find out what she wants for her part in the affair. Anything in reason, I will be glad to pay, of course. And I shall take pleasure in making your efforts worth while as well."

" A—a—real ceremony? You want it to be a real marriage?" The clerk's manner indicated surprise.

" Yes." Theodore nodded. " You see, I'm old-fashioned. I don't like the notion of trifling with or making sport of the sacred rites of human life. I want the ceremony to be genuine. Of course, if the step fails to cure my son, why, his very condition will enable her to get a divorce, and if it does, and they are not compatible, why—there can be a divorce

on those grounds as well. My friend here is a lawyer, and he will confirm me in those statements, I think."

Wally bowed. "That is the—ah—statutory law in such cases," he affirmed. "There will be no great trouble in dissolving the union should it fail of its effect or prove displeasing to either or both parties."

The clerk considered.

"Of course," he decided in the end, "I can not accept or refuse without consulting Miss Fraeme. She mentioned only the mock marriage. I don't just know how she'll take to this notion of an actual wedding, but I can ask her and let you know."

"If you please," said Theodore. "Be sure and make her understand that I shall be willing to pay any reasonable price for her assistance in the endeavor to place my son in a different position from that in which he now exists."

"Yes, sir, I will. If you'll excuse me a moment." The clerk rose.

"And—one moment," Lewis stayed him; "before you go, I must tell you one thing more. This young man is not my own son really. He is a stepson, in fact. His name is Conroy—James Conroy. It will be necessary for Miss Fraeme to know that in order to get the license. She had best attend to that, since neither myself or my friend are personally known in town. In fact, I wish she would make all the arrangements in regard to the license and the obtaining of—say, a justice of the peace—to perform the wedding itself, if she decides to accept my offer, and go through with the thing."

"Very well, sir, I'll—er—explain it just as you've said."

The clerk left the writing-room and disappeared in the direction of the desk. Theodore looked at Henderson and slowly closed one keen, gray eye. Wally returned it with a smile. So far everything had gone very well.

The next few moments would doubtless decide as to whether their plans would prove wholly successful or the reverse. Plainly the clerk knew just where to reach his party. But, would the woman be willing to take the step Lewis desired?

If she did!

Wally had to chuckle again as he thought of what would happen to Jimmy before so very long. Theodore surely was the deuce of a fellow. How easily he smoothed out all the seemingly conflicting elements of the affair, even to a plausible enough explanation as to why the wedding must be genuine. As a lawyer himself he had to admire the ease with which Lewis got around a point. And then his mind veered. He looked at Lewis once more.

"How about Marna?" he inquired.

Theodore nodded.

"I've been thinking about her, my boy. As soon as we get this fool woman's answer, we'll go hunt that girl. There will be time enough to dig her out of this little burg while we're waiting for the nurse to make the arrangements of which I spoke."

Wally inwardly flinched. He didn't like the choice of pronoun Theodore made. If he insisted on Wally's presence as well, and they went to where Marna was waiting, she would most surely think he had defied her injunction against his giving Theodore any information about her, and he would be in her very bad graces for some time at least.

"It—it will hardly be necessary to do that, I think," he rejoined rather faintly. "I should be glad to spare you that further exertion. I should be very glad to seek her myself, if you will permit."

Theodore grinned.

"Spare me the exertion?" he chuckled. "That's a good one, Henderson, really. Why, I eat exertion up. No, no; you stay here if you don't feel up to the job, but — I'll hunt that little girl myself as soon as we know we've got this other thing fixed. I want to find her before the thing's pulled off—that is, I want to know where she is. Then as soon as we've got Conroy safely roped to his nurse, we'll get her and hit it for home on the jump.

I don't want her to learn just what's happened to Jimmy until we get away."

Wally gave it up. There was no use trying to oppose Lewis. The most he could hope for would be to get Theodore to tell Marna some time that he had not given away her place of hiding—though even that would be a difficult task without exposing to Lewis that he had known it himself for some time. Still, there would be plenty of time to figure it out after this day's work was finished, and at least she was going to be saved from a marriage with Jimmy, which was the most essential thing.

Footsteps broke up his further introspection. The clerk was coming back. He came into the room and sat down on a chair, and turned his eyes first to Lewis and then to Wally and back to Theodore again.

"Well?" Lewis spoke.

"She—she'll do it, sir."

"Good."

"Providing—"

"Eh?"

"Providing"—the clerk seemed a trifle embarrassed, and, in fact, almost awed, to judge by his voice—"you are willing to pay her five thousand dollars for her part in the affair."

"Five thousand dollars?" Theodore Lewis frowned. "Well—there isn't anything cheap about this nurse, is there, Mr. Clerk?"

"No, sir." The clerk shook a dolorous head. "I—I told her it was excessive, sir. I—I told her she must think you were made of money. But—well—she said that was the least figure she would consider if the wedding was to be—genuine."

"I see." Theodore pursed his lips. He turned his eyes to Wally, whose eyes were bulging out at the unexpected price. "Well—sir, what do you think?"

Wally had been thinking. The figure was exorbitant, surely; but he was loath to see this chance of putting Jimmy out of any further matrimonial running with Marna go by the board.

"Why — er — really, Mr. Lewis, I should say that if the experiment really offers any definite chance of success, it should be—"

"Worth the price, eh?" Theodore smiled grimly.

"Something like that was what I had in mind."

"A son's sanity should be worth five thousand dollars? That about it?"

"Well—sir—I should think—so, myself."

Lewis actually winked. In a way, he seemed suddenly amused. He swung back to the clerk, who had remained an interested observer of the dialogue between the other two men.

"Well, Mr. Clerk, I think we shall accept this rather extortionate offer after all. The nurse, I must say, appears to be rather a business woman, but I can hardly object to that. I'm a business man myself, and the motto of business nowadays is, press every advantage in your possession, and let the other fellow make the best of it. So, since she is playing the game, I'll have to play the other fellow's part. Now, just how is this money to be paid, or did she make any suggestions about that?"

"Yes, sir, she did," said the clerk. "She stated that she wished the payment made in the form of a certified check, which should be left in my care, to be delivered to her after the wedding."

Theodore narrowed his eyes.

"Indeed? Left in your care. Your pardon, Mr. Clerk, but — do you know this woman?"

"No, sir!" The fellow flushed quickly. "If you're going to take that stand, sir, I'm sorry I mentioned the matter at all. I—I—"

"Hold up!" Lewis cut him off. "Don't go off half cocked. I told you I was a business man. I'm not doubting your sincerity of intent, but the thing is a bit peculiar, you must admit. Now, in order to insure that this woman does the thing for which this check is to pay her, I shall in turn require from you your promise

before my friend here that you will not surrender the paper to her until you know —*know,* sir—that she has performed her part of the bargain; until the ceremony is over, that is."

"Why, of course, I wouldn't do that." The clerk widened his eyes and mouth jointly at the mere suggestion.

"Good."

"And I'm sure that the lady has no intention of anything else, because, sir, she told me to tell you to draw the check to the order of Mrs. James Conroy. It seems to me, that should be an evidence of good faith on her part, too."

"The devil she did!" Once more Theodore looked at Wally. "I guess, at that rate, it's straight."

"I think so, sir," Henderson agreed. "If the check is certified in that name, she would be unable to touch it unless she was the party in fact. Otherwise you know she could be made a considerable amount of trouble. I—er—really think we may consider this evidence of a *bona-fide* nature—that is, evidence of good faith."

Theodore drew his watch and glanced at its dial. It was twenty minutes to three. He got up.

"Very well. Tell your party the deal is on, and she can go ahead with her end of the arrangements, Mr. Clerk. She understands about the license and the officiating party?"

"Yes, sir. She agrees to attend to that."

"Then I'll be getting to a bank and arranging for that check. As luck has it, I brought a pocket check-book with me when I left home. If I can get Lewisville on the phone I can fix the whole thing up in a very few minutes, after which I'll come back here and leave the check in your hands. Now, how do I reach your best bank?"

The clerk gave him the directions quickly. He was suddenly agog with interest in the whole proceedings. A man who could calmly spend five thousand dollars by the use of a telephone and the scratch of a pen for merely a chance experiment was one to command his full attention and respect. Theodore was "some sport" in his mind, for the time at least.

He began to wonder just what would be his honorarium for his part in the affair. Surely Theodore would not be stingy. Five thousand dollars was a lot of money to gamble on a chance. He even led him and Wally to the door of the hotel in order to point out the way they should go.

With a breath of relief, Wally realized it was the opposite from that in which lay Marna's hotel. He followed Theodore out to the sidewalk, and turned down the street at his side.

Meanwhile Jimmy Conroy was enjoying himself to the full. His bonds removed, his door unlocked, the opposition of Marna's father to their wedding removed, things suddenly looked almost as rosy as they had this same time twenty-four hours before.

Almost! Why, they even looked better. Then they had been running away with the certain displeasure of Theodore staring at them from the future, to at least dampen Marna's joy. Now the old man was out making the very arrangements for the marriage itself. What had Marna said to him to bring him to time like that?

Jimmy grinned. Not for a moment did suspicion enter his mind. Lewis had tricked him that morning, but that was while they were enemies still, and all was fair, they said, in love and war. Well, it had been pretty near war, too, from the way his head felt still.

But that was past. Theodore was not tricking him now, or — why the open door? If he wanted to, he could get up and walk out of the hotel and go where he pleased, and Lewis must know that just as well as he did. He knew it, of course.

Still, he had left the door unlocked, as witness the well-stocked tray which had come in a little bit ago, and which he had

attacked with such an appetite as only an unaccustomed fast can engender, and which still stood there, sadly depleted as to contents, waiting to be taken away.

No — decidedly, this time, he could place reliance on Theodore's words. And if he wanted any other confirmation, there had been Wally's demeanor. The fellow had appeared positively rattled for a few moments.

Well—Wally liked Marna. He had known that for a long time, and he had shown it plainly on the train the day before. Of course, he wouldn't like the prospects Theodore named.

Jimmy chuckled. Rather funny that Wally should have been on the same train, have left it at Greenville, have bumped into Lewis, and now be once more brought up face to face with his nuptials with Theodore's daughter. It looked like fate was rather rubbing his loss of the girl into G. Walter Henderson.

The girl. Jimmy's whole expression softened. The girl! What a girl, strong and tender, loyal, brave, true! Small good for him to flatter himself that his fate had turned, his luck changed in this affair. Nothing had changed in the least until after Lewis had left him to find his daughter.

What had he found with her? Inflexible determination, immovable decision. That was it. She had defied the old man, told him to do his worst, asked him what he was going to do about it. He had told her last night Theodore could do nothing really, since she was of age.

Well, it seemed Theodore had been able to do quite a little despite his words; but Marna must have remembered what he had said, and have flaunted the flag of her majority in her father's face to show him the "no thoroughfare" of parental authority from now on.

But how many girls would have been strong enough to do that, in the face of the way her lover had acted, in the face of his continued absence, in spite of the fact that he had failed her from almost the start? It was her loyalty, the fidelity of her love, which made Jimmy's heart swell in his breast, and brought a tender light to his eyes and a soft smile of yearning love to his lips as he sat in his room and waited for the next step in the matter, which he now had every reason to believe would bring it to an end.

Young love, strong and faithful, warm and true. Something of its meaning came into Conroy's soul.

Girls were beautiful things; more beautiful, more sweet, more yearningly sweet than anything else in man's life — girls, wives, mothers—a trinity of words which stood for all that was best, most exalting, uplifting, ennobling to man; which stood for man's very life itself, through the progression of themselves; sweethearts, tender, soft, sweet in their virgin freshness; wives, loyal, tender again, brave with a bravery men too often neglected or overlooked; mothers, pure, crooning lipped, tender eyed, soft breasted, braver still for their glimpse into the grim face of death that they might bring back life from the valley of shadows through which it must always pass.

And of all girls, all women, one girl stood ready to be these three in one for him, with him, by him. She had defied the father of her own life in order that she might step into her place by his side.

A strange, holy ache came into Jimmy Conroy's throat. He sat staring into far vistas of hitherto unplumbed thought. He set his lips to still a strange desire to quiver which assailed them, and sat on. After a long time his lips moved. "Marna," he whispered in the voice of the man who prays and bowed his head in hands.

He lifted it after a time. And he raised it up a changed man. This wedding came to be to him a far different thing than it would have been before.

He had loved Marna, yes; he had wanted her for his wife. But yesterday's elopement had, after all, seemed to him then almost something like a lark—a joke on grim-faced Theodore Lewis, who had opposed their love — a putting of something over on the old man.

That element had stood forth in his mind as plainly, as fully important, as the actual marriage with the girl who had been ready to give herself to him.

How—how puerile, how silly it seemed, in the face of all marriage really meant. How childish his own attitude appeared in the face of what Marna had felt—must have felt to take the step she had.

Marriage was no joke, no step to be taken with jesting or a laugh. It was something bigger, grander, higher, more exalting than he had ever considered it before. It—it was a—a—holy sacrament. Through marriage one entered the temple of life, not leading, but led by the hand of the vestal herself. For that he was waiting here in this room, with the door unlocked.

Unlocked!

He smiled and rose.

For no definite purpose, more to sense the actual fact than anything else, he crossed the room and laid his hand on the knob, and turning it, set the door ajar and looked out.

There was nothing to see. The corridor was empty—or was it? He peered more closely along its sweep. No. There was some one there—a woman.

Half-way down the hall a girl, flattened into the shallow recess of a door, had her face turned toward him, her eyes staring at his head, thrust forth from his room. She stood there without motion, without any sign of animation, for what seemed a full minute before suddenly she whirled and went flying down the hall.

Jimmy drew back. He closed the door softly, returned to his chair. There was a whimsical smile on his lips as he threw himself down.

"Scared stiff," he said to himself. "Thanks to Theodore, they all think I'm a helpless bug around here. That's what was the matter with that maid. She thought I was locked in, and when I opened the door and stuck out my mug, it nearly gave her the pip, poor kid."

He got up, yawned, and stretched out on his bed to wait.

"Ho-hum," said Jimmy. "This sure has been 'some day.'"

CHAPTER XII.

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATE.

"IT—it's a hold-up," Henderson began, as he followed Lewis away from the hotel.

Theodore nodded.

"On its face it does look like that, but I wouldn't do it for less if I were Miss Fraeme. She'll have to look after herself and pay attorney's fees, and experience more or less annoyance for several months before she can get her divorce. She won't clean up such a great deal, really, when the smoke clears off."

"You'll—er—fix everything with the justice before he sees Jim, I suppose?"

"Naturally, yes. There will scarcely be much time for explanations after that."

Theodore smiled in his tight-lipped fashion again.

Wally made no answer. Another ghost of the future was troubling him again. Theodore was going to arrange for the check, and then he would set off on the quest of Marna. If only that latter step were safely settled, he could breathe easy.

He no longer doubted that Lewis would put over his rather high-handed scheme in regard to Jim. But—if Marna took anger at what she would almost certainly think was his betrayal of her hiding-place, what good would it do him to have Conroy put out of the running, after all?

He plodded along, therefore, at Theodore's side, teasing his brain for some way in which he could manage to escape the blame for her finding without at the same time permitting Lewis to know that he had known it all along.

It was no use. Anyway, in the very nature of things, subsequent explanations between father and daughter must show that he had withheld knowledge from Lewis from first to last. It began to look to Wally as though that first impulsive lie, told in the morning, was going to

prove his total undoing after all. He was in a very uncomfortable frame of mind, indeed, by the time they reached the bank.

It was there that Theodore met one of what he was inclined to regard as the few pieces of good luck which had come his way that day. The cashier had left, but the assistant cashier was still in his railed-in quarters. He was a young man who had been born and raised and employed in Lewisville until he had come to take his present position in Greenville's leading bank. He gave Lewis one glance as he and Wally came in, got out of his chair, advanced to the rail, and stuck out his hand.

"Well, well, Mr. Lewis and Mr. Henderson!" he exclaimed.

"How are you, Howard?" Theodore took the extended hand and shook it. "You're the very man I want to see. Do you suppose you can get my home town on the phone before the City National shuts up?"

Howard glanced at the bank clock.

"I'll have to hustle if I do," he returned. "Come inside here while I try."

He seated himself at his desk, leaving his guests to find places for themselves, and asked for the long distance connection before turning around.

"What's up?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothing much," Theodore told him in a purposely light tone. "I merely happen to need a certified check for five thousand in order to close a little deal. Luckily you know me, but I think I'd best speak to Meacham, of my own bank, first."

Howard nodded.

"Just how did you want to arrange it, Mr. Lewis?" He had no hesitation in honoring the demands of Lewisville's big man, but asked the question as much from routine as anything else.

"Why"—Theodore reached into his pocket—"I'll give you my private check, and you can issue me a certified check on your own institution for a like amount, I think."

Howard nodded.

"We'll be glad to, sir," he assented, just as his telephone rang.

He put out a hand, took up the standard, and answered, then turned again to Lewis:

"Here is your connection, sir. They've got your bank."

Theodore took the phone and himself began to speak.

Wally and Howard waited. After a time Lewis returned the phone to the bank official, who spoke briefly to the City National of Lewisville, at his request.

Then he hung up, set the instrument aside, and returned to the personal side of the matter.

"If you'll draw your check, Mr. Lewis, I shall be glad to do what you wish. Just how should our check be drawn?"

For one moment Theodore did not answer. All at once, he wasn't sure whether meeting Howard was a piece of luck or not. The fellow was too well acquainted in his home town, not only with people, but with its rumors and reports. In the end, however, he decided to brazen it out.

"Mrs. James Conroy," he returned.

"Mrs.—"

Howard got that far and paused. A smile began forming on his face. A surprised light began dawning in his eyes. He remained standing beside his desk as he had risen, and looking into Theodore's face.

"Yes, Mrs.—Mrs. James Conroy." Theodore's tone was growing somewhat crisp.

"Pardon me. It was a bit of a surprise," Howard said quickly. "I didn't know Jimmy was married."

"He isn't," Lewis snapped.

"But—"

"He will be."

"Oh!" Howard's expression changed. It became very knowing, indeed. He left the railed-in section and passed quickly back toward the tellers' cages, bent on seeing to the drawing of the check.

Theodore watched him until he had passed beyond the cages, which veiled him from sight. Then he turned on Wally with his same grim smile.

" That young man knows a lot, or thinks he does," he rumbled deep in his throat. " Wait till he sees the real Mrs. Conroy. I've a notion he'll be surprised."

Wally nodded. He was of the same opinion. But it no longer served to excite his sense of humor. He had quit thinking of Conroy some time ago, and was devoting his thoughts to himself.

Getting the check had proved a ridiculously easy matter. In a few minutes now they would take it back and leave it with the clerk, and then — then they would set out to find Marna. He had a fixed belief that, for Lewis, the undertaking was going to be a very simple matter. Theodore seemed to have a most remarkable habit of putting whatever he attempted across.

Not without any apparent notice of Wally's attitude, he had gone to Howard's desk, seated himself, and begun filling in his check to the order of the Greenville bank. While Henderson watched, he wrote up the stub, tore out the foil, and blotted it with care. It lay on Howard's desk, a slim, pink spot of color, after Theodore had put away the book, with its counterfoil, and resumed his own chair.

Howard came back, picked it up, glanced it briefly, and, in exchange, passed Theodore a somewhat larger oblong of white paper, which the Lewisville magnate folded together and placed in a pocket folder before he rose.

Then he put out his hand.

" Thanks, Howard," he said. " Any time you're in the old town drop around. I'm sure Miss Marna will be glad to see you. As I remember, you and she used to trot in the same set up there."

That was the way he did it. Wally had to admire the cool, collected manner in which he answered all Howard's conjectures in a seemingly natural fashion, and freed his mind from any suspicion that Marna was the one who might after a while come back to receive payment on the check he had just had made out.

Howard, too, seemed to sense that he had received an answer to much he had not said. His eyes widened a trifle as he took Theodore's hand.

" I—shall be glad to do so," he accepted. " Miss Lewis and I were always good friends—though to put us in the same set, even in words, is rather overdrawing. I was mostly a grub, while, thanks to your ability to overtake and knock the almighty dollar into your pockets, she was more of a beautiful butterfly."

Lewis let his gray eyes twinkle.

" Yes," he said slowly. " But you see, my boy—in her case—I was the grub. Well — come and see us. Right now, I must be getting along."

Wally Henderson got up. He followed Theodore out of the bank and into the street. Suddenly he felt much like a small boy whose father invited him to come out " to the woodshed," or some other similar resort, for a session of corporeal chastisement, aimed for his own eventual good.

They were going back to the hotel and leave the check with the clerk, and then —then they were going to the woodshed —which was the place where Marna was waiting the outcome of all the tangled threads of cross purpose which this day had woven into the woof of the past.

The question was, were " they " going? Was he, G. Walter Henderson, going with Theodore on that quest, or was he going to remain behind and make his escape so soon as Lewis turned his back?

Either way, he was fated to cut a ridiculous figure, it would seem. Either way, he would be caught on the sharp horn of a dilemma which was, after all, entirely of his own construction. Almost he was glad of the burning heat of the day, despite which he shivered, as he drew his kerchief and wiped his sweat-drenched forehead once more.

