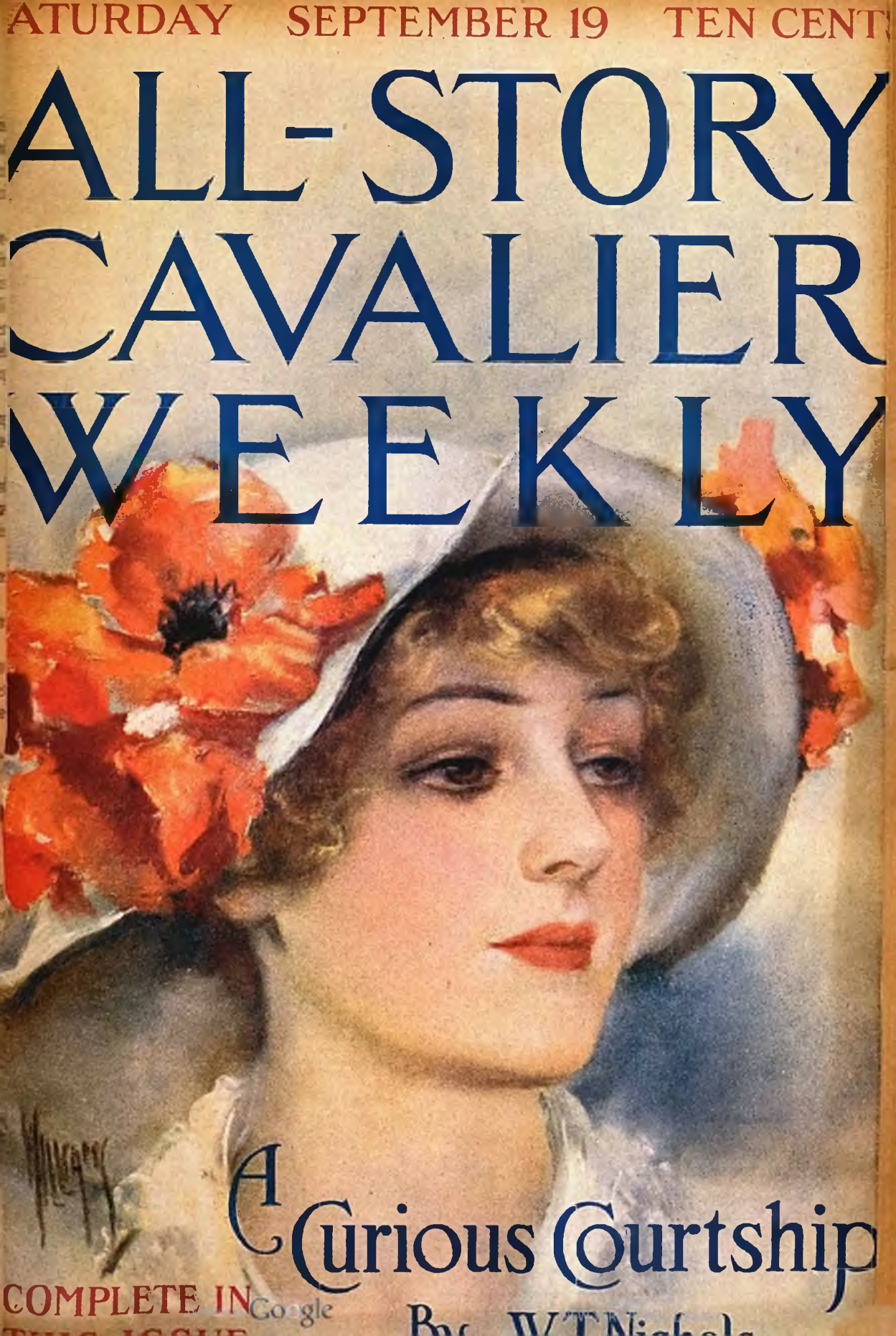
ATURDAY SEPTEMBER 19 TEN CENT

ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY



A Curious Courtship

By W.T.Nichols

COMPLETE IN

GOOD PIANO QUALITY

The First Consideration

KIMBALL
PIANOS

Are the choice of the great musicians of America; Kimball pianos were the choice of the mothers and grandmothers of the present generation and they are the choice of a larger number of present day purchasers than any other one make of piano in the world.