The hotel came in sight. They were upon it, and he had not made up his mind. Confound this vacillation, such as he had never suffered before.

He followed Theodore into the Metropole and across to the desk, and stood while he asked the clerk for an envelope —showed him the check, sealed it inside the cover, and wrote across it the name of " Mrs. James Conroy " in a perfectly steady script.

Why couldn't he be cool, like Lewis? Why was he so dreadfully upset?

" You understand, Mr. Clerk," Theodore was saying. " This is to be delivered to Miss Fraeme only *after* the ceremony has been performed?"

The clerk nodded.

" Yes, sir. I understand that fully. I shall tell her the check is in my hands, and I shall again mention the condition you have just named."

" Very well." Theodore prepared to turn away. " I have as yet one small matter to attend to. But I do not think it will take long. I shall return inside the hour. By that time I trust all other arrangements will have been made." He turned to Wally at the last. " Well—are you going along, or would you rather stay here? Suit yourself, if you've had too much running around."

" I'll—I'll go along," Wally decided.

Suddenly he felt that would be the better way. Suddenly he thought that now, at the last, he saw a way out. He would tell Theodore the truth at last as they walked along.

He would explain that he had been trying to help Marna get back home without—a—a scene — without being compromised; that she hadn't wanted to meet her father—had been afraid to meet him —that she had run away, and he had been trying to find her, even as he had been trying to prevent her coming in contact with Jimmy.

He would tell the whole thing and enlist Theodore on his side. That was the thing to do. Why hadn't he seen it before. Well—there was plenty of time still to take advantage of the situation. He opened his mouth so soon as they were once more out of the hotel.

" Mr. Lewis," he began, " did you—er—that is—did you know that Miss Marna was in the Metropole this morning when you arrived?"

" What?" Lewis paused and regarded him sharply. His face darkened to something between red and purple. " What do you mean by that?" he ended in a roar.

Wally told him the whole thing. His words poured out of him in a tripping, stumbling stream, as his desire to square himself with Lewisville's big man spurred him to full confession.

And Theodore heard him out without a single word, until he came to a panting pause and stood with his blue eyes popping in his pallid face, waiting for the result of all he had said.

Then Lewis laughed. His voice boomed out across the hot air in a series of hoarse cachinnations, which actually seemed to shake the shade of the awning beneath which they stood.

" That's what was the matter with you!" he bellowed. " Henderson, you young dog, you meant to take her home and make love to her on the way. Well —by gad, I think you've been pretty well punished for your lie of this morning. Cheer up and come along. Where did you find that girl of mine after you—er —' escaped ' from the hotel in that auto this afternoon?"

" I'd—I'd rather not say, sir," Henderson explained. " You—er—you see, sir, I—she—she told me if I told you, she'd never forgive me."

Theodore grinned. He was not at all worried. He had plans for Marna of his own regarding a husband, but — let the poor fool dream, if it would do him any good. If Wally could find the girl, it would be hard lines if he couldn't do it also. He nodded.

" I see. Well, come along, and we'll try the other hotels—how about that?"

" It—er—might succeed," Wally admitted with a faint smile.

After all, the thing had come out all right. Lewis had laughed. He had not taken it the way he had feared he might. And—it was easy to answer this question,

give Theodore the right tip, tell him he was on the right track without really saying anything that could be termed a betrayal of Marna herself.

He could truthfully deny having told her father where she was. Anybody could have thought of other hotels, just as he had himself. Anybody could trace her, as he had traced her that afternoon.

Theodore chuckled.

"Come on," he said again and moved ahead. "I don't want to see her now, Henderson, you know. I just want to know where she is. We'll go get her after the other affair is over, and we'll make her think Conroy married this other woman to save his own skin. After that she'll never give the fellow a thought again. She couldn't and be a child of mine."

Wally nodded. Suddenly he was quite himself. His heart warmed. After all, there was nothing like the truth. He had stepped briefly from the path of rectitude to-day and — look what had happened! Then, when he had taken his courage in his hands and spoken truly, everything had straightened out as if by magic.

Yes, decidedly, the truth was the only thing worth while, after all. Let others seek to follow the crooked paths of deception. An immense sense of moral rectitude rose up and filled his being as he walked at Theodore's side. He drew his kerchief and wiped his forehead again, but in relief now rather than from any other cause.

They went rapidly along the street in the direction of that other hotel which Wally himself had visited once before. And once in front of its doors, Lewis paused.

"This being a hotel, and not far from our own, I shall make my first inquiries here," he remarked, with a glance into Henderson's face.

"Very well," said Wally, and halted.

"Coming in?" Lewis laid a hand on the door.

"Er — that is — no. I — think I will wait—outside."

Theodore grinned, but made no comment. He pulled the door open and vanished inside, making his way toward the desk.

Wally waited. He had no desire to follow. That impudent auto-driver had said he had questioned the clerk concerning him while he had been in Marna's room. No doubt the fool had told the man that he was crazy, or given him a hint of it at least—told him all about the crazy man at the Metropole, and things like that; and, of course, his asking for Marna would have fitted in.

Let sleeping dogs lie. There was no need to excite further comment or make further explanations concerning his state of mind. It was better to stand in the shade of the hotel awning and wait until Theodore had learned that the girl was really there in a room waiting for Jimmy, than to run any further gantlet of stares from addle-brained clerks.

So he stood there and stared around; thought what a very fine day it had turned into after all, and waited. Once he glanced through the window and saw Theodore leaning across the desk, speaking in what seemed very earnest fashion to the clerk.

Doubtless he was explaining to the man so much as would loosen his tongue and break through the incognito of Marna's assumed name, Wally thought. Well —trust Theodore to know what to say and do. He was a very competent man in action. No wonder he had made a business success of his life and become Lewisville's big man.

Wally turned back, thrust his hands into the pockets of his well-fitted sack coat, teetered on heels and toes, and stared out at the hot street, still baking under the westering sun.

And then the door opened and Lewisville's big man came out like he might have been thrown, so swift was his rush. His eyes darted here and there, seemed for a minute to completely overlook Wally, who stood at his very side, then dropped to embrace him.

And plainly something was the matter with Lewisville's magnate, because he was puffing rather than breathing in any normal way, and his face was a deep, dark, mottled red again, and his eyes were narrowed to gray slits.

Wally caught his breath at the man's expression.

"Mr. Lewis?" he began an uncertain interrogation.

Theodore opened his lips. "Was that girl here when you came to hunt her?" he rasped. "Quick, now! No more stalling!"

"Why — er — yes." Wally took the plunge.

"Registered under the name of 'Wick'?"

"Yes."

"What time was that?"

"A little before one, sir. I left—"

"So did she."

"What? She—she—"

"Left!" Theodore grunted and paused. "She must have left," he went on after a second, "because—she isn't here now, and the clerk says she paid for her room and went away."

"But—" The word left Wally's jaw sagging, his eyes popping wide.

"But nothing!" Lewis snapped. "You scared her, you chump! She got afraid you'd put me wise to where she was cooped up, and wasn't going to take any chances. She just waited till you were out of the way and then made another jump. Now we've got to do our work all over again, thanks to your butting into what didn't concern you. Come along. There's another hotel."

He set off down the street. Wally tagged along. Tagged is right, because the pace Theodore set was almost more than he could equal. His breath began to come more quickly as he essayed to keep up.

Once more the sweat of exertion and nervous unrest dewed his brow and face, and trickled in little tickling streams down his neck. They reached the other hotel, and Theodore forced him inside. They approached the desk. They explained, argued, and inquired. To no result. No young woman of extreme brunette pulchritude, clad in white and carrying a light pigskin suit-case, had been seen around there that afternoon.

Together, the two men mopped the perspiration from their brows.

"What next?" said Theodore, exhaling his rage and disgust in a long-drawn breath.

"The—er—lodging-houses, I suppose, sir," Henderson suggested. "She may have realized that a hotel was—er—too—"

"Oh, yes; she might have developed common sense to that extent," Lewis cut him off. "But see here — we've got to pull off that other thing some time, and I said I'd be ready in an hour. We can't make a round of all the lodging-houses and private boarding places even in this village in that short a time. We'll go back to the Metropole and attend to Conroy. After all, this is a civilized community, and the girl won't come to any real harm."

Henderson agreed.

They left the hotel and started back toward the Metropole again. Lewis stopped and bought a collar at a shop which showed a long glass case of the things beside its door. The clerk even allowed him to put it on before a glass in the back of the store.

Theodore knotted his tie afresh, threw the wilted wreck of his soiled linen on the floor, and again charged out of the place. To Henderson it seemed that his tongue had developed a pasty condition and was sticking to the inside of his mouth. But he said no word. When they got to the Metropole he would have a nice cool glass of buttermilk, he determined. That would fix his pasty tongue.

So at last, after greater exertion than Wally could remember for a long time, they reached the street on which the Metropole stood and charged up to its doors. They went inside. And there Lewis assumed an entirely different de-

meanor. Once more he was suddenly self-controlled, dignified, calm.

He led the way across the office to the desk, where the clerk was watching his approach. He ranged up at the desk with Henderson at his side.

"I'm a trifle late," he began in an almost casual voice, "but I was unexpectedly delayed. Is everything ready for the ceremony, Mr. Clerk?"

And the clerk was regarding both Henderson and Lewis in a rather strange way. In fact, an odd smile was creeping across the clerk's lips as he listened to Theodore's words. Then as Lewis paused and stood waiting he opened his mouth in turn.

"Why, you see, sir," he explained, "that little matter is over. Miss Fraeme thought there was no need of waiting, so—the wedding took place some fifteen minutes ago!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS FRAEME'S FRAME-UP.

"WHAT!" Henderson gasped.

"What!" Lewis roared.

"They're already married, sir," the clerk declared.

"But—" For once Lewisville's leading citizen seemed at a loss for words.

The clerk nodded.

"Miss Fraeme came in some time ago with a minister, sir, and since you weren't here, but had left the check, she decided she might as well perform her part of the bargain, and meet you when you came back."

"And you gave her the check?"

"Certainly, sir—after the marriage. Those were your instructions. I followed them to the letter. In fact, I was a witness of the wedding, with one of the maids."

"And he went through it?" Lewis demanded. "He—didn't object?"

"No, sir. He was quite—docile from first to last. There was no trouble at all."

"Urrrrgh!"

The sound came out of Theodore Lewis's throat in an articulate growl. He seemed completely disgusted at the behavior of the man who had aspired to his daughter's hand. Without waiting for any further explanation he turned and charged directly toward the stairs to the second floor.

Wally Henderson trotted after on uncertain legs, which seemed strangely weak to him now and not under good control.

"Mr. Lewis," the clerk's voice drifted after them as they went.

"Well?" Theodore paused with a foot on the bottom stair.

"They—aren't in your room now. They're—waiting for you in the—ladies' parlor."

"And that is?"

"Over there."

The clerk gestured across the office with one hand.

Without a word Theodore Lewis turned in the direction of the room the clerk pointed out and went toward it with a heavy-footed tread. He reached the door with Henderson a step behind, and, without a rap or other premonitory sign of his coming, passed through.

Three people were in the room already: Jimmy Conroy, and a tall, light-haired young woman, and—Theodore Lewis's own daughter.

Theodore paused just inside the door and stared at the latter, while his face took on a color which could be described only as purple.

"Marna!" he roared.

"Oh, hello, dad," said his child quite calmly. "I heard you were in town."

"You—" Lewis began, and caught himself up. "What are you doing here?" he went on once more in a heavy grumble of sound.

"Why," Marna smiled sweetly into his darkened face, "I was just waiting for you to appear. I wanted you to meet my—husband before you went back home."

"Your husband?" Theodore bellowed, advancing a step, while Wally sank into a chair, because the floor had suddenly

begun to act like a merry-go-round to his swimming senses.

" Yes, Jim here." Marna put her hand on Conroy's arm.

" But—I thought—"

For the second time in the last ten minutes Lewis paused and seemed to choke on his words.

Marna nodded. Her lips parted to show her very white teeth.

" Yes, dad, I know you thought a whole lot. You thought you were going to marry Jim to this nurse—this Miss—"

" Fraeme," said Theodore in a tone of sullen defiance. Since she knew so much, she might as well know the rest, he appeared to think. " I suppose this is the lady in question?" He jerked a heavy hand at the smiling young blonde.

Marna shook her head.

" Oh, no; this is Myrtle, one of the maids and a witness to the marriage, father dear."

" Then—" Suddenly Wally sat up very straight and stared at the flushed face of the little brunette before him and erupted a startled word of comprehension.

And Marna nodded toward him.

" Quite right, Wally, I am Miss Fraeme," she agreed.

" You?" Once more Theodore rumbled a single word hoarsely.

" Yes. I thought it a suitable name, since the whole thing appeared to be a frame-up from first to last. You see, dad, while you were doing such a lot of thinking, I did some myself. I even helped to decide the nature of some of your thoughts. Your whole trouble was that you forgot I was your own daughter, daddy dear, and—a woman besides."

Theodore sat down on a chair and took a deep breath.

" You mean you planned that stuff about the nurse—that you were the nurse all along—yourself?"

Marna nodded again and said:

" You've got it right now, father."

Theodore eyed her in something like a grudging pride.

" And I suppose you've got that check?" he remarked.

Marna's eyes were dancing.

" Yes."

" Give it here."

Theodore put out a hand.

Marna drew back.

" I won't."

She was half laughing, half pouting. She shook her head.

" I'll stop payment on the thing!" Theodore got up again and towered in the room and his wrath.

Marna drew herself up.

" You can't, dad—it's—certified."

" Not to you, young woman."

" No. To Mrs. James Conroy. I'm Mrs. James Conroy now. Don't get excited, dad. It was to be given to me after the wedding. It was to pay me for marrying your crazy son. Well—I've done what was required. Dad, are you trying to welsh? Be a sport."

Undeterred by his glowering brow, she went quite to him and put a hand on his arm.

" Dad—daddy—you tried to slip something over on Jimmy and me, and we—beat you to it. Dad—don't beef—be game."

Theodore Lewis hesitated before that appeal and was lost. The ghost of a twinkle crept into the gray eyes so much like those others pleading up to his glance beneath them. Once more he took a deep breath. He caught the hand which lay on his arm, went back to his chair, and drew the girl down on the arm beside him.

" Tell the old man all about it," he said.

Marna nodded. She flashed a smile about the room.

" Sit down, folks," she advised Jimmy and Myrtle, and placed a hand on the iron-gray head of the man beside whom she sat.

" To begin with, daddy," she went on, " you shouldn't have let the clerk put Jimmy in the room next mine. It just happened that when he found you'd locked him in he made a fuss and at-

tracted my attention, and we had a little talk.

" After that I understood a lot of things I hadn't known before, and as I'd brought his suit-case from the train, I was able to give him some clothes over the transom, while you and Wally were down-stairs—and—he was able to give me some money the same way, so I could go to another hotel."

Theodore looked at Conroy.

" That's where you got 'em?" he observed.

Jimmy nodded assent.

" And as I didn't know you knew Marna was in town, I wasn't going to spill the information right then."

Marna dimpled.

" He tried to get away to come to me, instead," she resumed, " and—oh, father—I never would have thought you could be so brutal as to do what you did."

" I was mad," Theodore rumbled. " Go on."

" I went to another hotel and waited for Jimmy to come, and he didn't, but after a long time Wally did. I managed to get him to tell me everything that had occurred, and after he had gone away I thought and thought, and I thought that if Jimmy couldn't come to me I would have to find some way to get to him.

" So—you see I'd already met Myrtle here, and I had telephoned her once already so she could tell Jimmy where to find me when he got loose, and after I'd thought it all out I telephoned her again. That was just before one o'clock. I got her on the phone and told her what had happened, and I got her to have the clerk tell you what he did about a—a nurse—and—oh, dad, it was too funny—you swallowed the whole thing like a fish. But—never mind. You see, I thought you would.

" I told Myrtle what to do, and asked her where I could go to hide, and she—she sent me to her own mother—at her home. I went there, and Myrtle told the clerk the telephone number where he could reach me to tell me what you said. He wasn't to blame, dad. He didn't know me at all, or who I was. He was acting in good part all the way through. I—I think, dad, you owe him something for his trouble—"

" I owe him something all right," Lewis agreed, but his voice was not altogether certain. It seemed to shake the least bit. It appeared that the audacity of the girl with his blood in her veins was far from unpleasing to him.

" And then, dad, you made a bad mistake," Marna resumed. " I was all upset about the very last part of my plan. I was afraid that when you found it was me, you'd raise the very mischief of a fuss.

" I'd about made up my mind to tell you I was of age and would do as I pleased, and that you'd either be a good dad, or I'd have Jimmy sue you for damages for what you'd done to him, when Myrtle telephoned to me and straightened the whole thing out.

" She said you'd gone away and left Jim's door unlocked—that she knew it because she had seen him put his head out of the door and because a tray of food had been taken up to his room while you were down-stairs.

" Of course, I saw what had happened right away. I figured it out that you must have gone up and told Jimmy some sort of fairy story about the coming wedding, and got him to agree, if you had left his door unlocked. And, of course "—she paused long enough to give Conroy a heart-quickening glance—" I knew that if he'd agreed, you must have told him you had decided to let him marry me.

" You see, dad, I know you pretty well, and it was easy to work that out. As it happens, I was right, too, because when I got here, Jim was expecting me, and he didn't know anything was crooked about the whole deal till after I was his wife."

Jimmy grinned.

" The open door seems to have settled the whole thing, Mr. Lewis," he remarked. " It certainly convinced me that you meant what you said, and it

made a clear way for our little girl to turn the trick when she came."

Marna went on:

"So I told Myrtle that I'd come here after she told me that you and Wally were somewhere out of the hotel. I got the license and a minister, and we came right over, and Myrtle and the clerk witnessed the wedding, and—well—that's all, except for you to give us your blessing and tell us to come home."

For a time Theodore Harwick Lewis said nothing at all. He sat there silent, seeming to struggle with something within himself rather than any external element of the entire situation—any wholly patent circumstance.

"You're going to do that, aren't you, dad?" Marna's voice came softly across the silence which had fallen.

Abruptly Theodore threw up his head. He looked at Conroy and opened his lips.

"James—did you mean what you said to me in that room this afternoon, about your treatment of this little girl?"

"Did I mean it?" Jimmy got to his feet. "Did I mean I'd be good to her in every way a man can be good to a woman? Say—Mr. Lewis, I didn't even begin to say to you then what I mean now. I did a lot of thinking after you left, and I thought I was waiting for her, as—well as I was. And I don't think things look quite the same to me now as they have before. I—I think I've just begun to understand what it means to a man, to win a—a real woman's love."

Wally Henderson fidgeted on his chair. The whole thing was as gall and wormwood to his soul. But—there wasn't anything to do about it. Not a thing. The whole jig was up. So he sat and waited, while Theodore held his eyes on Jimmy's flushed, rather boyish, yet serious face. He sat and watched while Theodore rose in turn and stood before the son-in-law fate itself seemed to have wished on him.

"Conroy," Lewis began, "I've never particularly liked you, nor have I ever really disliked you in a personal sense. I had plans for my little girl into which you didn't come, but—well—between you two, you've knocked those flat. As I say, I've never liked you overly much, but I have to admit that to-day once or twice I've had to admire the way you talked, and if that girl of mine can find enough in you to make her take to you the way she has, why, there—must be something in you worth while, after all. So be good to her, James; prove that you mean what you've said—and—if you've got it in you to make good, I don't know of a better place to show it than in my Lewisville mills."

He paused and stuck out a heavy hand. Conroy took it.

"I'll make good," he said strongly, looking not at Theodore at all, but at Marna.

The two men gripped hands. It was all off. Wally Henderson swallowed something which came up and tried to stick in his throat. Theodore and Jimmy were shaking hands. Jimmy and Marna were really married at last. What was he doing there then? He was decidedly *de trop*. If he could get out quietly, while every one else was intent on their own affairs—

Marna spoke.

"Say, dad, just who spilled the beans?"

Theodore turned toward her.

"Eh? Just who did what?"

"Why, who slipped you the information that our elopement was coming off? Did you just get a hunch, or did somebody put you wise?"

Wally Henderson stiffened. Very softly he slid quite to the edge of his seat and waited.

"Oh," Theodore said. "Why—somebody meant to, I guess. Just before three o'clock I got a letter which should have been delivered in the morning's mail, but somehow got delayed. It wasn't signed, but said you intended running off with Jimmy at three that afternoon. Wait a moment. I've got it with me, I think." He slid a hand inside his coat.

Marna got up. She went to his side.

Together with Jimmy she bent her head above the lines which had served to start Theodore in the pursuit which was only ending now.

Quite without sound Wally Henderson rose from his chair and went softly toward the parlor door. Quite without sound he turned the knob and let himself through to the office beyond and turned up the stairs to the corridor above, and so at last reached the door of 261.

He went in and took up his grip, went back down-stairs and across to the desk, told the clerk he was leaving, and paid his bill. After that he went unchecked and undelayed to the street and turned up it away from the Metropole doors.

Inside the parlor Marna raised a flushed face from inspecting the note. Her eyes were wide with a sudden understanding.

"Wally?" she cried.

"Wally?" repeated Conroy, and turned his eyes toward the spot where Wally had been.

Marna nodded. She pointed to the empty chair.

"You know he was at the dance the other evening, Jim. Don't you remember that while we were planning the whole thing out, back of those vines, I said I thought I heard somebody, and you said it was just the wind shaking the leaves?"

Suddenly she laughed past all restraint. "He—Jimmy—he wrote this and mailed it to father, and thought he had stopped us, and got on the train quite satisfied about it in his own mind, and then bumped into us on the same train at Fairview. No wonder he was surprised."

Theodore turned his eyes from Wally's empty chair to the two young people.

"Just where is Henderson?" he said.

And Conroy rather choked as he made answer:

"Why, sir—he seems to have taken himself away."

Which was exactly the thing G. Walter Henderson had done.

At last he had reached decision of purpose and course. There was nothing else to do. He would go on to Atlanta and tend to his business as though nothing else had occurred.

After all, this whole day of trouble and harassment was nothing but a sort of interlude in which from the first *dux femina facti*—a woman was the leader to the deed.

He walked toward the station, to inquire when the next train went south. And having gained the information, he came forth and put down his case, drew out his sodden handkerchief, and once more mopped his face. *"Tenit caprinam meam,"* said Wally, lapsing once more into both Latin and slang. "It gets my goat!"

(The end.)

THE AEROPLANE

BY RAY McINTYRE KING

I SAW a bird against the west,
An eery bird that hath no nest.

I saw a ship that sailed the air,
A sea impalpable and rare;

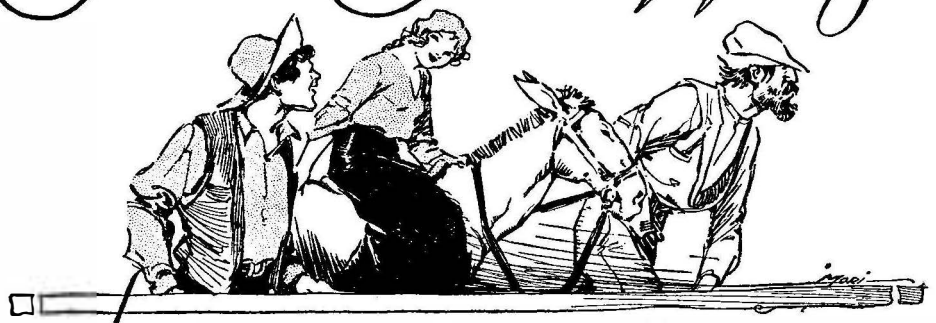
A sea that hath no charted past;
Wherein no anchor hath been cast.

It soared, a Viking of the air,
Where Viking never dreamed to dare.

I heard the throbbing motor's din
Fall from the zenith, far and thin.

O eery bird! O eery cry!
O eery thing that man can fly!

The Old Way



by Edwin Carlile Litsey

AS the full moon surmounted Big Hill its mellow rays floated across the ravine and lighted up Rattler Rock, a huge, flat, outjutting stone. Here a sinister scene was revealed.

Two men stood in the center of the tablelike stone. Face to face they stood, so close that their middles touched. They were practically of one height, and approximately of the same build. Big men they were, sturdy-limbed and heavy-shouldered. Neither wore a hat. One was shaggy with hair, of face and poll, and he was the older. This man had taken off his shoes, and stood with bare feet and ankles. The other was a muscular youth in the twenties, with a clean face.

About the waist of both and encircling both was a broad belt of leather—one belt, which bound and held them together with a tight, triple-sewn buckle which could not break. The coming of the moon was a sign to the two men. As it rose clear of Big Hill's topmost peak each raised his right hand on high, and beneath each hand glittered six inches of white steel. Then, acting from a common understanding, each man calmly lifted his left hand and grasped the corresponding right wrist of his opponent, each thus rendering the other temporarily harmless. So they stood in an unconsciously statuesque pose for a moment, looking hate and taking deep breaths.

"Tell death!" said the shaggy one, his voice a little hoarse.

"You or me!" answered the other in sibilance which told that his teeth were clenched.

Neither grew violent after this mutual acceptance of the terms of this strange duel, but a peculiar rigidity gradually possessed them, and the heavy, two-inch belt began to sink softly into their shirts, while as yet the upheld arms remained stark and stiff, motionless.

The home of Slim Sam, the trapper, was far removed from any human habitation. That was why Janie, his only child, grew to the advanced age of eighteen without being offered matrimony, or a home in exchange for herself. 'Possum Ridge was the nearest settlement, and it was here Janie came riding for help one day when her father was hurt by an accidental gun discharge.

Tom Hunn saw her first, ambling along a bridle-path on a small gray mule. Tom had been ten days a widower, and had already begun to nurse a longing for another mate. His keen eyes noted that the one approaching was a stranger, and that she was likewise fair. He looked again, twisted his unkempt beard about his hand meditatively, and strode forward to greet the oncomer.

While he was yet some distance away a figure stepped out of the bushes at the mule's head, and the animal stopped. So did Tom Hunn, swearing softly, and baring his white teeth. For the second man was Jim Tabb, a big young chap who cherished a fool notion of shaving every day and keeping his hair cut. Jim took his hat off and said something, and Tom saw the girl smile and lean forward to answer. Then Tom strode up forthwith, pushing his slouch hat back from his forehead without removing it.

"Howdy!" he said, ignoring Jim, and throwing a kindly twinkle in his gray eyes. "Won't you light?"

Janie turned her round, brown, innocent eyes upon the speaker, and Hunn felt a sudden thrill shoot through him.

"Dad's hurt hisself," she said, sudden distress on her face. "His gun went off suddint as he's cleanin' it an' hit 'im here."

She artlessly touched the subtle swell of her right breast, while quick tears came to her eyes.

"He's all I got," she added, her round throat beginning to work convulsively.

Jim Tabb stepped closer and placed his hand on the mule's neck.

"Whur d'you live? I'll come nuss 'im!"

"Whut you know 'bout a gunshoot?" broke in Tom Hunn. "I've doctored many a' one an' I know yarbs." Stepping to Janie's side: "I'll tend yo' pap! How fur is it?"

The girl looked perplexed, and turned troubled eyes from one to the other.

"Right smart piece. I've be'n ridin' since sunup, but I got lost wunst. My pa's Slim Sam, an' we live nigh Lost Hoss Crick."

Tabb scratched his head reflectively, but Hunn spoke at once, a look of cunning on his whiskered face.

"I know 'im! He's a frien' o' mine. Sure I'll go nuss 'im, gel! Le's hurry. The quicker I git to 'im the better!"

And forthwith he laid hold of the bridle, turned the mule around, and began to lead it on the backward path.

The younger man started forward with an arm uplifted in protest, then stopped abruptly, chagrin on his features. He had been simply outwitted.

They had gone but a little way when the girl drew in her mule, looked back, and beckoned.

Tabb responded with alacrity.

"If you don't mind," said Janie softly, "I wish you'd come, too!"

"That's what I 'tended to do!" replied Jim stoutly. "Two heads 's better 'n one when it comes to nussin'."

The girl sighed as though in relief, while Tom Hunn said nothing because there was nothing for him to say.

It was far past noon when the relief party began its journey. Tom Hunn, doggedly determined to maintain the precedence he had assumed, kept his position at the little mule's head, while Jim Tabb, recovering his wits, diplomatically fell back by the animal's side. Thus, while the older man virtually assumed charge of the expedition, the younger man's position was vastly superior from a strategic standpoint. Conversation naturally sprang up. Tabb was all of six feet; the mule was low and Janie was not tall, so her head and Jim's were not far from a level. They talked a great deal as they plodded along mile after mile, and sometimes, when her mount stumbled on a stone, Janie would have to grasp for an instant the strong shoulder so convenient to her hand.

Hunn quickly realized he had made a mistake, but stuck to his post with mulish persistence. Of an intolerant nature, it had fretted him when Janie summoned

Jim Tabb, too. He could look after Slim Sam, and find time for courting, too. He was sure the trapper wasn't badly hurt. If a chest wound didn't kill at once, it usually didn't kill at all, provided somebody handled it who knew how.

The rapidly ripening friendship going on behind him began to heat Hunn's blood and make him nervous. He purposely made some false turns, and presently dropped back to the girl's other side, explaining that it was so long since he had been this way he was "mixed up."

Night had fallen for more than an hour when they finally arrived at the lonely cabin near Lost Horse Creek. Hunn at once assumed charge of Slim Sam. He had had considerable experience with bullet wounds, and this one seemed of comparatively slight importance. But the wily Hunn shook his head gravely after he made his examination and told the anxious-hearted daughter that he would do his best for the old man. The sly fellow knew that gratitude was the strongest ally love could engage.

The week which followed began a new and strange and thrilling epoch in the life of Janie. Two men were in love with her! Each had hastened to declare his affection, and Jim's fervor was evenly matched by the restrained ardor of Tom. While smiling upon each and practising innate coquetry, she yielded nothing to either man, not even a kiss. She must wait till her father got well before she could think of love-making. When she had spoken thus, Slim Sam quite suddenly took a better turn. Hunn explained that it was due to a certain herb which he had had trouble finding, while Tabb bluntly avowed to Janie that Hunn hadn't been trying to cure her dad.

But presently Sam was sitting up, and then the game began in earnest. He kind of leaned toward Hunn's suit, despite the fact there were already seven children in his shack. But Hunn had three hogs and a cow and an acre of land which would grow indifferent corn and potatoes. Tabb had nothing but two guns, and was known as a "roamer." When a girl came to marry she should choose a man settled in his habits.

Janie was all flustered and undecided, and no wonder! What girl can stand serenely to have two men bending every effort to win her? When she could gain a quiet moment for reflection and self-analysis, Janie felt that she favored the dashing, impetuous Jim Tabb. There was more fire to his wooing, more chafing at delay. When she coyly inquired how she was to live should she come with him, he answered darkly for her not to worry about that; she should have plenty.

Tom Hunn fingered some kinks out of his whiskers and sheared his hair a little, but made no further effort at personal adornment. He figured that a woman liked hair on a man, anyway.

Janie, suddenly and thoroughly awakened to her own charms and their possibilities, bestowed constantly added care upon herself. She was a round-bodied, vigorous lass, though not too heavy, and her physical development had been the natural result of her birth and surroundings. She made over her simple frocks, taking up here, loosening there, and putting V-shaped openings in her waists which revealed her fair, firm throat.

When she first appeared before Tom Hunn in this manner she saw a new, strange, eager gleam come to his eyes, and that day he strove for the third time to take her in his arms. When Jim Tabb first saw her thus his cheeks blazed, he swallowed and clenched his hands, and told her before parting that she'd have to take him or Hunn one, and that pretty quick; he was tired of this fooling.

But the days passed, and she took neither. She was enjoying the game, and realized, with a wisdom such as few of her sisters thereabout possessed, that it would end with marriage.

So there came a day when the two suitors decided to take matters in their own hands. Janie would not make a choice, so they would make one for her. It was Jim Tabb, inwardly boiling with jealousy,

who waited for his rival at the big loop in the trail just before it started up 'Possum Ridge.

Hunn was a half-hour late that night returning from his call, and when he at length appeared Tabb could see by the clear moonlight that he was still under the influence of some strong emotion.

"I can't stand it any longer!" burst out Hunn, his chest heaving.

"That's why I'm here!" returned Tabb, elated to find his fears groundless.

"Whut fur?"

"I can't stand it neither. The gel won't; we must!"

Hunn drew a sleeve across his forehead.

"You mean fight it out?"

"Yes."

"Guns?"

"The ol' way, if you ain't skeered."

"Knives?"

"Yes—an' the belt!"

The older man thought a moment.

"I don't want 'o kill you," he said.

"Don't you want the gel?"

"Yes, by God!"

"It's yo' quickest way to git 'er. She's teasin' us now, but she'll take the one that's left."

"I guess you're right," said Tom Hunn. "I'd kill my gran'daddy if he stood twixt me an' that gel!"

"Tomorrer night, then; jes' before moon, at Rattler Rock. Nobody goes there wunst in six years. Is 't a go?"

"Yes, I'll come."

They shook hands, then walked back silently side by side to the Ridge, where they separated for their respective homes.

The uplifted arms began to sway, ever so gently, giving no indication of the great power which animated them. A full minute must have passed before a foot was moved. Hunn had arrived at the rendezvous first, and with characteristic craft had taken off his shoes. The soles of his feet were leatherlike, and he knew he could keep his footing better with his sinewy toes free to grip. Tabb, striving to free his knife-hand, came to his toes. The watching Hunn noticed this, and threw his body forward. They staggered backward together, but Jim agilely regained his balance, and they drew up, this time with legs locked.

They were rather evenly matched. Tabb had the vigor of youth, but Hunn had the seasoned vigor of middle life. A quarter of an hour passed with no advantage resulting to either combatant. Neither could free the hand which would mean a speedy end to the bout. Their exertions had been fearful, and they breathed hard and noisily. When a half-hour had gone the weakness of weariness was creeping upon both. It was then by a sudden, swift jerk Hunn freed his hand. Electrified by the certain danger to which he was thus exposed, Tabb burst into furious action, striving to recapture the wrist and force him back all at once.

So they reeled toward the cliff from which the rock outjutted, Hunn all the while striving to plant a body blow, and directly crashed into a clump of straggly weeds. Hunn was vaguely conscious of a brierlike scratch above his ankle, but in his eager fury to press his advantage home, paid it no heed. Soon thereafter his chance came, and Jim collapsed in his arms with a severed jugular.

As Hunn sank down with the weight dragging at his waist, he felt sharp, terrible pains in his head, and knew that he was growing numb and helpless. With a flash of horror the truth dawned. The scratch upon his ankle had not been caused by a brier. Rattler had not been so named without cause. He strove to reach the buckle to loose himself from the man he had killed, but Jim lay upon it, and his own hands were becoming heavy and lifeless. His blood had turned to fire, and he could not see. He tried to cut the binding belt, but the blade turned in his nerveless fingers and the knife slipped to the ground.

Now two skeletons circled by a rotting piece of leather are bleaching on Rattler Rock, for it is a place where nobody goes once in six years.

The Hiding Places

by Allen French

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

LAMON HARTWELL, retired pirate, buccaneer, privateer, before his death in 1824 has packed his fortune—all in rare jewels—into six small, lead boxes and hidden them in odd places about his Massachusetts farm. By will he has left half of the farm to each of his two sons, and provided that the boxes shall belong to whoever finds them, whether they happen to be on the finder's land or not. The "Thick Oblong" box was found in 1839; the "Flat Oval" in 1847; the "Flat Round" in 1854. The story opens with the finding of the "Flat Oblong" by Binney Hartwell, great-great-grandson of the buccaneer, on the land of his cousin, Lon Hartwell; Margery Hartwell, Lon's daughter, and Gertrude Worthen, daughter of a wealthy summer resident, are present. Lon is furious and, advised by Al Stidger, a mean little country pettifogger, makes up his mind to get hold of the jewels (thirty thousand dollars' worth) the box contains. His attitude, however, makes no break between Binney and Margery, who have been chums from babyhood. Mr. Worthen disposes of the jewels for them and invests the money, also he takes Binney into his large brokerage office in Boston. Binney does very well, is introduced into society by Gertrude, and advanced to a confidential position by Worthen. Binney hears various rumors that Worthen's business is no more than a bucket-shop; but his faith is so great he will not believe until his eyes are opened by the discovery that Worthen has fleeced one of the customers Binney himself has brought to the office. To think it over he goes home, after questioning Worthen about his father's account. While talking to his father the next morning a letter arrives from Worthen announcing that the thirty thousand dollars is lost and six thousand dollars besides. Old Mr. Hartwell drops dead of heart disease from the shock, and Binney goes back to Boston, where he forces Worthen to give up the accounts with his father. He also demands a copy of the old will which Stidger has been trying to get hold of for some reason, and which had been given to Worthen for safe keeping. Worthen tells him Gertrude has it, and Binney goes to her. She knows nothing of his loss of money or his father's death, and is disturbed at his manner. She finally gives him the will, but in such a way that he, thinking it some worthless old paper, tosses it into the fire. Not till it is consumed does he realize what he has done.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOME.

WITHOUT surprise, and indeed without resentment, I recall that I slowly smiled as I turned again to Gertrude. She was rising.

"Now!" she said defiantly. Yet there came a little catch in her breath as our eyes met, and she looked at me as if wondering how a man could smile at such a time. When I asked her to sit she took her chair again, but nervously, as wondering what I would do.

"You can do what you please," I said, "with anything of mine. And now that thing can make no more trouble."

"And you aren't angry?" she asked.

"I am sorry that I provoked you to it," I replied. Indeed, I have never been angry with her for it, then or since.

She struggled with perplexity. "But Binney!" she cried, half piteously, beginning to feel regret.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for December 9.

"But Gertrude!" I imitated, not unkindly. "Do you suppose I will let such a little thing come between you and me?" She was beginning to look grateful when I added, "We'll forget it. It's of no consequence, anyway. I was just getting my things together before going away."

"Oh," said Gertrude.

Just a dry little word, dryly uttered. She looked at me very strangely, then became entirely composed and formal. She settled herself again in her chair as if she were leading in the ritual of an afternoon tea. "You have found new employment?" She might have asked me "Cream or lemon?"

"Only the old one," I answered. "Farming."

"Ah?" she inquired. "Indeed?" The next question should have been "Sugar?" But she said, "You are tired of the city?" Quite conventional.

I found myself growing indignant. "Very," I replied, and equally formal. "And you see it's spring, and time to plow."

"To plow," mused Gertrude daintily. "Strange!" And then she asked me, with a little lifting of the eyebrows: "You like it?"

"Very much," I answered doggedly, and rose. "Well, good-by." And I added, in her own vein, "So good of you to have seen me."

"So good of you to have come," she responded, quite according to the book. She offered me her fingers, and I touched them listlessly. Then I was out of the room and on the landing, and finally on the straight flight leading down. If my head was as high as the indignation of my spirit I must have looked very haughty indeed.

"Binney," said Gertrude softly above me.

Her tone would have wheedled the edge off a chisel. I stopped and looked up. She was leaning over the railing and looking sweetly down. "You have not told me," she said softly, "why your necktie is black."

So sudden were the turns of her mind that I never could follow her gracefully. Bluntly I answered: "My father is dead."

If she was surprised she did not show it. She seemed intent on her next question. "And why did you not tell me?"

Startled, I knew that I must not betray myself by hesitation. I answered promptly: "I did not wish to distress you."

As she studied me searchingly, I realized that there might be two interpretations of the answer. But I stood her gaze until, to my relief, it seemed satisfied. She answered, "Thank you, Binney."

And then I saw the girl, so oddly changeable, show her womanliness. For first she breathed, "That kind father!" And then—did not the tears start to her eyes? "Your poor mother!"

Emotion was dangerous. I feared to stay lest I betray too much. So I let the great fact explain itself, said my few words of thanks for sympathy, and forced myself away. I was glad to take this remembrance of her.

Before I went to my lodgings I sent a message to Joe, appointing an hour for him to lunch with me. And when my landlady had been paid, and my belongings packed and sent to the station, I met the good fellow at a restaurant, where for the last time (until my honeymoon) I ordered a city meal.

And Joe, kind soul, had slicked himself up, and sat on the edge of his chair, and was as satisfied as if he had been dining with his employer, or some one who could be of use to him. Yet all these months Joe must have known that my fall was sure to come, unless I chose (bless him for his faith that I would not!) to give my soul to Mr. Worthen's keeping.

I could not long pretend that things had not changed with me. My spirits were not good; and besides, I saw Joe eying my somber garb, and trying to find cour-

age to ask the reason for it. So I told him of my father's death, and added, "I must run the farm."

Though for my bereavement he was truly sorry, he could not help smiling with delight when I told him that I had broken with Mr. Worthen. He reached across the table and wrung my hand. "Binney, this is worth a good deal to me."

"Worth thirty thousand dollars to me," said I. So, reaching the point at last, I told him all my misfortunes.

It was not hard to confess to Joe, especially since, unconsciously assuming a thoroughly professional air, he set himself to listen intently. There are some men whose knowledge of the world comes early; it rises from insight rather than experience. I am no such man. Years hence, I suppose, I shall still be repeating the blunders of my youth, while my wise children regard me indulgently, as hopeless. But Joe is of the sort who, once fairly started, seem to accrue sense as some men gain money. True, my haphazard roughness had been needed to free him from Stidger. But the boy in Joe, except for his diffident manner, was already dropping from sight. I perceived in him now a new quality of dependableness, and before I had finished the story of my interview with Mr. Worthen I felt that I was appealing for his advice.

"A very high-handed performance," he chuckled first. But then he asked pointedly: "You mean only to hold those papers over his head? Why not sue him for your money?"

"Plainly, Joe," I inquired, "what chance would I have?"

"Plainly, then," he returned, "very little. We know very well in our office how smart he is at evading such suits."

"But why," I demanded, "should he ever have treated me so?"

"Because you asked your money back," explained Joe. "And meanwhile he'd scattered it."

"Spent it?" I cried. "Wasn't it a mere nothing to him?"

Joe shook his head. "It's common knowledge that he's always on the edge. And it happens that just at present he's closer pressed than usual. That's why he turned on you—but it's also why he's willing to stand your assault on him this morning. Ordinarily he'd have you into court for it, and would exact every cent of the money he claims that you owe. But all winter he's been where to start one suit might have the result of starting a dozen against him. Some even say that the Federal authorities are quietly looking into his operations."