There is every reason why the Kimball should be your choice, because it combines that which is most sought after; namely, the best of musical and wearing quality AT A PRICE YOU CAN EASILY AFFORD.

WRITE FOR OUR FACTORY
DISTRIBUTING PRICES
AND PAYMENT TERMS

Make Home a Play House

No one, young or old, rich or poor, should in this day and age feel the necessity of leaving home for entertainment, and yet we all need and will have entertainment. It may be the kind that leaves either good or ill effects. Home entertainment is always uplifting. Have you seen, have you heard the music produced by the ***great***

Kimball Solo Player Piano

There is not another like it and in many—great many—respects there isn't another that equals it. With this most wonderful 88 Note Solo Player, the young, the old, even the invalid—indoor folks—can play any and all kinds of music and as if by magic change a dreary, humdrum home into a palace of music—a good place to be.

Catalogues, Prices, Terms, Mailed Free on Request

It is to your interest to have our beautifully illustrated catalogues, our FACTORY DISTRIBUTING PRICES and our easy credit terms on Kimball Pianos and the Kimball Solo Player Piano. Send for them today. **The coupon below, a postal card or letter brings them.**

Use This Coupon Now

and we will mail you catalogues, price lists and send you the **Musical Herald,** containing two pretty songs, words and music, absolutely FREE.

$2.50 a Month Buys a Genuine KIMBALL ORGAN

At Factory Prices

FREE Music Instructions by Our New Diagram System if you write at once.

You can now buy the famous Kimball Organs direct from the makers at factory prices. We will send them to reliable people anywhere, to be paid for on our extremely easy payment plan—$2.50 monthly and upwards if desired. Operating the largest piano and organ factory in the world, employing the largest capital, buying raw material in the greatest quantity for cash—the Kimball system of manufacturing and distributing positively saves you **$25 to $50** on strictly first class organs.

Valuable Features of the Kimball

For half a century Kimball Organs have been regarded as standard and America's favorite. They are famous for their beautiful tone and extraordinary wearing quality. The Kimball has many important new inventions that make them not only the sweetest toned but most powerful organs in the market today. Try one in your home at our expense.

W. W. KIMBALL CO.
1066 Kimball Hall, Chicago, Illinois

COUPON

W. W. KIMBALL CO., 1066 Kimball Hall, Chicago

Please send me FREE { Piano / Organ / Player Piano } catalogues, factory distributing prices and Musical Herald, containing two pretty songs with words and music FREE. Cross out the instrument you are interested in.

Name .....

City ..... *State* .....

St. or R. F. D .....

ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXVI CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 19, 1914 No. 3

TWO NOVELETTES

THREE CONTINUED STORIES

FIVE SHORT STORIES

VERSE

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $5.00 to Canada, and $8.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

ENTERED AT THE NEW YORK POST-OFFICE AS SECOND-CLASS MAIL MATTER—COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXVI SEPTEMBER 19, 1914 No. 3

The Rajah's Prize

by Marguerite & Armiger Barclay

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

NARAIN GHOSE, Indian law student in London, is much struck with a pretty, olive-skinned girl he sees in a vegetarian restaurant. This is Jacynth Elphinstone, who is on her way to her solicitors following the death of her mother. Jacynth learns that she is really daughter of an *ayah* and a *dohbee,* adopted by her supposed mother. She is penniless. Narain has a vision of Shiva, who tells him that he is destined to serve a beautiful girl in the "pit that hath no name," and to keep her out of difficulties. He makes Jacynth's acquaintance and she accepts his humble service understandingly. Rajanath arrives from India, telling Jacynth that she is really daughter of the Maharajah of Rohpore, and he takes her away despite the objections of Tom Lucas, who loves her. Narain goes too.

CHAPTER IX.

In the Palace.

A PEEP-HOLE view was all Jacynth got of Bombay. Through the port-hole of her cabin the scene reminded her of the moving pictures in a cinematograph theater.

It was Eastern, but circumscribed and doubly strange because her *ayahs* could give her no information about the moving panorama, and neither Narain nor Mr. Rajanath was available for the purpose.