I sat amazed. It was part of my happy innocence that these rumors had never come to me.

"That's why," went on Joe, "you ought to have got his receipt in full, as you did for Mr. Canby. For should his creditors sue him, his books might show that he had a claim on you."

"I might really be involved?" I asked.

"Leave that to me," he said. "Before night I will have his receipt for you."

Joe would have his receipt for me! And this was the boy I had protected, now protecting me. He thought it all over, then nodded positively. "You sha'n't be drawn into it at all. Unless you wish to begin it yourself."

"No," I said. "It would be a heartbreaking experience for mother, and sickening to drag through, even for me." Then I thought further of Mr. Worthen's position, and asked: "If things go wrong with him, what will Gertrude do?"

"Why," answered Joe, "give Mr. Worthen a smart lawyer and he'll be able to start again. His daughter will not suffer, especially since you don't intend to expose him. Unless, of course, it's prison for him."

"Prison!" I cried.

"Why not?" he rejoined. "He's been ruining men for years. Shouldn't he taste a little of the disgrace and the despair?" He added, practically: "He's liable enough."

Liable! I thought of Canby. Hard labor for life! I thought of my father in

his grave, and became reconciled to the idea that the man at whose table I had sat should go to prison. Yet he was Gertrude's father!

"You couldn't prevent it, you know," remarked Joe, reading my face.

Indeed I could not, and I turned from the subject. "Joe," I said, "you must be my lawyer in Boston if ever I need one. I mean to give you a key to my vault box. You can put Mr. Worthen's receipt there."

"Very well," he agreed.

There being not too much time before departure, I called the waiter. Then, as I took out my purse to pay for the lunch, I was dismayed to find how little money I had; after tipping the man there remained scarcely twenty dollars. I winced to recognize that the old times had come again. I must pinch. No more free spending. Pocket money was to be as nearly as possible like pocket pieces, to be kept to look at. I had only a little money in the bank. What father had at home I did not know; but I wondered, with a strange feeling of emptiness after my hearty lunch, whether the seed and fertilizer, which father had shown me stored at the barn, had yet been paid for. I could never pay for it.

"Binney," asked Joe, who must have noticed my fascinated study of the slender purse, "have you got your pay from Mr. Worthen?"

"Why, no," I answered, surprised. "He hasn't paid me for two months." It was my reason, I now remembered, for having so little money at the bank.

"I'll look after that," said Joe competently.

"No!" I cried. "No money from him!"

"See here," and Joe assumed command. "If I'm your lawyer you must do as I say. Of course you'll take his money."

"Think where he gets it," I protested. "It's blood-money!"

"If it is," returned Joe, "it was bled from you."

Therefore I acquiesced. I took Joe to the bank, made him free of my safe-deposit box, and after a hearty handshake, left him.

My first impulse was to take a carriage to my train, my next to board a car. But then, believing myself to have plenty of time, I began the practise of economy. A nickel was worth saving. So I walked.

It was thus that I met Denny. He came swinging along Washington Street, jaunty in his carriage, very loud of dress. I placed myself in his way. When he saw me he colored, side-stepped, and tried to pass. But I detained him.

"I'm in a hurry," he objected.

"There's always time to say good-by," I answered.

"So," said he, pausing perforce (for a hand on the arm is a good argument), "you've met your finish?" Then he bit his lip and looked away.

I laughed. "The truth was startled from you, Denny. So you knew I was down here for the purpose of scientific plucking?"

He would not meet my eye, but mumbled, as he looked down: "I had nothing to do with it."

"And thanks to you for that," I answered. "But Denny, what next? Are you going to keep on helping at the miserable business of ruining the innocent?"

He grew defiant. "I simply buy and sell, according to orders. No one can hold me liable."

"You never warned me, Denny," I said, "but I'm going to warn you. Remember this word that I say to you now. Conscience, man; conscience!"

He fell back and glared resentfully. "That's my affair," he mumbled.

I clapped him on the shoulder. "True. And I suppose no one, since you left your mother's side, has interfered to prevent your helping at the devil's business. Go your own way, man. But Denny, I challenge you to forget my warning."

So I left him, having committed the social sin of reminding him indirectly of God, and, incidentally, of his mother.

And falling into a slow step while I thought of his self-persuasion of innocence, and of how a man will deliberately shut his eyes to his responsibility, I so lost account of time that when I saw the station clock I stood disgusted at it. My train had gone.

But I thus was given time for taking farewell of the city. I walked to State Street, whose busy hum had not yet subsided, and I saw without bitterness those rapids of finance, whence other men drew fish, but where I had lost bait and tackle. I went through the shopping district (where once or twice I had gone with Gertrude) and looked indulgently on the fripperies in the windows, because in their mysterious way they made the girls so fine. And I crossed the Common and the Garden, and looked for a time down the vista of the avenue, where the delicate green of the first buds made the trees begin to look alive.

I saw a man and a girl go by whose engagement was expected soon; and I believed the rumor, for so absorbed in each other were they that they did not see me at all. I bowed to a carriage or two, then turned back, lest perchance I should see Gertrude again. I crossed Beacon Hill on my way to the station, and having time, took the roundabout route in front of the State House, where I turned and looked back. I could see the Back Bay, and the shopping district, and Dorset my tailor's, and waved them all a good-by. I was finished, even if I was not cured. So I went and boarded my train, having under my arm my supper of rolls and cheese and chocolate, purchased at a grocery, to save me from the expense of the dining-car.

As Bunker Hill Monument glided out of my sight, reminding me of my first coming to the city, I felt a miserable sinking, not of the heart, but of the stomach, which I am inclined to think is the organ of all unwelcome emotions. I was going away short; the farmer and his diamonds had been separated; there would be a week's gossip about me, and much wagging of heads. I tried to smile cynically; but I knew well enough where the fault lay, and understood that the place where I should do least mischief was the farm. Also there was some relief in the idea of burying myself where even my townsfolk would be unable to point at me.

If there was one notion at which I could take any satisfaction, it was that the score between Gertrude and me stood a little in my favor. I had not bothered her with any good-bys; I had kept my secret from her, so that she need not despise her father on my account. For I felt pretty sure that the gossip concerning my plucking would be kept from her; people aren't so cattish as the novelists make out. Gertrude would feel vexed at my boorishness in thus departing; but vexation would be a deal pleasanter than knowing the truth. And once a year I would send her a basket of apples, or some of our best butter, to give her distinctly to understand that I was a farmer now, and nothing more.

I see now the boyishness of this program. It proves that I was miserably sore.

Our train was delayed by nearly an hour in reaching Athol, and as a consequence I reached home not far from midnight. For I had walked the seven miles, carrying my bag and umbrella and hold-all, a model of thrift. A hundred times I blessed the darkness that covered my fatigue and my shame. My arms and shoulders, back and legs, but above all, my hands, continually gripping, were sore and cramped long before I had passed half the distance.

Again and again I sat down to rest, and mopped my face in the frosty air, and thought of myself in my fine city clothes plodding thus through the country, and coming back, a failure and a fool, to the life I had so confidently left. I was so soft from lack of exercise that when I reached the farm I fairly dragged myself through the yard on my way to the barn. For mother was asleep, and I would not rouse her. I entered the barn

by the little door, dropped my bags, and groping my way to the ladder that led to the loft, climbed it and threw myself into the hay.

At first I was so tired that I could not sleep. I listened to the noises of the barn. One horse was awake, champing, and then pausing to drag hay out of the rack. Some of the cows, too, were softly mumbling their cuds. But the heavy breathing of the others made a peaceful undertone that gradually calmed my senses. Here was I among the cattle, on the old farm. I felt like a little boy, and snuggled deeper, and dropped asleep.

CHAPTER XXV.

REORGANIZING.

OUR big rooster waked me. I suppose a train might have thundered by and never roused me; but the suddenness of the shrill cockcrow opened my eyes. My surprise at seeing above me cobwebbed rafters, at finding the hay tickling me, while I lay there fully dressed, finished the work of waking me. The last note of the call was still echoing in my brain while I scrambled to the ladder.

In the milk-room were the pails, scrubbed and ready for use. I looked in vain for overalls; and so, after a good wash at the pump, in my business clothes I fed the cows and sat down to the milking. It pleased me to suppose that the cows remembered me; at any rate, not one of them objected to my handling. And so I sat and listened to the streaming of the milk into the pail, and the contented munching of the beasts, until I felt myself humble and content, and fell to singing softly.

I was roused by the feeling that some one was near me, and turning my head, saw my mother standing a few feet away watching me. "Hullo," I cried. "You see I got ahead of you."

"When did you come?" she asked.

I explained. "Amusing, eh?" She did not answer. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

Then as I looked at her more closely in the dusky passage, I saw that she was weeping. I sprang up. "Mother, what is wrong?"

"Oh, Binney," she cried, "to see you sitting there in those clothes, and doing such work!"

"I will be in overalls next time," I said, "and that will be entirely natural. Good morning, mother," and I kissed her affectionately.

She clung to me, still weeping. "Oh, my dear boy, you ought to be in the city, at better work. Let us give up the farm. I'll go with you."

My heart leaped at the proposal, for I knew just how hard the lonely work was to be, compared with the pleasures of the city. But my shame was still strong; and (this credit I can claim for myself) I knew what the uprooting would mean to mother. I had done her harm enough. Here at least I could create, and be a useful citizen.

"No, mother," I answered. "Here is the place for me."

She drew back and looked at me anxiously. "Binney," she asked, "you aren't hoping to find another box?"

"Not a bit," I assured her. "There probably won't be another in my lifetime."

Mother hesitated before her next question. "And that girl?"

"Gertrude? I am best out of her way," I answered. I meant, best for Gertrude, for I doubted if I could see her again without her worming from me the secret of our disaster. But mother thought I meant best for myself, and sighed, and looked at me sorrowfully. Then she cried a little more and was content.

But one thing she said with truth. "I have lost two of you, your father and yourself. For my boy has changed, and will never be the same again."

"I am both sore and sorry," I answered. "How then can I ever go back.

But let us hope, mother, that your boy is on the way to becoming a man."

Thus the day began for me a new life, which had to be different from the old. I could look at nothing as before. One thing showed the difference as scarcely anything else could do. Rummaging in my room, I came across the old knife which I had used when looking for treasure, and which I had been sharpening on that day when Stidger came for Joe. It was still keen from the grindstone and the hone, and I put it in my pocket because it might prove useful. But I knew I should be too busy to hunt for boxes; and besides, I dreaded the ill fortune which the next one might bring me.

That evening, though dog-tired from the unaccustomed work, I went with mother over father's accounts. It was with the greatest relief that I found all bills paid, and about a hundred dollars in the bank. When the funeral expenses were discharged I should still have something to the good. And mother acquiesced in my accepting the money which, in that day's mail, Joe sent me from Mr. Worthen.

" Besides," she said practically, " your treasure find, in spite of all its harm, has left us something. We are all painted and shingled afresh. You have the silo, and the blower to fill it, and the engine. There are all the other new tools. Since you must work single-handed, these things will help you. And for me there is the new stove, and the washing-machine, and the sofa for my resting, and the new pots and pans and dishes. And great outfitting through the house. As if," mother added with a tremulous smile, " we foresaw that as money the fortune must go, but in other forms we might keep it."

Work pressed on me swiftly and heavily. My still soft muscles could hardly stand the strain of the next few days. Once after supper I laid my head on my arms at the table and slept till mother roused me at bedtime. And though I rose earlier than ever, and worked till I thought I should drop, I never properly finished the tasks of each day. And the plowing, not yet begun, loomed up to appal me. Mother, when I told her of my dismay, gave me a reason.

" You've grown too thorough, Binney. We can't slick up the farm every day, like the desks in a city office. Your father was content to do the main part of the work and let the rest go. So must you."

But as I thought the matter over I reached a different conclusion. I was carrying too great a burden of work. There were too many cows; which of them were worth their keep? There were more horses than we needed; some of them must go. More tillage was planned than one man could well maintain. The rest must go into hay—and lucky was I to have the new machinery. For not only had we the ordinary tools, from seeder to mower, but on my departure for the city father had bought loader and hoister of the best make in order to do the work alone.

We had plenty of storage room, and I could team our surplus to Athol in the winter, when work was slack and prices high. By such a scheme as this I was likely to do better than father. So my first week of work, when I applied what little business training I had had, was very valuable to me. It paved the way to many labor-saving schemes, and to methods of testing results, such as milk-weighing, and ration experiments, and (in mother's domain) to trap-nests for the poultry.

It all took time and thought, but led to many ideas and conclusions, yes, and to results which, if ever I should begin writing of them here, would thickly pad this book. I leave them, though unwillingly. For this part of my life is as real to me as any other, quite as critical, quite as desperately earnest. It should be interesting to any one else—if only I could make it so.

The time came to plow, and mother stood by to watch me get out the New Universal, bought in the fall, used now

for the first time. Before I seeded any of the broken land, I was going to break a piece of old sod on the eastern slope, now well drained, but not too dry, and ready for the share. Mother had acquiesced in my plan for smaller tillage operations and bigger mowings, and now, I knew, breathed a prayer after me as I left the barnyard.

My muscle was hard, now. I knew my horses. And as I began the work, and drove a furrow along the side of the ten-acre piece, and turning, saw that it was as straight as ever I made in my life, I on my part gave a little sob of thanksgiving and hope, a sob that surprised me by showing how deeply my heart was stirred by this beginning.

The work soon absorbed me, partly perhaps from its difficulty. I know that in favored localities (Concord, for example) the plow meets no obstruction, and a man digging is surprised and disgusted if anything stops his spade before reaching full depth. But in Petersham digging is slow on account of the stones, and the surprise is quite the other way. And though on the farm our walls testify to a century and a half of stone clearing, and our smaller boulders are mostly blasted, stones from twenty to a hundred pounds weight seem continually to work up from below.

When the plow meets them, sometimes in every other furrow, the plowman must heave them to the surface (that is, if he wants to do a good job, and to save risk to his harrow) and must set them up on edge, to come for them later. It rests the horses, but it tires the man, and it much delays the work. This morning I found plenty of such stones in a field which had not been plowed for a number of years. I was prepared for them, having, in sockets on my plow handles, a spade and a short crowbar.

I plowed and dug and pried and heaved without ceasing, until I knew, as noon approached, that Cousin Lon himself could scarcely have done better. In Petersham he had the name of our best worker. With the thrust of an arm he did what an ordinary man would have to put his back into; his endurance was extreme. This last I had not gained. The afternoons were still very long for me, and for weeks yet I was to crawl home dog-tired, not yet able to prove, as my neighbors were doing daily, that in spite of the weight of his worries a man is a better animal than his horse or his ox. But I already felt my manhood coming upon me, for I guided my plow, and wrestled with the stones, with an unexpected ease and satisfaction.

I had planned to eat in the field, this being washing day, and one on which many of my city things had to be laundered for their long rest in my bureau. So to ease mother's labor I had taken my lunch with me. At noon I paused to gloat over the many furrows of black loam, where not a spear of grass showed, while here and there stood up the rugged stones, monuments of my achievements. I unhooked the flagging horses from the plow, changed their bridles for their feed-bags, and approached my own nook, where Jones guarded my lunch.

The tin pail stood in the shade, and I set beside it the dripping can which I brought from the spring, close at hand. But a delicious odor arrested me as I prepared to sit, and I looked about me.

On a peeled apple-shoot, projecting from a crevice in the wall, hung a doughnut!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A WARNING.

THE crisp brownness, the smell, and indeed the very fact that it was there, meant Margery. Mother seldom made doughnuts, and then apologetically, as it was hopeless to compete with Margery, who never made a batch without saving some for me. In fact, mother's cooking, good as it was, and far above the average to be met with on our farms, was rather a triumph of intellect,

as befitting one trained for a schoolmistress, than an emanation, such as is the spontaneous product of genius. Margery had a feminine instinct for clothes, for cooking, and for comfort.

So she had stolen up and stolen away? Jones would have given tongue at any one else except mother, and here he lay, wagging as if at a joke.

But stay. That long red tongue was reminiscently licking. Could Margery be far away?

He raised himself on his forepaws, wagging very actively. His eye strayed to a little patch of scrub.

"Find her!"

In a flash he had rounded it, and I heard his delighted yelps. There I found Margery, holding high above him a paper parcel at which he was hopefully slobbering.

"One more for Jones," she said, emerging. "And a total of four for you, being quite enough for one meal. And may I sit with you while you eat, Binney?"

Might she! But she had to repeat her question before I answered it. For her personality, as Gertrude's once before, suddenly possessed me. She was like a little brown thrush in the neatness of her monotone. Her dress was a plain, serviceable gingham, finely checked, simply girt, and with no ornament except, at the throat, a simple gold pin of her mother's. But the dress wonderfully set off the trigness of her figure.

I am not so foolish as to contend that Margery was unaware how simplicity became her. Further, nature was good to her, I admit, in waving her hair, and in curling those tendrils that escaped at temples and at nape, so that the small, shapely head seemed always to be adorned: a compensation to busy Margery as against Gertrude, who had the leisure to frizz her otherwise lank locks. Now Margery could go out in any weather, and take no thought of it. In slicker and sou'wester she was a very wholesome sight.

And just now this wholesomeness, and the steadfastness that gazed out of her brown eyes, and was ensconced in the short round chin and the lips that were both sweet and firm, seemed specially evident. I was absorbed, so that she had to repeat, in some surprise, her question:

"Mayn't I sit with you?"

So I welcomed her.

It was pleasant to have her there with me, seated half facing, so that I could view her without turning. She had had her lunch, but admitted some interest in mine, for she nibbled at the bread and cheese, and took toll of mother's pie. But she soon came to business, for she said: "You don't inquire to what you owe the honor of this visit."

"Now, Margery," I exclaimed, crestfallen, "I was enjoying the idea that you came just for the fun of it."

She shook her head. "Too busy. But father was over in the wood-lot, and I wanted to see you by yourself, because I've had a letter from Gertrude." And she drew it from her pocket.

"You've hurt her feelings," reproached Margery. "You left the city without saying good-by, and here she has only just found—that is, two or three days back—that you have gone. She wants an explanation."

"Then you must give me your advice," I said.

She listened very gravely while I told why I had fled from Gertrude's inquisitiveness, fearing to let her know that her father had robbed me. ("She doesn't know," interjected Margery. "That explains a good deal.") I went on, rather reluctantly, to expound my theory that Gertrude was well quit of me; but I showed that I felt myself virtuous in sparing her. Whereat Margery frowned.

"But is it friendly?" she asked. "Gertrude has been kind to you; few girls could or would have done so much. You can't drop her without another word."

I asked her what I should do.

"Write to her," said Margery firmly. "You need say no more than good-by, but you can at least say that."

She was right, and I promised it.

"She has something else on her mind," Margery went on, "but I can't make it out. I half believe it's the real occasion of her letter. She says she's afraid of something her father may do; she'd tell you if you were there; but perhaps nothing may come of it after all. And then she closes rather abruptly. Perhaps you can see to what she refers."

I couldn't. Unless, I thought, Gertrude wishes to toll me back again, the coquet. But I couldn't suggest this to Margery. So I repeated that I couldn't see to what she referred, since I felt myself free from her father's clutches. I had the papers and accounts; Joe had got me his receipt: Mr. Worthen could not lay hand on me. Yes, but I counted that he could do me no purely malicious mischief, which I soon learned to be my great mistake.

It was now that Jones growled. And we saw, coming into the field at the lowered bars, a man on horseback. He did not at first see us, but paused and scanned the field. Margery and I knew him at first glance. No one else that we had ever seen dressed so trimly, or rode so precisely, with a horse so perfectly shaped and neatly accoutered. And while I sat wondering what should bring Collester there, and whether perhaps Gertrude had come also, Margery sprang to her feet and called and waved to him.

He rode to us, but with a deliberation that seemed expressed by the gait of his horse, which, being used to level going, had to be urged over the furrows. And though when the rider came near he lifted his hat, Margery turned to me with swift surprised questioning at his grave face. He greeted us, at close hand, very kindly, but did not dismount.

"I'm here for only a few minutes," he said. "I must get myself and my horse on the freight-train that starts from Athol before three. But I have a message for Mr. Hartwell."

"I'll go away," said Margery quickly, while I was still wondering at his intention to travel in a box car.

"Really," responded Collester, "I think you'd better hear it, too."

We stood waiting, while he, sitting above us, seemed to be searching for the right beginning. And once again I gave him my grudging admiration, not only for his lack of concealment of his embarrassment, but presently for the direct simplicity with which he stated his errand.

"I saw Miss Worthen three days ago. She was troubled because she had let slip to her father the fact that the old copy of your ancestor's will had been destroyed."

"Destroyed!" breathed Margery, startled.

She gave me one quick, searching look. She never asked me what had happened; but seeing that I was not surprised, and connecting Gertrude with the affair, she simply accepted the fact, and worked forward from it.

I tried to think. This must be what Gertrude had referred to in her letter. Had she told Collester how the copy had been burned? How much of a grudge had her father against me? And would he gratify it by telling Stidger?

Margery, more quickly, since she had more to adjust herself to, came to the same point, but more positively.

"What," she asked, half to herself, "will Mr. Stidger do?"

"What can he do?" I demanded.

"A good deal," replied Collester.

I looked at him, puzzled.

"You both thought of Stidger," said he. "So did Gertrude. So did I. And I wanted to know why he should want to get in his hands the mere copy of a will. So I went to Worcester, to the register of probate of this county, and asked him to see the original will. And there was no original."

"None?" I cried.

"None!" he answered positively. "A fire some forty years ago destroyed many records of the first quarter of the century. And Stidger knows this. Within a week after your find, last fall, he was inquiring for the original will.

"And unless there are other copies," pursued Collester, with an inexorable completeness, "or unless there are enough witnesses to establish the conditions of the old will, Mr. Alonzo Hartwell would stand a good chance of winning a suit for the recovery of the gems which were found in his wall."

"Our copy is lost," cried Margery. "It hasn't been seen for many years. I searched the house for it last fall, when Mr. Stidger was so anxious to see Binny's."

"We were to have had Mr. Worthen make a copy of ours," I supplemented. "But Mr. Stidger never asked for it, and so it never was made."

"Who has seen your copy?" asked Collester.

"I never read it," said Margery. "Even father knew the terms only by hearsay."

"Gertrude had not read it," added Collester.

"Mother has read it," said I. "And I can almost say it by rote."

"You are interested parties," replied Collester. "Who else?"

"Stidger himself."

"Will lie," commented Collester.

"And finally Mr. Worthen," I added. "That's all."

Collester shook his head. "If Mr. Worthen tells this news to Stidger, we may be sure that he is prepared to give shuffling witness in court. Therefore," and Collester looked at Margery, "if Stidger begins again to hang about your father, it will be common sense to bring all possible influence to bear on the other side."

It was his simple assumption that Margery would stand against her own worldly interest.

"Oh," she cried, with sudden tears in her eyes, "I cannot be sure of my influence over father." She was distressed beyond measure.

"But Mr. Collester," I demanded, "will it count for nothing that the two families have always acted on the terms of the will as I can state them, that the whole town believes in them, and that no claim was made on me when I first found the box?"

"That is your line of defence," answered Collester. "But it is a very pretty tangle. Given a clever lawyer for the claimant, and persistence on both sides, and before many years the value of both farms will be eaten up by fees."

Margery spoke. "I will do my best." She began to dry her eyes.

As for me, rather than complain of this trap in which I found myself, I set my teeth and said nothing. Then Collester gathered up his reins.

Even before I could stretch out my hand to prevent him (for surely there was more to say) Margery seized the bridle. "Mr. Collester," she cried, "you have done all this traveling, and inquiring, and have brought this warning, just for us!"

He answered: "As soon as I suspected the situation, there was nothing else to do."

It was plain that he had acted on his own accord, not on Gertrude's orders. At any rate, so Margery thought, for she said: "You could simply have left it alone."

With a serious smile, he shook his head. "Not with you two good people so unsuspecting here." And he pointed to our peaceful valley. Then, as if his glance was caught by the beauty of the scene, he sat in momentary quiet, and mused upon it.

Between perplexity and gratitude (which I never found easy of expression) I was tongue-tied. And besides, an urgent question puzzled me. Why should he have done so much? Why was it for me rather than for Margery? I knew it to be so. Why was it?

Then recalling himself, with a very kindly smile he turned to me. "If ever you need to fight, let me help you." He held out his hand for good-by.

At this last expression of good-will my throat became unmanageable, and I could only wring his hand. I think he saw my

difficulty, for after but a look he turned to Margery. She, too, could only press his hand—but though our difficult farewell was voiceless, it was expressive. He turned his horse, raised his hat, and cantered away, while we stood gazing.

Not until he was gone from sight did we two look at one another. Then said Margery: "Father might take away your farm, Binney." For of course there was nothing else with which to pay a judgment against me.

I could not make the cruel answer that she at least would be so much better off, for such a change I knew she would count as a loss. So I told her that I could make a home for mother elsewhere.

She answered passionately that I should not have to. Yet the very extremity of her feeling betrayed her doubt; and when she almost abruptly left me I knew that she as well as I could not bear to speak of the future.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LIKE DAMOCLES.

THAT was a refined torture which set the Sicilian flatterer under a sword hanging by a hair, to study a prince's feeling of security. Suspense! For weeks I was doomed to it.

On that afternoon of bad news I finished my plowing at five, and went home to the chores. That day I felt no fatigue: the new worry keyed me up. The chores finished, while mother was still cooking supper I shaved, dressed for riding, and sat down to write Gertrude a masterpiece of a letter, brief and cutting.

"Going riding?" asked mother, when again I came to the kitchen.

"It's time I came out of my shell," I replied. "I'm going to the post-office to-night."

"I knew that something had happened," said mother, quiet and very certain. "Tell me." So I told her all the story, from the burning of the will (which I had suppressed) to Collester's news.

I think it was not till then that I understood mother's great self-command. At father's death the torture of my conscience, together with my anger at Mr. Worthen, had blinded me to everything outside myself. But now I was able to recognize what the new danger must mean to mother, so deeply centered in the farm. She had no other place to turn to, for her childhood's home had long been broken up. But she took the news very quietly.

"Let us remember," she said, "that to leave the farm is a plan which we have already once considered."

"But I have fought one fraud against our ownership," I groaned. "I hate to yield to another."

"We will yield," decided mother calmly, "if the first decision goes against us. Appeals may take ten years of your life, and then what are you but a soured and quarrelsome man? And what of the peace of my old age?"

I knew that she was right, and even high-minded. But I could not help suggesting: "The last two boxes?"

"Ah, Binney," said mother pityingly, "are you counting on those?"

"Mother," I cried, "you know I haven't looked once since I returned. But they lie here somewhere. Some chance—"

"It is the gambler's word," interrupted mother. "And seventy years of chance have passed them by. Will you set your life on the turn of the wheel, or will you make your own fortune?"

She shamed me, and I submitted.

"And now," she said, "will you show me your letter to Gertrude, unless it is too private?"

I handed it to her, and she read it slowly. Then she shook her head. "Burn it, my boy," she said as she handed it back. "Letters are terrible things. I don't know your feeling for Gertrude, but you mustn't put on paper a hint of a reproach for an act that can't be repaired."

I felt this, and admitted it, and burned

the letter. Then after supper I wrote Gertrude a cheerful good-by, told her that my luck was still good, and mounted Peter for my ride to the post-office.

Since my return I had not once been there, for I had dreaded facing my townsmen at the common meeting-place. Margery had brought our mail, or occasionally mother had driven to the store. But if ever I was to meet my neighbors, I might as well begin.

Folk are usually kind. If there were nudgings and whisperings while I did mother's errands, I was not aware of them. The postmaster shook my hand and spoke of father; the clerks, old friends of mine, welcomed me back, and hoped that I could pitch for the nine whose practise was to begin as soon as the rush of spring work was over. So as I cantered homewards in the fine, bright evening I felt that the world was friendly.

And then, as I neared Cousin Lon's driveway, a ramshackle buggy turned out of it into the road before me, and headed toward Athol. Its occupant was narrow-shouldered and shabby; clear-cut against the fading sky I saw the fuzz of his hat-brim. Stidger! So Mr. Worthen had told! And I drew rein.

Then there came to me on the quiet air his flatted whistle.

I stood still and let him pass on. He had not seen me. But trust in the kindness of the world fell away from me; darkness came over my soul. When I saw our house again it was no pleasure to me, for I was going to lose it. I stabled Peter and walked wearily indoors. At my face mother exclaimed, and I told her what I had seen.

"Binney," she gently reproached me, "already losing heart?"

"But he was whistling," I replied.

"Still," returned mother, "your cousin Lon can't have agreed instantly. Cheer up!"

"If I saw anything to do!" I complained. "I can't appeal to Cousin Lon."

"You can," answered she. "You can believe in him till he turns against you. Begin at once! Go to his house, be friendly, and let him see that you trust him."

"If he will only let me show it!" I groaned. But I saw her good sense, and took a little of her courage.

Now I had, among the books which in my extravagance I had bought in Boston, some very good tales. Kipling was in those days at the first ascent of his fame, and Stevenson's death had set us all to buying sets of his works. So "Soldiers Three" and "Kidnaped" I tucked under my arm, and in the dusk set out for the other farm, depending on the young moon to light me home through the woods, and leaving Jones to take care of mother.

Margery's house was dark and grim in front; but I had seen the gleam in the kitchen window, and as we do in the country, went to the back door. No formality of entrance in Boston ever troubled me as did the approach to this other home of my childhood, until I remembered that I should merely do as usual, and so knocked as I opened the door.

Margery sprang up from her reading, and, knowing who it must be, ran to greet me. A glance beyond her showed Cousin Lon, hastily shoving something under a newspaper that lay on the table. I thought Margery's cordiality was somewhat apprehensive, and her talk intended to give her father time. Cousin Lon pushed up his spectacles on his forehead, and having concealed his occupation. turned in his chair and told me to come in.

I suppose he thought me very young and foolish. Like all the Hartwells, I had lost my money. Like any youth, I had as yet no judgment. I was the only one in town who could ever rival him in strength. All these things must have often been in his mind as he considered me. I know I thought of them now as he moved to the window and took out his pipe.

It is a miserable endeavor, the attempt to interest an elder who has little in common with the younger generation. Efforts

at conversation are so easily snubbed. The old know more of the signs of the weather, of farming, of business, of politics. On most matters they have formed a settled judgment, against which the comments of the young seem impertinent or at least callow. The best working arrangement is polite abstraction. In his home Mr. Worthen had seemed to regard Gertrude and me as kittens gamboling on the hearth. Never again, by Heaven, would he think of me as harmless. But to-night Cousin Lon's heavy silence was more forbidding. I was a mosquito. Let me not buzz too near!

" I have brought Margery a couple of books," I said. " Perhaps, Cousin Lon, they will interest you, too."

He did not look at me, but continued filling his pipe. " I seldom read."

Now, farmers have a great contempt for improving literature, especially if it deals with farming. I hastened to add, " They're merely stories."

" Stories never," he said shortly, and struck a match.

" Kipling I know," said Margery, busy with the books. " But who is this man Stevenson?"

Now, though R. L. S. was so long before the American public, he was new to me. I had my first enthusiasm to aid me in telling Margery about him, and in fighting against the silence of the gaunt figure in the window. If it heard me, it gave no sign.

Now, in telling Margery about Stevenson, the thought of " Treasure Island " rose constantly to my mind, and I had hard work to keep it out of my speech. That tale of hidden treasure, won from buccaneers, ought not just now to be mentioned before Cousin Lon, though I resolved that Margery should see the book at our house, and read it there, if she would. In fact, she did so, for having once dipped into it, she ran over twice in working hours (entirely wrong, but she declared she could not help it) and read the book intensely until she had finished. Our affair, she said to me with a sigh, was different. If we had had the crew of the Walrus prowling about our farms we might have called in the constable.

This evening, however, I talked of " Kidnaped " and its sequel, of the " Master," of " Ebb-Tide," and of the brilliance of Stevenson's style as a virtue quite additional to the interest of his tales. Margery listened willingly. But Cousin Lon never turned his head, nor asked a question, nor gave any sign that he heard. And after some twenty minutes, deciding that I would trouble him no more—in fact, beginning to appear to myself like a puppy yapping near a mastiff, I said good night and went to the door.

Margery stepped out with me, and after closing the door behind her she whispered eagerly, " Come again, and come often. It is the best way for you to soften him."

" I saw that Stidger came," I said. " What did they do?"

" Father has taken his papers, and is looking them over. But that needn't mean anything. Good night."

I trudged home, to tell mother that her wisdom had agreed with Margery's. I slept better than I expected.

But the sword was hung over my head, and the danger was never out of my mind. Every day's work at plowing or seeding might be for the benefit of some one else —and of whom? If it should all go to Margery and Cousin Lon, I could reconcile myself. But I had concluded that Stidger was merely working for himself, and that he would put in so large a bill for services that Cousin Lon, unable to pay, would have to give him some hold upon our farm. And that would be unbearable.

For now I hated Stidger quite as much as I had formerly despised him. I had thought him a jackal; he proved to be a hyena. He had smelled blood, he had traced it out, he was prowling for a taste of it—my blood! My work might go to him. Every acre that I was plowing and harrowing and seeding might be reaped by him. The buildings that I had painted, the stock that I had bred, would be for

him to swagger about and gloat over. And the miserable scavenger, who so far had earned no more than pickings, might not merely have our farm to feed him well, but also might some day happen upon our treasure.

The thought would have soured me, but for mother's steadfastness. I never went out to my work, nor came back to my meals, without a draft of courage from the well of hers. And knowing that in working so much alone I was in danger of brooding, she warned me plainly of it, so that when I found myself fretting I could help myself.

Nevertheless, my temper grew somewhat savage at times, the more so as my strength grew on me. It took but a fortnight of the work of plowing and stone-hauling to get me in condition for the heaviest and most continuous labor. I worked more hours, and did more in each. One day I teamed oats from Athol, and as mother watched me carrying the bags into the feed-room, one in each hand, she exclaimed in surprise at me. I was afraid to tell her that at the bottom of these new achievements of mine was a feeling of evil will. As I pitched a bag of oats on to the feed-room floor I wished it were Stidger; as I heaved a two-hundred-pound stone on to the stone-boat I said: "Take that, rat!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SWORD FALLS.

WHILE the time dragged, mother and I made it our affair to maintain good relations with Cousin Lon. Several times a week one or the other of us was at his house for a few minutes' chat. He avoided us if he could; yet, unobtrusively doing as we had always done, we kept our claims before him.

Poor Margery could tell us nothing. She always stole out for a word on the doorstep, and sometimes came over to see us. Her sympathies were clearly ours. "But what can I do?" she asked. "He always puts me off. But he reads all Stidger's letters carefully, and listens to everything he says."

"Margery," I asked one day when I was walking home with her, "doesn't he talk to you about it at all?"

"I never knew him so silent," she answered. "Even when I become desperate, and tell father that Stidger is merely working for himself, he mutters things I cannot hear, and says nothing more. It irritates him if I ask him to repeat. Binney, what can you do with a man if you don't know what he's thinking?"

She was silent for a few moments, then spoke in her father's defence. "He's always been kind to me before. I suppose it's the strength of the temptation."

When I saw tears in her eyes, there began to dawn upon me the hardship of her position. "Margery," I said with some wonder, "I believe you're in quite as much difficulty as we."

"It is not easy, at any rate," she answered, "when your own father is likely to do wrong!"

Now, the wrong was such as the law might permit, and I pointed this out to her. Yet we both had our opinion as to the right of it. And this unity with Margery was most comforting to me. I told her so, holding her hand at parting. "You're as good as a sister."

I thought her inattentive. "Indeed?" she asked absently, withdrawing her hand. "Well, good-by, Binney. Let's hope things will improve."

Trying thus to hope, I went about my daily work, always taking comfort that nothing had yet been done. April passed into May, and May into early June, so that the ball-games had begun—of which I had to content myself with seeing only an inning or two, no longer having time to play, much less to practise. The farm was doing well, for the seedlings had rooted deep in father's rich fertilizer, the fruit-trees had blossomed finely, and everything was coming on finely. But still I had the uncomfortable knowledge

that Stidger came almost weekly to talk with Cousin Lon.

At last I met him. I was on the way to town to get the evening mail, when I happened to note, on a low shoot of wild cherry, a nest of tent-caterpillars. At such a time of day the loathsome things were of course at home; so, getting down from Peter, I drew my heavy knife and cut the shoot. A flat stone and a little pounding despatched the pests; then I rode on. A quarter-mile further on I found another nest; but on dismounting and reaching for my knife, it was missing. Jolted, I supposed, from my pocket.

On foot I went back, Peter docilely following. It was not yet dusk, and as I went I made sure that I did not pass the knife. As far as the corner by which I had so startled Joe the knife was nowhere.

Then I turned the corner, and saw Stidger walking toward me. A rod beyond him was the bush at which I had cut the branch. I scanned the roadside. The gutters had been recently scraped, everything was bare, and the big knife was not visible. There was but one inference.

I stood in Stidger's way. "It's mine," I said.

He stopped. "Good evening. What did you say?"

Now, courtesy was not in his line, and therefore his good manners were suspicious. The surer did I feel that the knife was in his pocket. "If you look at the knife that you've found," I explained, "you'll find my initials on the handle."

A very superior smile. "You have a knife," said he, his pale, thin lip curling nastily, "that you have a habit of sharpening to threaten visitors with. Is that the one you've lost?"

I laughed. "I suppose we mean the same one, since you recognize it. May I have it?"

My good nature must have jarred on him. His irregular and untidy teeth showed as his lip curled further. "I've found nothing." Then he bristled. "Stand out of my way!"

"Just a moment," I said, and remained, regarding him.

I was half inclined to take him and search him. The day was to come when I was to wish I had done so. But now the pleasure of watching his eyes grow redder, and his strained lip paler, and his tense figure begin to shake, quite overcame my desire to recover the knife. Besides, I had been a little ashamed of carrying around so dangerous an implement, useless since I no longer kept up my old-time search. The loss, therefore, looked a little like good-riddance.

"Mr. Stidger," I said genially, "I'll give it to you."

"Give!" he sneered. "Confound you, some day I'll give you something that you'll not want."

I wished to make him betray himself. "Explain," I begged.

But seeing his indiscretion, he exploded in one of his sudden passions. "Stand back and let me pass!" And as if he considered himself a steam-roller he advanced upon me.

I took him by the breast of his jacket.

Now, I have wrestled, and have had my tussles with my fellows, but always in sport. Never before had I felt the strange temptation that sprang from thus having in my grip a man who hated me, and whom I despised. As he strained to get away from me, his little swelling ribs felt like a frail basket beneath my knuckles. With a twist of my wrist I could crack that scrawny framework of his. And suddenly, in preparation for the effort, of itself my arm grew rigid.

"Stand still!" I warned him. The devilish temptation was stronger every moment.

He ceased struggling. Whether he sensed his risk or felt the pressure, he was panting. And seeing fear creep into his eyes, so that he hung back from me, I too was afraid, and let him go.

"I suppose I understand your threat," I said, ashamed at the tingling of my

nerves, and glad that I had not hurt him. "Do what you can, Stidger. You've got a clear field for your dirty work."

Without a word he slipped past me and hurried on. I felt very cheap. Such actions would do me no good.

Indeed they would not. Margery came the next day to reproach me. "Oh, Binney, how could you? Of course you didn't attack Mr. Stidger in the road, but you have given him a chance to make father think you did."

Mother, who had heard my story and disapproved of it, now, like a true parent, tried to come to my defence. But Margery would not listen. "Don't you see," she demanded, "that Binney has simply given the man another means of prejudicing father against him?"

"But," I mumbled, shamefaced, "it has no real bearing on his claim for the jewels."

"Even so," retorted Margery, "every little thing counts just now." She began to plead. "Oh, Binney, won't you let him entirely alone?"

Of course I promised. I would do anything possible to keep Cousin Lon from making his final decision against me. But now the end was near, for, as it appeared, Stidger had another method of approach.

Two nights later I went over for a chat with Margery. It was nearing dusk, but in the dim kitchen the lamp had not been lighted. "Hullo, everybody," I said as I stood in the doorway. When I got no immediate answer, though I plainly heard Margery busy at something, I sensed that something was wrong.

It was scarcely a long second before she answered, "Hullo, Binney"; yet in her voice, strained in the effort to be natural, I found reason for my alarm. Still fumbling with something, she added, "Wait a moment," and at last struck a match. And then I saw before me a little figure that, being entirely new to me, amazed me quite.

A child of eight—no, perhaps of ten. She stood by the table, the light full on her sweet pale face, showing her pinched yet pretty features trembling with a smile of habitual shy apology. Her large dark eyes revealed a pathetic intensity of timid friendliness. And around this appealing countenance curled and hung so much fair hair as to make the head seem much too large for the frail body.

As I smiled at the little one, who instantly, beamingly, responded, I said to myself, reassured: "Nothing is wrong, after all."

"You have a visitor," I said aloud.

"We have visitors," returned Margery.

Disagreeably jarred, I looked toward the windows. Both of them were occupied. Cousin Lon, in his shirt-sleeves, filled the breadth of one, as he looked out at the sky and smoked imperturbably. And in the other window was that well-known narrow figure, with one sharp shoulder turned toward me, and the vulture's head stiffly turned away.

I managed to greet them. In response, the one grumbled and the other growled. And then I turned to the child. "This is—"

"Bertie Stidger," she answered. Her gentle pipe was as sweet as the note of a song-sparrow, and as I held out my hand she put her little one confidingly in it. But her father called harshly.

"Bertie, come here!"

She went, reluctant, but docile. And Margery touching me on the arm, I slipped out with her into the golden dusk. In silence we put the breadth of the yard between us and the house. Then, leaning on the bars of the gate, and watching the dying gleam in the west, we spoke.

"You see!" said Margery.

"Tell me about it," I urged.

"I had no time to warn you," she explained. "It wasn't till father got home from his work to-day that he looked around the kitchen and asked, 'Isn't she here?' So I found I had missed a note of his, which in the morning he had left tucked away where I did not see it. Mr. Stidger had asked that the child might spend a week with us. He's troubled for her health, down in that hot valley."

"H-m!" I doubted. And yet I thought of the frailty of the little being.

"Binney," said Margery earnestly, "he's fond of her."

"He calls her like a dog," I said.

"That was because you were there. When only I am by, he speaks to her gently."

"And that is because you are there," I retorted. "He expects, apparently, to spend the night."

"Yes," admitted Margery. "He came driving over with her, not an hour ago. And he asked if he himself might stay a day or two, just to make sure that she was all right, and so that she shouldn't be homesick. Father agreed, as if he didn't know how to refuse, and yet as if he knew what would be the result of consenting."

I, too, knew the result, and patted her shoulder. "Good little Margery. You have worked hard for us."

She answered pathetically, "I have been so baffled." And she sought her handkerchief.

I went home expectant of the end. But a day passed, and two, and nothing happened. Then on the third day Margery slipped over to tell us that Stidger had gone to Athol, leaving the child behind.

"It must be," she said hopefully, "that we have escaped after all."

It was for this reason that, on the following evening, mother and I together went over to call. But Stidger had returned. He and Cousin Lon sat in their windows in a glum silence, and paid us no attention—which was so rude, even for them, that I felt a sudden disgust at my soft and feminine policy.

"If you went for your mail, I'm sorry," said Margery. "I have it here. Just a long envelope from Athol."

Had I guessed what the cheap brown envelope contained, I should have been able to read, in the attitudes of the men in the windows, not rudeness, but suspense lest I should open it at once. But thinking it to bring merely an advertisement, I opened it, intending to glance at the contents and stuff them in the stove.

But I found a very legal statement that suit had been entered against me for the value of gems found on my cousin's land, and wrongfully taken therefrom.

So at last the sword had fallen. Yet after all I scarcely felt the blow. For looking at my cousin's figure, tense and, I thought, shrinking in his chair, I felt that he was the one to be harmed by this. Morally, what else could happen?

I thought of sparing Margery by saying nothing—yet already, reading something in my looks, she was gazing at me in quick apprehension. Therefore I spoke.

"And so, Cousin Lon, you have done it at last!"

Margery turned like a flash, and her cry of "Father!" rang in the room. Before it we were all silent for a moment. Yet Cousin Lon began heavily lumbering from his chair; and Stidger came bustling forward.

"It was my letter, not his. Everything is now in my charge."

I continued to look at my cousin. "The responsibility is yours, sir. And how can you face your neighbors?"

He could not face even me. Poor Cousin Lon had no hardihood in his mischief; his glance turned from me to mother, and from mother to the floor, and stayed there. As for me, I felt a sudden lift of my spirits.

"Why, mother," I cried, "we need not even reproach him. He knows already what it is to be in the wrong. Come away."

But Margery was crying on mother's shoulder. And Stidger, fuming, came snapping out remarks from which I gathered that he was trying to order us from the house. But when I looked at him he drew back.

"Quiet, little man," I said. "To-morrow is your day, and all the days that come after. But Cousin Lon, take a good look at the miserable creature that you are trusting yourself to."

Now Margery fled away up-stairs, and I drew mother out of the house. She

walked for a long time beside me very sadly, but at last for the life of me I could not help whistling. Mother looked at me in surprise.

"Why," I explained, "it's a real fight now. I'm glad the waiting is over."

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONSULTATIONS.

I WROTE to Collester, enclosing the notice of the suit, and asking for help. The answer, arriving in twenty-four hours, was brief and to the point. He was sorry; he would do his best. And next day, who should come driving into our yard but Joe.

"Rascal!" I cried, as I hauled him from the buggy. "Where is your bag?"

It was in the back of the carriage; he had come from Collester; would we take him in? If he found a box he'd shut his eyes and walk away.

"With it under your arm, I hope," answered I. "Why, how light your suitcase is!"

"You see," explained the simple fellow, "I don't dress as much as you do."

"Indeed!" I mocked. "And look at me now." For beside my overalls his store-clothes were elegant. I felt very much set up by this visit. And after I had established him in his old room, and while mother was frying potatoes for supper, I sat him down by the kitchen window and demanded an account of himself.

Now the sound of frying potatoes is a pleasant undertone to chat. To be sure the occasional snaps do interrupt, but on the whole the pleasant hiss helps talk, on account of the suggestion of the meal to come. Both Joe and I love mother's fried potatoes, so, as we used to do months before, we sniffed the aroma, and let the pleasant sibilance tickle our ears, while we talked. And mother, while busy at the stove, and sometimes sending a fragrant cloud to the ceiling when she turned the potatoes, listened closely.

"I'm sent here for business," began Joe, with a satisfaction that even his modesty could not disguise. "Mr. Collester was good enough to say that he had seen in me signs of—well, signs, you know."

"Of application, and keenness, and common sense," said I. "I know. He's slow in discovering them. Go on."

Blushing, Joe proceeded. "He seemed to think that on account of local knowledge, and familiarity with Stidger's methods, and being unlikely to attract attention, I could help him here. And so I'm promoted!"

I asked him what he was to do.

"Get evidence. You know," he explained, "that there are plenty of old-timers, not only in Petersham, but also in Athol, to whom the provisions of the Hartwell will are a matter of household religion. I know some of these men myself. There may be some who can even remember the previous find, on your land and by the other family, forty years ago, and who will know whether the question of ownership was then raised. I must find all these men and talk with them."

"Mr. Worthen," I remarked, "will be on Stidger's side."

"Not so certain," answered Joe. "The gentleman is in difficulties." He explained that claims had been made against Mr. Worthen which he had had to satisfy and hush up; two suits had been entered against him; there had come the collapse of one of his favorite companies—

"Not Cloudburst Cañon?" I demanded, certain rumors, after lying inert in my brain for months, suddenly making an impression.

Smashed, answered Joe. And there was much unpleasant feeling among Mr. Worthen's clients when the fact leaked out that he owned none of the stock. And now, while with much difficulty, Mr. Worthen was trying to satisfy his claimants, and to stave off other suits, Collester was employed in what we nowadays call watchful waiting, to see whether matters would turn out to my advantage.

"What he hopes," Joe concluded, "is to find Mr. Worthen in such a mood that he can persuade him to testify in your favor. If Mr. Worthen will, then your suit is as good as won. If not, then—"

"Lost?" I asked.

"No," answered Joe. "Otherwise I should not be here. Now, of course, Mr. Collester hasn't explained all that he has in mind. But it wouldn't be hard for him to prove that Mr. Worthen's word isn't worth taking."

"A nice thing to make public," I remarked, "if you happen to be a friend of his daughter."

"Exactly," agreed Joe. "Where did you get your pull with him, Binney, to make him take your suit at such a time?"

My pull with Collester! There was no such thing, as the backwoodsman cried when he first saw a camel. Yet there the thing was, to be wondered at. There was either a great power of principle in the man, or a great kindliness toward me. Which, or both? I could not explain.

To have Joe with us again was very pleasant. He was our good old Joe, and yet he was different, as I had already in part learned. His character was emphasized by the solidity of his new acquirements. These I was abashed to contemplate. In my six months of city life I had learned only to dance, to chat, and to wear good clothes—was still a fool in all serious matters. And here was Joe, his simplicity unspoiled, and yet his shrewdness well developed on the double basis of study of men and study of law. His evening classes had done well by him, but he had done still better by himself. Though still weedy in growth and diffident in manner, Joe was, as a keen look into his eyes would show, very dependable.

I had slowly been making my saddle-horse, Peter, into a roadster for our buggy. His first youth now passing, he had taken very kindly to the new order, and was convenient for Joe's service. Among our solid citizens Joe soon proved to be very welcome, first for father's sake, afterward for his own, as his respectful manner and sensible questions recommended him. When possible, I went with him. And on one of these expeditions we met Stidger.

We were in Athol, and had just finished a comforting talk with old John Wyman, born and brought up in Petersham, now prosperous in Athol. His clear memory of the finding of the flat round box in 1854, his indignation at my cousin's suit, and his contempt for the person of Stidger, were quite fresh in our minds when, going out to the horse, we met Stidger on the sidewalk. Or rather Joe met him; for I, standing on the steps, and just closing the door behind me, was not in Stidger's vision.

He stopped short. That he had not yet heard of Joe's coming was plain from his first words. "Well, what brought you back? The city was too much for you?"

If anything could show one aspect of Joe's character, it was the fact that he was not boiling with resentment at the sight of his old master. And if anything could show Joe's development, it was the quietness with which he confronted Stidger. He merely said: "It's a rather big place."

"Got new clothes," sneered Stidger, as he looked Joe up and down. Yet I thought the sneer was merely a habitual fling at anything different from his own untidy penury. He went on: "Want a job?"

"I might want a better job," replied Joe, without a gleam of mischief. "A fellow always wants that."

"My business is increasing on me," the shyster explained, cautiously feeling his man. "I need a clerk again. I could pay you better than before."

"Twice as well?" asked Joe.

Stidger calculated. Since he had previously paid Joe next to nothing, he could very well afford to double it. "If you've learned something in the meantime," he stipulated.

"Will you pay in advance?" inquired Joe, still entirely mild.

"Me? In advance?" Stidger was outraged.

"Then I'm very sorry," answered Joe, and turned to untie Peter.

Now Peter was a strikingly unhandsome beast, of a roan color, with a nearly roan mane which contrasted unfavorably, and nobly raw-boned. Even Stidger, unaccustomed as he was to observing horses, from his spite to me had come to know the beast. Recognizing him, he cast his suspicious glance around, and saw me standing smiling on the steps.

"He'll pay you, Joe," said I, "in promissory notes, payable when, if, and as collectable."

If the man Stidger caused me, Heaven knows, enough trouble before he passed out of my life, he gave me some moments of pleasure. I joyed, just now, to see him grow pale and red, and snarl, and bite his lip. Thus mutely furious, he passed along, and out of self-respect I did not laugh at him.

"It's not good form," said Joe, reproachfully, "to guy the opposing counsel."

I answered, "I must have a little fun out of this, if I can."

"He'll tell your cousin," Joe replied.

I suppose he did. But often as I tried to imagine the intercourse of Stidger with Cousin Lon, I never could make it seem human. I always imagined the father of evil, whispering his instigations into the ear of a tortured spirit—for that Cousin Lon was happy or even satisfied I never could believe, nor could any one who saw his great haggard eyes. And so I often told myself that I had the best of it.

In such a mood I still enjoyed my life and its duties. The opal morning, the handling of the scented hay, the meditative task of milking, all made my early chores seem light. The companionship of horses, next, had become a solace; they knew me and responded to my care, and I knew that from them I should never receive treachery or malice. And then the steady drive of work, out in the open fields, purged through my pores all discontent. Appetite, too, was a great dependence. To eat my snack in the cooling breeze, or at home to sit down to a spotless service, with food attractive, and plenteous, and hot, as mother said was hygienically right, and as I knew was spiritually easeful, and conducive to slow eating, and to thankfulness—this was no mean pleasure. And then at night to sit on the doorstep in the fading light, talking with mother of work done and plans for the morrow, feeling the languor of content and the creeping desire for repose—this was a fit end for any man's day.

But it was not complete. There was an unfilled gap. For a week after the notice of the suit I wondered why I should feel a strange vacancy. At last one evening, before I felt willing to go to bed, my feet took me, in the last dusk in which appeared the early moon, along the path to the other farm. I meant to go to the wall, and look across it, and come home.

But leaning on the wall appeared a quiet figure. And at my sudden feeling of relief I understood myself, and said: "Of course!"

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

Margery lifted her friendly eyes. "Binney, I was lonesome!"

"And so was I," I admitted.

We talked for twenty minutes before she said that she must go. But it was settled that since mother and I could no longer go to her house, Margery should run over and visit us when she could. And so my restlessness was appeased.

Her visits made my days the pleasanter. Especially was I glad that in haying time, which now was coming on, I could enjoy her comforting presence. For now my work doubled, and mother took the milking and the light chores, in order that I should get in the greatest crop that, thanks to our heavy fertilizing, our farm had yet yielded. As I look back, I wonder how I had the courage to try it alone, or the strength to handle it.

The cutting was comparatively easy. Once around each field with the scythe,

for the headlands, and the rest with the machine, was no especial task. The tedder carried me well through the next stage of the work. The raking also was not bad, for the horses took the burden of it. But the cocking and spreading, repeated because of showers, and finally the work of getting in the hay, were very laborious. Much as the patent loader saved me, on our uneven fields it had to be followed by hand.

A boy to help me, for the driving only, would have saved me much time in the field; a man would have made the loading light. But sometimes, when using the loader on a fresh field, and always in haste because of the fear of showers, I risked too heavy a load home, and all but overset; and sometimes, rather than climb too much on a soft load, when loading by hand I had to be content to put on all that I could toss from the ground, and so traveled light to the barn. There the work was burdensome. The hay-fork worked pretty well, no doubt; but its crankiness was very much for me to manage. In the muggy air of the fields, or in the close barn, the labor was very heavy. At night I was dog-tired.

Without encouragement from mother, and especially from Margery, I doubt if I could have done the work. From dusk to dusk it was a race against time. Nothing refreshed me so much as to brag a bit. After each load mother slipped out to see how the mows had grown, and once each day Margery came to look, and exclaim, and listen to my vainglory. They sent me to the field heartened for another spurt; their encouragement was better than wine. And when one afternoon the last load was safely off the field, and the mows were filled to the rafters, and I, the pigmy that had built these precipices of hay, stood looking at them from below, it seemed as if I could not wait for mother and Margery's approval.

Now, when I had unharnessed the horses and watered them, and again stood gloating, I heard a light step behind me; Margery's footfall. And then her voice.

"Well done, Binney!"

I turned to her eagerly. "What do you think of it?"

"Father's crop is light," she said. "We couldn't fertilize as you did. But even he has only just finished; and here have you, in the same time, got into the barn the biggest lot of hay that ever I saw here."

"Is it?" I cried, delighted. "I wondered if I could believe it. Margery, come and tell mother."

We were passing out of the barn, and I was very voluble, and her eyes were shining up into mine, when suddenly she started and intently listened. Up the stony farm road came the clatter which last summer meant but one thing. Our eyes sought one another. Gertrude? And Margery drew away from me.

Could it be Gertrude? She had not answered my letter of farewell, and what lies her father had told about me I could only guess. Why should she come now, or why at all? Yet such thoughts were soon smothered by the feeling of anticipation. I saw through the orchard trees the flicker of bright headgear, some one in red was dashing around the curve, some one in gray was following, and—yes, Gertrude came headlong into our yard, with all her old-time recklessness.

Behind her was Collester, more reticent, more sane.

Gertrude was in her impetuous mood. Her flushed cheeks and flashing eyes were quite in keeping with that flaming hat of hers. She stopped her panting horse, and from her pretty mouth, as she gazed at the house, she sent a clear resonant cry.

"Yoho! Binney!"

In a moment I was close to her. "Here, Gertrude." Instantly turning, she looked down at me.

Always magnetic, always vital. But now I saw in Gertrude's face some change that was not clear to me. Whim may have had its share in prompting the visit, but something besides had determined her, as I knew when I saw a question looking out of her eyes at me. I had

never seen her so high-bred and self-possessed, quite so near to grand-ladyship. Without a word she stretched to me her ungloved hand, her left, and held mine firmly as I gave it. And so she looked me through.

I was puzzled, for she was asking something that I did not understand. Gertrude was always too deep and too swift for me. All I could do was to remain silent before her questioning, until her eyes should release me.

In a second, two seconds—I cannot tell how long, but I knew she had ended an examination of me — her serious glance flickered to a laugh, and she said:

"Binney, how you are changed!"

"Changed?" I echoed, blankly.

"Years older in these few months," she said. "And broader, Binney, and very much harder in muscle. And your hand is rough and calloused."

I withdrew it hastily, for I was not quite sure of her laugh, and thought her disappointed in me. Her telling me that I was changed was not now a challenge to flirting; she had measured me in her balances, and I wondered if I had failed of her standard. I stammered some excuse.

For there came over me, as never since our first acquaintance, the difference between us. I was no longer the farmer's boy, with the world before him. I was the farmer himself, sweat-marked and toil-stained, tied to the farm. If this was what Gertrude saw in me, if her laugh meant disdain, there was every reason for it.

From me she turned to Margery, who was slowly coming forward. "And Margery, too! Oh, Binney, take me down!"

I swung her from the saddle and set her on her feet, and the two met. I never could be quite sure of Gertrude's manner toward other girls. Sometimes I have thought she underprized them, and especially Margery, not appreciating those qualities in which they differed from her, but knowing well their lesser brilliancy. This struck me now when I heard her greeting: "You dear child!" But I turned very eagerly to Collester, having Gertrude's bridle in my left hand, but the right free for this good friend.

His solid self-possession had never struck me quite so strongly. He had the air of a spectator, kindly but detached. But when I said, "I am glad you could get free of business," he smiled and shook his head.

"This is business," he said. "When Gertrude heard where I was going, and why, she took her chaperon and started ahead of me. She was at the hotel when I arrived. Apparently you had not told her of the lawsuit."

"I saw no need," I answered. "It seemed a little like reproaching her."

There was a little gleam in Collester's eye that showed that I had given him evidence as to her share in the destruction of the old will. "She wormed my knowledge out of me," he said. "She always does. And she declared that she was involved, and must see you."

"Yes," said Gertrude, who now had Margery by the wrist. "And you must let me talk business with you, very serious business.

We tied the horses. Then mother came out, and we settled on the doorstep; Gertrude kept Margery, and would not let her slip away. And when we were all seated she said her say.

"Father is so queer," she said, looking at me sidewise, as if defying me to put the statement differently. "He declares that he has no recollection of the terms of that old will, so that it will do no good for him to testify." I glanced at Collester, he lifted his brows, and I wondered what the wily banker really meant to do. Gertrude was quite aware of this interchange of glances, and went on with lifted chin. "And he has been quite sulky about refusing to help. But I remember quite clearly what he told me of the will, riding home that day. And so, Binney, I can testify in your favor."

She finished with a pretty air of triumph, then played with one of Margery's hands. As for me, I wondered if she real-

ly did not know that second-handed evidence was of very little value. I glanced again at Collester, who pursed his lips and shook his head. I wondered if he, too, questioned whether Gertrude was as simple as she appeared.

"That will depend on my lawyer," I answered.

She pouted. "That means you don't think much of my offer."

Collester explained. "If it comes to hearsay evidence, and your father declares himself uncertain of what he read, I am afraid that your statement will not help us."

"Indeed!" returned Gertrude, with a very charming toss of her head. "And have you properly considered how I can influence the jury?"

"But," explained Collester, "this being purely a question of law, the case will not go before a jury."

"And won't I influence the judge, then?" cried Gertrude. "But I have no patience with either of you." She rose. "I must go back to supper."

And to my surprise she left the subject that she had traveled so far to see me about. She kissed Margery, and said good night to mother, and ordered me to fetch her horse.

When I had raised her to her saddle she leaned down to me. Collester was speaking with mother and Margery; we two were quite by ourselves. "That was well done," said Gertrude swiftly. "Do you know that you are twice as strong as ever?"

Personalities. "I need to be," I answered. "I work twice as hard."

"When will you ride with me?" she demanded. "To-morrow morning?"

At once I was eager. "But Joe is away with Peter overnight," I remembered. "And I suppose Mr. Collester wants me for some business."

"And there is all the farm work," she mocked. "Well, go about your regular work. But you shall not escape me."

And she was off, quite as abruptly as she had come. Collester hurried after.

"Upon my word," I said, as I watched them go. "Gertrude does beat me. She seemed to have an idea in her head, but she dropped it very readily. What did she really have in mind?"

Mother and Margery glanced at each other with meaning. But I could not get a word out of them.

CHAPTER XXX.

TEMPTATION.

MOTHER claims she knew at once that Gertrude's coming excited me —stirred me up, as she expressed it. Well, she was right, but she knew it quicker than I did myself. It was not until I lay tossing on my bed, and wondering at the slow coming of sleep, that I realized that Gertrude's bright glances were in my mind, her ringing tones were in my ears. I was anticipating the morning's meeting; but worse, I was discontented with myself. That was the usual effect of Gertrude in her challenging mood: an unsettling, a restlessness. Not that she stirred up ambition, but rather vague resolves to please her.

I had intended to put a day on cultivating the corn, which I had necessarily slighted during haying time, and which badly needed attention. For the weeds were too high, and the corn was growing so fast that I must cultivate now or never. A little unwillingly I made ready for the work; and thinking that perhaps Gertrude might come to find me, I discarded my overalls, wore my second best trousers, and confined my brown throat in a collar and necktie. And I took pains that mother should know where I expected to spend the morning. I took the horses' feed with me, intending to leave them to eat in the field while I slipped home across lots for my dinner.

In good time I had the two-horse cultivator going up and down the long rows. And fine rows they were. This was an important enterprise, this field of fodder corn, for I had chosen a variety different

from what father always used, and in every way had treated it differently, whether in distances, the number of plants to the hill, or the absence of "hilling up." And I ought, now, to find joy in seeing it coming nobly on, the broad leaves waving, and the stalks shooting ever taller. They were up to my elbows as I sat on the cultivator; in another week they would be above my shoulders, and no machine could go between them. There was promise of a field of twelve-foot corn, a full silo, and fine milk and cream for the winter.

And yet my eye kept roving, and my mind wandered from the work. Would Gertrude perhaps follow me to the field.

Noon was approaching, the field was more than half done, and something within me was mentioning dinner, while a higher organ was troubled with the beginning of disappointment, when over the tops of the nodding corn I saw a bright spot of color. It seemed to have perched itself at a side of the field to which in a few moments I must approach. And I smiled. That daring vermilion I had yesterday seen surmounting Gertrude's frizz —and I was glad to feel that since the day was not hot, I was still pretty tidy.

I reached her at the end of the next row. She was very comfortably seated on the shady wall, and beside it was the dinner pail which she had fetched.

Now Gertrude was so made that while she loved to adapt herself to those about her, and did it charmingly, she always gave the impression that it was a bit of a masquerade. It was as if a princess came into your sphere for a while for the fun of it. I had forgotten all this in the months in the city, when it was I, doubtless, who was masquerading. But here she was, rather too dainty for the rugged wall, begloved and very prettily shod, yet willingly risking her adornments for the sake of this new experience.

"I asked your mother for the lunch," she said, beginning to pull off her gloves. "She directed me here. Hurry, Binney! Come and eat."

"The horses first," I answered.

"Oh, the horses first!" she echoed, with a little mouth at me. "We must be humane, of course."

I fed the horses, then took my place beside her on the wall. "See," said Gertrude, opening the pail. "I took your mother rather by surprise, I fear. But here is cake, and pie, and some cookies; I put them up myself. She said there was water here near by, so I left the coffee, for fear of slopping it. And I left a kind of thick soup, which would be horrid if I spilled it on my dress. And I meant to bring meat and cheese, but there was no room."

The fixings and not the solids! I was to work all the afternoon on cake and pie and cookies! But Gertrude had her pretty mouth open to begin on a slice of Washington pie, which mother could make quite as well as Margery. "Come!" she cried. "I'm famished. Hurry!"

On the frivolities (for mother's cake is light) I contrived to make myself feel as if I had eaten. And water is always refreshing.

"What a lovely field," said Gertrude. "And what is it going to be?"

But when I explained that the corn was to become silage, and what silage was, she shuddered, and would hear no more. "Animals must be fed, I suppose. But they feed so greedily!"

Gertrude had early wiped her lips with the filmiest handkerchief, her hunger already appeased. She was always dainty, but now I reasoned that her slender appetite explained her preference for the sort of food she brought me. And picking and choosing is very graceful when the jeweled hand hovers over the dish, or even over the dinner pail.

"I hate to think," she went on, "that you're making it your business to feed animals. And you are, aren't you?"

"Why, yes, after a fashion," I admitted. "But only in order to feed myself."

"But with your investments," she went on (and I saw that she was still ignorant of her father's robbing me), "you could

hire men to do the dirty work, and yourself be boss. I hate to have you just a laborer." And she pouted.

Except for a purpose, Gertrude never pouted. Her mind was above it. But she was willing to appear very young if only she could persuade. This time I smiled at the artifice.

"It is what I was brought up to, Gertrude. And you know we never have workmen on our farm."

"Oh, your everlasting boxes!" she rejoined. "They will never be found. I don't believe they exist."

We sparred for a time, then drifted into reminiscences; yet I knew that we should get back to the point, for I felt sure that a point there was. But the reminiscences! Could I but reproduce them I should make more clear the charm which Gertrude laid upon me. She spoke of dances and of teas, the opera and theater, of the friends that we met at all these places. She made them rise and move before me. And as I saw myself in these familiar scenes, careless and very gay, I was delighted until something recalled to me the fact that after all I was but a farmer, with a farmer's drudgery binding me down.

Perhaps Gertrude saw this; perhaps she worked for it, and knew the word that had recalled me to myself. At any rate it was when I had fallen into sudden dejection that she laid her hand upon my arm. "Pleasant times, weren't they, Binney? And there was one time that almost promised to be—something more than pleasant."

With a suddenly jumping heart, I looked at her. Was she to acknowledge, so late, the meaning of the evening that had so thrilled me? Did she think of me, as I of her, as the one who had brought nearest the meaning of life? She met my eye boldly.

"Must the farm be run?" she plainly asked. "Can't you come back to the city again?"

"And leave mother?" I asked.

"Bring her," she returned.

Even then, with life drawing near again, I had to try to be practical. "The farm would be spoiled," I said. "It would be overrun with treasure-seekers. Men would run excursions up from Athol and over from Barre. I couldn't leave the property to be ruined."

Gertrude's manner changed instantly: I had given her her opening. "And yet," she said with suddenly intense earnestness, "you left behind in Boston a better property to go to ruin."

I looked at her. What could she mean? With serious eyes she nodded at me.

"Your name," she explained. "Your reputation as a worker and a fighter. You who came to conquer the city have left it at the first defeat."

Her glance burned shame into me. My eyes turned away.

"People want to know," said Gertrude with deadly calm, "when Mr. Hartwell is to settle his affairs and come back. They know you've had a quarrel with father. How long can I conceal from them that you're a—" She paused, then drove the word at me, "—a quitter?"

I had not thought of this. It dismayed me. In the pause I looked up. Her keen face was firmly set, her eyes were burning bright. They fixed mine; I could not look away. Suddenly, in the midst of my foolish peace, this summons had come to me.

"As for this farm," she began again, her voice beginning to thrill, "let it be ruined! There may be sixty thousand dollars hidden here in those last two boxes. And you may not find either of them in all the rest of your life. But in father's office, or in Mr. Collester's, you can earn that sum twice over in a few years!"

Now this was fiery; it made the farm seem mean, my peaceable retreat mere hiding. It roused me to the hope of redeeming myself. Seeing, I suppose, the flash in my eyes, Gertrude hurried on.

"What is there if you stay? You drudge along. Perhaps you marry Margery."

Marry Margery! I had never thought of it. Studying me, Gertrude laughed low. "Why, Binney, how little you have looked ahead! Now listen to what I have thought for you. Pay no attention to this lawsuit. Even if you lose it, you have only to hand over the money. Put on the farm the most honest manager you can find, and trust the rest to yourself."

"There is a man," I said, beginning to take fire, "very dull but very honest, whom I could put here."

She clutched me, her little hand, very pink and shapely, seizing my great tanned wrist. "Come and explain it to your mother!"

But the mention of mother showed me a difficulty. For me she would do anything, for Gertrude, next to nothing. I hesitated, and Gertrude shook me with impatience.

"You are so slow!"

"Because once I was too quick," I responded. "Let us manage mother carefully, and our luck will be the better."

Our luck! The pronoun slipped out and could not be recalled. But her eye still looked steadily into mine; and though she released my arm, it was not in displeasure. As for me, where was I going?

Looking back, I had recently wondered why I had not fallen in love with Gertrude. But if an instinctive recognition of her artifices kept me from it, as I sometimes thought, now all these subterfuges were for me. For me she had come from Boston, had planned this appeal, had sought the right moment for it. I knew now why she had yesterday studied me so carefully. And through her I should be able to hold up my head again.

I caught her hand. "Gertrude, but for you I should grub along here forever. How can I thank you?"

She left her hand in mine. I had never held it so before, a warm, responsive thing that returned my clasp. Yet very coolly she replied:

"By showing what you can do."

Her self-possession provoked a desire to move her in her turn. I held her hand the tighter, enfolding it till I felt the hard gems in her rings. "Tell me why you are helping me so!"

Her hand relaxed, grew limp, drew away. And she smiled at my eagerness. "To make little boys ask questions."

But she was not rebuking me. And we were alone there in the hollow, with no one to see but the crows overhead and the squirrels in the wood. Her smile was a provocation, her pursed lips a challenge. Something surged within me, and before I realized the temptation I had snatched her to me. Her breast to mine, her clear eyes looking up.

But because her eyes were so clear and unmoved, and because, without other resistance, her little hand was laid on my shoulder warningly, the flood within me subsided as quickly as it came, and left me hollow and shaking. Never before had I held a girl or a woman so; every nerve was unstrung by the new emotion. Releasing her, I rose and turned away; I moistened my lips, but was silent. How could I excuse myself?

"Sit down again, Binney," she said in her crystal voice. "There are just a few words that I want to say." And when I was seated, though unable to look at her, she went on. "Father is cross with you. But you're much better off in Mr. Collester's office."

Now that I had held her so, even for so short an instant, how could I take Collester's help, believing that he loved her.

"There must be other offices," I said. "I'd like to stand entirely on my own feet."

"You would make a mistake," she replied very positively. "Now, Binney, leave it all to me. Remember that last time you had your own way, and bungled."

She took away my belief in myself, and I could not answer. "Remember!" she repeated, beginning to rise. I rose also. She swung herself down on the opposite side of the wall, and across it I tried to look at her. Difficult as it was, on ac-

count of my still strong quivering, I grew calm enough to see that she was still entirely cool. She leaned toward me.

"I'm glad it's settled," she said winningly. "And Binney, one last thing. Lean across. I want to whisper."

I leaned to her, and turned to her an ear. I was quite unexpectant. Her soft lips brushed my cheek. Gertrude had kissed me! And then, as I looked at her, struggling with my surprise, doubtful of her meaning, she nodded saucily, waved me good-by, and tripped away. Had she run I would have followed her. But she was so entirely mistress of herself that I remained where I was.

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

Nero and the Fo'c'sle Goose

by Captain Dingle

Onward sailors! Onward jog,
Strengthened by a tot o' grog.
'Til they gives us better scran,
Cuss and work as best ye can!

I AIN'T much ov a poet, but them sentiments of mine was true 'uns, as I planted the mess kid on the fo'c's'le table on Chrissmuss Day in the old Sargasso. Trouble was, sentiments or sonnets wasn't appreciated.

When I'd picked out the débris of the swab wot Tough Bill Towser hove into my starb'd lamp, I see the hull watch pokin' and peerin' at the hunk o' green, gristly fat pork in the kid, an' pretty quick the rumble started.

"Merry Chrissmuss, is it?" growls Towser, stabbin' his sheath knife into the blubber an' liftin' it level with his lamps. "Fine Chrissmuss grub to feed to honest sailormen, I don't think. Here! Who's fer a hand ov a watch to ram this muck down Nero's fat neck?"

Nero was ship's cook—doctor, we called 'im—and a fatter, greasier swab never shipped. As fer gettin' hunk with him fer the shortcomin's ov our Chrissmuss dinner, it wasn't to be done, not by no means; fer Nero was the blue-eyed boy with the skipper, on account ov his bloomin' fiddle, which had hypnotized the Old Man. Olson, the boss-eyed Swede, said some'at to that effeck, an' Tough Bill made a motion.

"Orl right, then, eat it! Take the lot!" roared Bill, and the lump o' fat sow left his knife blade an' took the Swede fair in the bow-lights, arter which the

sow an' the Swede fetched up in a slippery heap under the 'awse-pipe, an' altogether it looked like we'd see a merry Chrissmuss arter all.

Tough Bill Towser warn't no man to mix up with, though, an' we most ov us knowed it. He was cock o' that fo'c's'le, an' wot he said was likely to go. He buzzes th' mess-kid arter the pork, an' ketches holt ov another one as young Suds had just slapped down.

"Let's try the duff, anyhow," sez Bill, haulin' the dish along. Chrissmuss pud'n sounded Chrissmussy, if nothin' else, an' all hands stretched their necks in anti-pashun.

Suds was ship's boy, an' he hemptied the hashes to windward once arter all hands had put in a hot day a paintin' the bulwarks an' rails: so nobody choked wi' grief when the Chrissmuss pud'n flew from the kid in a stream an' poured over his head an' shoulders like a shower o' brown bilge.

"Holy sailor!" roared Bill, dancin' wi' some'at as made him black in th' face. "Duff! Gawdblimmee! Look wot they gives us fer duff! Blarst my whiskers! How're we goin' to eat that slush, unless we pours it outa the teapot an' sucks it through pipes?"

That's the kind o' duff it was. Nero nigh lost 's fiddlin' license right there, an' only our nighness to port saved 'is missuble life. Tough Bill ramped an' reared up, till all hands clambered into ther bunks outa the road. We et hardtack an' pickles fer Chrissmuss dinner, an' while we was knockin' the weevils outa the pantiles Bill made Suds scrape up the duff an' put it in a bucket.

"Never waste good grub," he sez, an' we knowed as some'at was a bitin' up Towser's sleeve.

But he's a sly duck, is Bill, an' Chrissmuss Day passed into the day arter just like other days, an' nothink more was said about that sorrerful dinner. Olson did start to chaw 'is fat about Nero 'long about the second dog watch, but Tough Bill hung a wallop on 'is beak an' shut him up. So we all on us clapped a stopper on our jaw-tackle an' let Bill do all the thinkin' for the fo'c's'le.

New Year's Day comes a week arter Chrissmuss in them latitudes, an' 'twas two days afore New Year's as we tied up alongside the wharf in Demerara. I copped the first night watch, and was leanin' over the gangway rail listenin' to th' bull-frogs hollerin' an' the doctor a scrapin' away on that old fiddle of his'n in the galley.

I hears somebody comin' along from th' fo'c's'le, an' as the footsteps passed th' galley I hears Tough Bill Towser cussin' Nero some'at fierce. But Nero went on a fiddlin' harder'n ever. Yuh couldn't feeze that fat cook, unless yuh dropped a iron snatch-block on his big splay feet. All the passage we seen the skipper listenin' like a love-sick gal every time that fiddle screeched, an' frum Chrissmuss on he had brought Nero aft every dinner hour to play sweet music while the cabin was a dinin'. Mates an' engineers cussed a lot about the infernal row over their 'eads, but they couldn't do nothing. 'Twas skipper's orders.

To make matters wuss, the skipper had told Nero as he expected to have a dinner party on New Year's night, an' he'd want the fiddle in the companionway while th' eats was goin' on, so he'd better practise some high class toons. Seein' as how 't was the money he'd saved by givin' th' fo'c's'le rotten rations as was goin' to pay fer that big New Year's party, it ain't no wonder that we pore Jack Mucks didn't feel no enthoosiasm about th' doctor's practisin'.

Well, Bill rushes by a growlin', and blunders down to the saloon. Pretty soon up he comes again, a cussin' wuss n' ever.

"Wot d'yuh think ov that blighter?" he sez to me, lookin' as if I'd done some'at he was a goin' to hand me a doughboy for.

"Wot, Bill?" sez I.

"The skipper, o' course!" he snaps like a dawg. "I arsks, civil like, if we was

goin' to git a decent New Year's dinner to sorta make up fer that Chrissmuss crime," sez Bill, " an' he sez we kin have wot we likes. Ugh!"

" That's orl right, ain't it?" I sez.

" Orl right me fat aunt!" hollers Bill, an' I steps back, cautious. " We kin have anything we likes to pay fer ourselves, if the doctor wants to cook it! If th' doctor's too busy with his blarsted practisin', we kin take our rations or leave 'em. An' that's wot our respeckted Old Man sez," finishes Bill with a rush.

'Twusn't long afore Bill brings the rest ov the fo'c's'le crowd along to the gangway, an' we has a conflab. Result bein' that we decides to have a real, slap-up New Year's feed, even if we did have to buy it. Bill was detailed to buy a couple ov gooses, some fresh wegetables, an' just a drop ov good Demerara rum to kinda help 'em down. But the Old Man wouldn't advance us no money until next day, sayin' as he had to go to the agent's to git it; so Bill gits leave for his marketing, an' was to meet the skipper ashore next noon.

Well, to pass over to Bill's return, we gathers around the galley next evenin', an' tries to git to a soft spot in Nero's thick hide. The gooses was a hangin' frum the beams in th' fo'c's'le, lookin' to us pore hungry flatfoots like plucked hangels. Like the bloomin' genius he is, Bill 'ad fetched aboard a extry bottle o' music, an' when he flashes it Nero's eyes stood out like door-knobs.

" Boys, Ah's always glad to 'commodate my shipmates," sez Nero, ackshully puttin' down his fiddle-stick fer a minit. " Shorely Ah'll cook them goose. Send Suds along wid dem, an' don't bodder about drawin' or fixin' dem. Ah'll tend to dat. An' Ah hopes you-all will hab a fine New Year dinner."

Which we all had pleasant dreams ov that night, an' we wakes up in the mornin' to find Bill had got enuff bottles o' music to allow us a good slug ov a eye-opener to wish each other happy New Year. We had the day off, but nobody wanted to go ashore for a stroll. We was all a moppin' our mouths, which was a waterin' profuse at the merry sniff as was wafted outa the galley. And all the time that blarsted fiddle kept a scrapin', but we didn't mind it a bit, for wasn't we all anticipatin' to blow out our kites on the next-to-the-finest coupla gooses in South America? I'd a sed the finest, only the skipper was havin' two gooses fer dinner, too, an' I ain't got no doubt as he'd get the best, if Nero had to ring changes on ours for to git 'em.

Gettin' nigh to eight bells, all hands was busy as a one-man stokehold watch. Chips an' the bo'sun ad' chipped in on our blowout, and they was rigged out like fancy dress yachtsmen. The mates 'ad took the day off, not bein' invited to the skipper's party later on; but afore the fust mate dipped ashore th' bo'sun ad persuaded him to lend us some spare flags, an' some on us strung 'em around the fo'c's'le, makin' her look some'at like the Sailors' Home when th' Governors is expected on a visit.

All the time our mouths was a waterin' like blazes, an' Tough Bill got jolly an' follered us round with a deck-swab. We took that like a good joke. Only Olsen, the boss-eyed Swede, got narsty. That Swede never was able to see as Bill Towser must 'ave his joke. But his kick didn't git him much. He was quiet arter Bill rammed arf ov the swab down his throat an' bunged up his lamps wiv the rest.

But dinner time come at last. There wasn't no linen in the Sargasso's fo'c's'le, except one sheet as Suds brought frum home, him not knowin' much ov sailors' ways. That sheet made a bully table cloth, spread wide like, to hang deep an' hide as much ov the rather spotty deck as possible.

But Bill Towser yells " Eight bells! 'Ands along to the galley!" an' we forms in line, tryin' to look as if we was used to goose fer dinner an' wasn't very anxious.

We noticed Nero's fiddle stop playin'

as we ranged alongside, an' we hears the oven door bang, an'. out through the galley door comes a buzz ov 'eavenly steam. Nero lets out a bust ov cusses, but we only laughs, thinkin' as he'd found our gooses a bit 'ot. Then out the doctor pops, with a big mess-kid all a smokin', covered over with another one to keep the steam in, he sed.

"Ketch holt!" he sez, slappin' the mess-kid into the fust man's 'ands. Then he dips inside and fetches out another kid, as was only covered over with a galley cloth.

"Run away wid yer dinner, boys," sez Nero, an' pops back inside. We could hear him a talking as we walks away. "Doan't come back no more to-day. Ah'm gwine to be busy wid the saloom dinner, boys."

Then the door on the other side ov the galley slams, an' that's all we heard. We was into the fo'c's'le then.

"Good fer th' doctor!"—"Nero's orl right!"—"Now we gits our lugs back fer fair!" was some ov the remarks as went round as we takes our seats an' Tough Bill picks up a carvin' knife an' fork as he'd borrered. Chips an' the bo'sun took head an' tail ov the table, as they was entitled to, bein' sort ov officers, like. There was a spell ov brefless silence when Bill yanks orf the cover, and—

Tough Bill Towser was allus a vi'lent man. He lets out a howl like a bustin' boiler when he sees them gooses, an' we all stretches our necks to look.

"Merry Chrissmuss! 'Appy Noo Year! Blarst that cat-gut scrapin' son ov a swab!" yells Bill, an' he stabs the fork into a goose as black as a bunker, an' out rushes a gush ov steam as 'ud choke a bloomin' Hottentot.

An' there was our fine dinner as we'd paid fer ourselves! That fiddlin' food-spoiler didn't even *draw* them blarsted birds. He cooked 'em wiv there ballast aboard, an' neck an' feet an' everythink standin'. If he hadn't burnt 'em to a cinder, too, we'd have seen the feathers still on 'em. Yu'd orter heard the langwidge! It fair shocked me, an' I worked in a printin' orfice afore I went to sea.

Somebody lifts the cloth ov the other kid, an' there was our wegetables, b'iled down to slush just like our Chrissmuss duff 'ad been. Murder? Sure, we was ready fer it. But Tough Bill started in to do it, which was diffrunt. The bo'sun an' Chips collars Bill as he was goin' through th' fo'c's'le door wavin' the carvin' knife, a hollerin' fer Nero's blood an' fair frothin' at the mouth.

"Leggo! Lemme thank th' doctor fer a good dinner!" howls Bill, husky like. "I'll ram his blarsted fiddle down his black neck. Lemme go!"

But th' bo'sun an' Chips was as tough as he was. They froze on to Bill, an' talked gentle to him, we all sayin' somethin' soothin' like, seein' as he couldn't git loose. And arter a bit he quiets down, an' another conflab starts. We can hear a wheechy-screechy sound comin' frum the galley, which Chips surmises is Nero practisin' preparedness with a meat-ax and steel.

Well, we wasn't all took into the talkee-talkee, Chips seemin' to be the main-guy. But presently we hears Bill Towser laugh, so it looks to be orl right. Then they whispers again, an' asks the bo'sun some-'at. Bo'sun shakes his head an' sez, "I dunno as I got anything like that, Chips," and then Towser busts out a larfin' again.

"Hey, Suds," sez he, "whatcha do with that bucket o' duff? Blarst my whiskers! I meant to domino Nero with that long ago, an' fergot it. That's jest the thing we want, Chips!"

Chips agrees, an' then we all gits told orf to stand by. We had to make a dinner orf ov hard-tack again, but there was the promise ov a real blow-out afore evenin' if we done wot we was told. Suds was sent to the rail to hempty the mess-kids, an' he had to do it opposite the galley door. An' Towser told him if he didn't gnaw on the drumstick ov one ov them gooses while he done it, an' look as if he liked it, he'd comb his hair wiv a handful ov fist when he come back.

Suds made a good bluff, an' put in a lick ov his own by tellin' Nero how much we enjoyed our dinner only we missed his music. That swab ov a doctor grinned orl over his fat dial when Suds said that, an' arter a bit some on us moves along at Chips's orders to help keep him amused.

"Anyfing we kin do fer yuh, doctor?" arsks Towser, stickin' his hairy face inside the galley. Nero looked at him, doubtful like, and fingers the meat-ax; but Bill was a smilin' like a lion full o' meat. The precious fiddle was in the case, a lying on top ov the coal locker, about the only place where there wasn't a pot or a dish or some'at gettin' ready fer the big feed aft.

The steward was makin' his jellies an' truck in the pantry next the saloon, an' it had been fixed between him and the skipper that as soon as the dinner was cooked Nero was to bend a new cap an' white jacket, an' go to fiddle in th' companionway, leavin' the stooard with a assistant frum ashore to serve up the grub while the cocktails was a gettin' drunk.

"Much obliged, boys," sez Nero, grinnin'. "Thar ain't much left to do now, ontil dinner's ready. But Ah'm obliged all de same. An' A'm shorely sorry Ah burnt dem gooses a bit."

"Burnt 'em?" sez Towser, innocent like. "They wasn't burnt, was they? Well done, that's all doctor, an' prime stuff they was, too."

Nero grins more'n ever, an' then the bo'sun hollers through th' other door: "Here, doctor, take this hat. It 'll look fine on you when you play music fer the Old Man." The bo'sun held out a red fez with a cutter's ballast ov gold lace on it. "Got it in Algiers, long time ago, doctor," explains the bo'sun, "an' yer welcome to the loan ov it."

That darky's eyes fairly jumped at sight ov that red hat, an' he stuck it on his kinky wool an' postured like a heducated hape wiv a hadmiral's coat on. I sees under his arm, across the galley, the lid ov his fiddle case open and shut wivout a sound, an' presently we was all back in the fo'c's'le a lookin' at Bill's little offerin' to the evenin's jollification.

He was a spoonin' up the horrible duff as we couldn't eat on Chrissmuss Day, an' was pourin' it into Nero's fiddle.

If anybody else had been a doin' it, we'd all busted wiv larfin; but nobody never wanted to larf much when Bill sed not to, so we kept quiet till it was all in. Then the fiddle hadn't got no more sound than a cork-fender, an' she weighed ruther heavy fer light music, too, sed Chips.

"All right, Bill," announced the bo'sun, comin' in from his own cabin. "Fetch him along, Suds. Tell the doctor I want him to drink my health. Hurry up."

We heard that larfin', chucklin' hape ov a doctor shufflin' into the bo'sun's cabin, and the door shut gently. Then Bill collared the fiddle and ran along to the galley with it, clappin' it into the case long afore Nero had necked his hooker ov rum, which the bo'sun seen was a big 'un.

There was some hours to go afore the saloon party an' some on us went ashore fer a walk, while others, with Chips an' Bill an' the bo'sun shut themselves into the bo'sun's locker an' held a secret session which we would only see the effecks ov.

The saloon dinner was set fer six o'clock; and at five-thirty Nero's work was done. He had two fat gooses, cooked a crispy, crackly brown, layin' on a big dish in the steamer ready fer the stooard's assistant to fetch.

And a great, swelled, brown plum duff filled the other part ov the steamer. We was allowed to see the stuff, fer Nero was all puffed up from the bo'sun's rum an' the red hat, an' some ov us took partickler care to tell him wot a fine figger he had. An' when he was all ready, red hat and all, Chips called him acrost to his room an' handed him another go ov rum, keepin' him chatterin' till the Old Man's voice bust out from the bridge-deck.

"Hey, galley there! Where's that blamed cook? We're waiting for him.

Hustle him along, somebody, with that fiddle of his."

Most ov us managed to give Nero a pat afore he started, an' there was as much powder as play in some ov the pats, too; but he only grinned with pleasure an' conceit, an' paddled along aft, snatchin' up his fiddle case as he went.

'Twasn't long afore it 'd be dark, and already in the shadow ov the sheds the Sargasso was dim an' gettin' dimmer, except fer the shine ov the saloon lights through the main-deck ports. Chips, the bo'sun, an' Bill Towser slips along to the galley with some'at as I couldn't see, an' presently they hurries back an' dips down the forehatch, calling soft like fer all hands to foller.

All ov us piles down the ladder an' follers the leaders aft to the bulkhead. There was a coupla doors in the bulkhead as led into the stokehold by way of the 'thwartship bunker, an' 'twas down by them doors we gathered. An' then all ov us become aware ov a 'eavenly buzz ov roast goose an' stuffenin'. Ow! Not burnt, either!

"Dig in, fellers!" invites Chips, squarin' away an' rippin' legs an' fins off ov two fat gooses an' passin' 'em around. "Don't make hogs ov yerselves," sez he, "but we ain't got napkins, ner plates, an' it won't be bad ettiket if yuh yaffles thisyer grub quick as yuh can."

Ettiket! We was hungry sailors wiv a grievance, an' them two golden gooses never had a chance. Then Bill hauls out a whoppin' big duff, an' the bo'sun perduces a bottle ov music, an' all hands rolled up their eyes an' got their ears back, listenin' all the time for sounds ov strife to carry down by way ov the open port-holes not far over our heads.

Fust sign we got that everything wasn't all right above was the Old Man's voice, an' it sounded mad.

"What's wrong with the darned fiddle? Won't play? Durn your greasy hide, you've been playing all morning on it. Damme, but I think you're drunk!"

Then we hears Nero a bleatin' as he wasn't drunk, an' he didn't know what was wrong wiv his fiddle. Soon we hears a doleful scrapin' an' that was when he made a larst try at scrapin' a toon out ov his music box.

Bustin' in on the other voices, we hears the stooard, an' whatever it was he said, it wiped the trouble with the fiddle clear off the board. We hears the skipper roarin' like a bull, an' plenty ov other voices chippin' in; an' from what we could hear the trouble seemed to be with the dinner.

Some ov the things the skipper told Nero 'ud make me blush, so I won't repeat 'em; but arter about three fathom ov cusswords come this:

"You lazy, drunken sweep! You've been drinking and fooling with the men all day, and you've ruined my party! Look at this—look at it, you no-good water-burner!"

There come a sound ov a scuffle, as if the skipper was makin' Nero look at some'at he wasn't anxious to see, an' then some'at comes flyin' acrost the square ov the hatch like a bat, another like it follers, and lands plump down amongst us. We hears Nero's big feet scuffling down the bridge-deck ladder fer dear life, chatterin' to himself, an' beggin' fer mercy. Then something else, like a flyin' dragon, flits acrost the darkenin' sky, an' this time it caught Nero full-an'-by on the sconce. There was a smash, like a pianner fallin' on the dock off ov a derrick, an' Nero sprawls head over heels with a howl.

Immediately down amongst us sails the thing what hit him, an' we picks it up. When it dropped, it scattered a shower ov some'at sticky all over us, so we wa'n't supprised to find it was the ruins ov Nero's fiddleful ov Chrissmuss pud'n.

"Come on, lads," whispers Chips, husky like, pickin' up the ruins ov the fiddle an' dippin' through the bunker door. "Foller on, an' we'll clean up the remains afore we slips ashore to do sootable honors to th' occasion."

We dives for them other things wot dropped down, an' I snaffles one ov 'em. We all troops arter Chips an' the bo'sun

an' rallies round him as he opens the fire-door ov the donkey-b'iler. Then in the red glare ov the fire I sees what I had: it was the loveliest bamboo an' canvas goose you ever clapped yer lamps onto, all glistenin' wiv gravy—varnish it was—an' smellin' splendid what wiv all the sauces an' seasonin' an' truck Chips had hemptied into an' over it afore shovin' it into the steam-chest. Tough Bill Towser had the sister ship to it, an' Suds carried both handsful ov the hull an' bare spars ov them two gooses we'd ate.

"Nero fiddled while Rome was burnin'," sez Chips, who was allus a scholard. He pokes the fiddle into the fire, an' signs fer us to heave ahead with the stuff we had. In pops my goose, an' in slips the one Bill had, an' Suds steps for'ard with the glorious relics ov our noble Noo Year's dinner.

"No, Suds," sez Chips, stoppin' the lad; "them remains is worthy ov a better fate. Stay here a minit," an' he skipped up on deck. He was back in two minits, a chucklin' like a hyaena, an' he brings down the busted parts ov Nero's fiddle-case.

"A long time ago," he sez, crammin' the goose wreckage into the fiddle-case, "I seed people settin' their dear departed adrift on little rafts down the sacred river. They only done it when they thought a lot ov the corpse. So we'll do sameways. Come on, quiet as mice, an' help in the obsequies."

So we piles arter him. Up through the starb'd coaling-pocket we clambers onto the dock, an' from the edge ov the wharf we sets our corpus adrift with sootable reverunce. Then, arter takin' a good lamp around, we slides off fer the town, leavin' behind us a storm ov vocal sound that was'n ezzactly a comin' from the skipper's party in the saloon.

Just as we swung into the street, somebody busts past us, knockin' young Suds ski-ootin' endways. That was Nero. An' did he stop to wish us a happy Noo Year? Well, not in our langwidge!

NEW YEAR IN THE ARCTIC

BY CHART PITT

THE north-wind croons, and the lean, gray dunes
March out across a frozen sea.
The auroras drip from the ice-clogged ship,
Whose sails are set for eternity.
The years run out with never a shout
Of silver bells across the snows.
With a broken prayer in the frost-scourged air,
We wait as the old year goes.

The shadows crawl on the igloo wall
As the slow stars climb the sky.
The ice-guns roar 'long the lonely shore
Where the broken floe-bergs lie.
The mad winds stamp o'er the frozen camp,
Where our frayed flag flaps in the gloom.
Speechless we turn where the blubber-flares burn,
As a new weaver steps to the loom.

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

IN our issue of June 10, 1916, we printed a novelette by Perley Poore Sheehan which caused more than considerable comment, and which proved, as we suggested it would, that all mud is not dirty. The title of that story was "Those Who Walk In Darkness," and as the problem with which it was concerned apparently did not end with that particular phase of the situation, a sequel was necessary to round up a troubled eventuality in a complete and proper manner.

Mr. Sheehan has now delivered the concluding and conclusive phase of the life of *Viola Swan,* and it will appear, beginning next week, in five parts, under the title of

THE SCARLET GHOST

BY PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

Sequel to "Those Who Walk In Darkness"

Above all things, this splendid serial deals frankly and cleanly with *humanity.* It portrays in a masterly fashion our weaknesses and our virtues—such as they are—and with a keen sympathy for the frailties of his fellows, the author presents his word-portraits with photographic accuracy. *Viola Swan,* late of the old Tenderloin, New York, is now *Mrs. Rufus Underwood,* of Rising Sun, and her influence upon the rural community is as oddly true as it is admirably conceived and delivered into words. It is the sort of story one can't get away from—the sort of story that is going to make a week seem a terribly long time between instalments.

So you can imagine how you would like to read that kind of a story in a ***monthly*** magazine!

PARIS, the delightful Paris, queen of cities—the Paris of Before-the-War—is the scene of next week's complete novelette. At least, *Enid Templeton* thought it delightful, until—

But you must first understand *Enid's* point of view. As an independent American girl bored to extinction for months, and with nothing more exciting than a soirée at the Y. M. C. A. in prospect, *Enid* had simply kicked over the traces and gone out to do a little sight-seeing on her own account. Her taxi landed her in Montmartre, and she went casually into the Café des Brigandes to find some local color.

This is the beginning of next week's complete novelette

PEARLS OF PASSAGE

BY M. T. L. ADDIS

Well, *Enid* found it. Luckily for her a certain mysterious young man had seen and followed her, and was able to proffer his assistance when it was most needed. But when he got her a box of chocolates as a slight souvenir of their meeting, and she opened them in the privacy of her room—

Do you remember the very striking incident in the first instalment of "Mid-Ocean," by Stephen Allen Reynolds, which ended a couple of weeks ago? I mean where *Jim Ballard* saved himself from drowning by climbing onto the body of the dead whale?

Now, it doesn't very often happen that two authors get the same idea; but sometimes it does. Just after we had bought "Mid-Ocean" a manuscript came into the office by another author, living in another State, that dealt with whale hunting in the South Pacific, that was, in a very different way, quite as good a description of a whale-hunt as Mr. Reynolds's and that had

very nearly the same identical idea for its motive!

That story you shall read next week—and you'll most assuredly enjoy it. It is "THE WHALE BUSTER," by Ben Ames Williams.

"IT is my opinion," says *Doc Apsey*, combination doctor and cashier of the lumber-camp in the heart of the Wasatch Mountains, "that the chap who don't know when he is licked—ain't!" The new boss didn't have any formulated opinion on the subject, probably; certainly he expressed none in words, but in "PETE AND REPEAT," by William Dudley Pelley, the old adage that "actions speak louder than words" is pretty conclusively shown. The new boss was only a kid of twenty-two and weighed only a hundred and twenty-five; neither did he have very much to say, but— Well, if you like a quick-moving, red-blooded, man's story, here it is.

"OLD HOME WEEK," by John D. Swain, is an amusing comedy of New England, handled with all the charm and unexpectedness of "Queen of the Mosquitoes," "The Crewell Emeralds," and "The Heir Unapparent." It goes to prove that sentiment is last t die in the worst of us, and that—

But the moral should come post-prandially and not as an antepast!

"THE ONE-MAN ARMY," by Richard Pink, is a grim little tale of a dusky savage chieftain in Northern Africa whose name was something of a terror to the whites, and of the punitive expedition that was sent by the British Government to put a stop to his activities.

Just what happened to that expedition, and particularly the activities of one *John Trehearn*, first-class stoker in H. M. navy, go to form the kind of a story that every red-blooded man loves to read and to remember.

Understand, this is a man's story. The fair sex, individually and collectively, especially the pacifists, are solemnly warned to let it alone!

NOTICE.—Inquiries concerning stories that we have published will be answered in the Heart to Heart Talks only when the name of the author as well as the title of the story is supplied by the correspondent.

A BOOST FOR MR. STEIN

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed please find note for twenty shillings to continue my subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

It seems to be the fashion in America to write to the editor of your favorite magazine and tell him what you think about it.

They tell me at home that if I once get an ALL-STORY in my hands, it is no use speaking to me for the rest of the evening, and I'm bound to say I *do* get enthralled in your serials. They are a wonderful tonic after twelve hours a day war work and worry. I like your covers, too, especially those of Modest Stein. Is it a man or a woman? The cover for October 21 was really excellent.

Yours faithfully,

C. HOWARD PROCTER.

Whingrove,
Cornwall Road,
Harrogate, England.

A VERY "GENTLE WARBLE"

TO THE EDITOR:

I'm wondering why ALL-STORY readers do not oftener mention your "different" stories. I've read a lot of them, and passed through several stages of emotion regarding their class. Now, I'm going to say about "Two Fares Back Home," by J. H. Sorrells—it was splendid! Of all the emotional yarns I've had the pleasure of reading, that was the best. What appealed most was the very simplicity of style. But for the slang it would never, in my mind, have made such a hit as it did. It "caught" with the very first paragraph, and I will admit that, although I'm generally what some would call an "unemotional cuss," at times it *did* bring a lump to my throat, and I recall that it pretty nearly brought tears. Softy, eh? Well, I don't know! An author who can do this certainly has great possibilities. You hear me gently warble!

Another big hit in the same number was "The Man Who Borrowed a Reputation," by John Fleming Wilson. The plot was strong, and it is exceedingly well told. Few such yarns are ever printed, and when they are, the magazine that has published it suddenly finds itself far up into the limelight. I did not lay the magazine down until I had finished that story.

And right here I'm going to say that I agree with Ed Kenney, of Bangor, Maine, about giving the covers their dues. Whoever painted the one for the November 11 issue was *there!* Realistic, passionate—those two words are sufficient for its effect upon my mind, and upon others'.

As per usual, Perley Poore Sheehan was at his best when he wrote "As In Duty Bound." It will be a long time before we'll read another nearly as good. It is strangely fascinating, bringing to one that feeling that used to come in our childhood when we read a wonderful fairy tale.

It is good to note that "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms" is coming back. I thoroughly enjoyed the first and second series.

Achmed Abdullah certainly knows how to write a "thriller." Few authors do I recall who can make that creepy sensation climb up and down one's back as he can. Mysticism—and especially the mysticism of the Orient—has always appealed to my imagination. It is a kind of story few ever grow tired of.

Then there is *Tarzan*—one of the most unique sets of stories ever written. I'm glad he will be back soon in "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar." By the way, will Edgar Rice Burroughs ever give give us another yarn like "The Man Without a Soul"? That was a good story. And where is Jack Harrower, author of "The Great Secret" and "The House of Sorcery"? Jack certainly *can* write a mystery yarn. Both the above stories were masterpieces.

Sincerely
WILLIAM RAND LOESCHER.

23 Parker Street,
Holyoke, Massachusetts.

BEST OF TWENTY-FIVE

TO THE EDITOR:

I commenced taking the *Cavalier* with its first weekly issue, and have not missed a number of that magazine or its successor, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY since. Although I take from fifteen to twenty-five periodicals, in five different languages, I consider yours the best straight fiction magazine on the market. What is more, my wife agrees with me.

Some authors and stories please me better than others, but I realize that a magazine must furnish reading matter for widely different tastes, so have no criticism to make along this line. I must say, however, that considered as a whole, your serials reach a higher standard of excellence than the short stories.

When *Munsey's* began publishing a complete novel in each issue, I began saving these, and now have some six volumes of excellent novels, some of which are valuable. I note that an English second-hand dealer is offering the number of *Munsey's* containing Joseph Conrad's "Victory" (February, 1915), for 7s. 6d., *net*, because of the fact that it is the first edition of this work.

I cannot close this without expressing my enjoyment of the Heart to Heart Talks. It is ordinarily the first thing I read in each issue.

Sincerely,
WM. RUFUS PRATT.

1115 Ninth Street, N. W.,
Washington, District of Columbia.

A WONDERFUL STORY

TO THE EDITOR:

I have just finished reading "The Golden Hope," by Grace S. Mason and John N. Hilliard, and I feel that I just must write you and tell what a wonderful, wonderful story it is.

To my way of thinking, *Kate* was a *real* woman. Gee! but wasn't she great? The story was one of the best I have ever read. I have never read any of the Mason and Hilliard stories before, but hereafter when I see their names I will know it's a splendid story, and be real prompt in buying the magazine.

I am going to commence reading "The Black Cloud," by another strange author, J. B. Harris-Burland. I know it is going to be a dandy also; but none can compare with those Western and desert stories. Give me a story of the outdoors every time, with men and women like *Kate* and *Wheat*.

I read the ALL-STORY and *Argosy* altogether; none other can take their place. My trunk is loaded with them.

Joplin, Missouri. BERTHA STOKES.

LETTERETTES

I accidentally acquired possession of one of your August 5 issues of the ALL-STORY, and am proud to say it is one of the best magazines I ever have read. I have since bought the 12th and 19th numbers, and I think Mr. and Mrs. James Dorrance have by far excelled all writers of late date in "Who Knows?" This is one of the best stories I have ever read in book or magazine form, and that's saying a lot, for I have read several hundred books and magazines regularly. I expect to subscribe for the ALL-STORY at an early date. Yours truly,

518 May Street. JOHN MCCLELLAN.
Jacksonville, Florida.

I have read with great interest Mr. Pettibone's "The Yellow Furlough," and am writing to say that I consider it one of the most artistic pieces of fiction I have seen in a long time. The very first paragraph grips your interest, and the element of suspense is remarkably sustained throughout. In character study I consider it exceptionally fine, and its ethical standard is high. It goes with a splendid swing, and, in fact, is a corking good tale of adventure. I hope we may see more from this entertaining writer's pen.

Very truly yours,
Highland, California. CORDRAY ADAMS.

Enclosed find ten cents, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, October 28. Have taken it for years as *All-Story Cavalier*, and now as the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and never missed a copy until last week.

You can see we think it some magazine, even though we miss others at times, we never fail to get the ALL-STORY.

MRS. F. C. MISNER.

582 Second Avenue,
Yuma, Arizona.

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