From the moment of disembarkation, which seemed to her extremely hurried, she saw little. A closed carriage and the veil she wore shut out everything of interest. Even the shipping in the harbor, the fort, the docks, and the streets were only visible to her as far as their lower halves were concerned.

It was in the irony of things that the only place of note she had time to look at was the Victoria railway terminus, where less than an hour elapsed before she entrained for the journey to Rohpore.

The monotony of the voyage seemed as nothing compared with the

This story began in The All-Story Cavalier Weekly for September 12.

sweltering tedium of that railway journey. It lasted three days and nights.

The train seemed to crawl from station to station. At each the strange cries of the native porters and the incessant wail of the water-carriers, *"Pani! Pani!"* like the keening at an Irish wake, had in it a sound of foreboding.

As befitting her rank, she traveled alone in a reserved carriage. Her women were no longer with her; they had been sent off to their homes.

Her attention was divided between the flitting landscape, soon monotonous in its limited variety of jungle growth and arid plain, and the other Europeans who were traveling on the train.

There were fair-haired women in sun helmets and muslin frocks; bronzed, drill-clad Englishmen with that air of authority so soon acquired by the dominant race; a few children. At the various stations where they alighted with their numerous servants and voluminous luggage, Jacynth noticed that they were invariably met by friends.

The joviality and *camaraderie* that prevailed among them all was very apparent. Even in a strange land they had a welcome.

Exactly what she expected in the way of a welcome to herself at Rohpore she had not figured out. All she knew of the place was that it was a small military station in the central provinces, and that the *maharajah's* palace was several miles from it.

The question of her reception had not been discussed by Mr. Rajanath.

She had read a few books concerning Indian life—novels for the most part. They rather led her to expect something in the way of royally caparisoned elephants, a host of servants, a brass band, and a military escort.

Imagine her feelings, therefore, when, her destination reached, the train pulled up at an empty platform and a dilapidated, shedlike building, which did duty as a ticket-office and signal-box combined.

A pompous-looking native station-master, in baggy muslin trousers and a velvet cap, was the only living creature in sight!

Narain made his appearance at the door of the compartment occupied by Jacynth. He carried a large white umbrella, and deferentially assisted her to alight. Higher up the platform Mr. Rajanath was engaged in a voluble argument with the station-master about the luggage.

"Is there no one to meet me?" she inquired.

Narain could not fail to notice the disappointment in her voice. He had already satisfied himself that no one and no equipage of any sort was in waiting for her.

"Possibly they know not the terain we come by," he said by way of consolation.

Mr. Rajanath came up, hot and perspiring.

"We must walk," he said, looking rather annoyed. "Even the station bullock-cart is gone."

"Walk?" cried Jacynth. "How far is it?"

"Two miles, perhaps."

She looked along the red, dusty road, with its fringe of burned-up grass withering under the pitiless sun, and her heart sank within her.

She was amazed. Her pride was hurt. It seemed incredible that her arrival should be so completely ignored. The absence of any welcome to the home of her fathers appalled her.

For the moment, indignation saved her from the weakness of tears.

"Walk?" she repeated bitterly. "Certainly not. The idea is absurd."

"I agree it is most positively annoying," said Mr. Rajanath. "I, too, am hot, and it is noonday. But we have no choice."

Jacynth's lips set. "You go, Mr. Rajanath. I shall sit here. I shall

not move until a carriage comes to fetch me. And if I am kept waiting too long I shall go straight back to Bombay."

"That is not possible. His highness would prohibit. It would be more expedient if you accompanied us," added Mr. Rajanath suavely.

"You and Mr. Ghose are to go on. Don't argue," retorted Jacynth haughtily.

She sat on her jewel-box and watched them depart. When they were out of sight, and the station-master, after a long look at her, had shut and locked himself into his rabbit-hutch of an office, she drew aside her thick gauze veil in an attempt to breathe more freely.

She was hot and tired and thirsty. She wanted a wash and a rest, and all that was possible to her was to sit bolt upright on an uncomfortable metal box on the platform of an ovenlike station and wait for a carriage that might be hours in coming!

She wondered what Tom would think if he could see her now, travel-stained and disconsolate.

At thought of Tom her eyes brimmed over. Pride had held her tears back, but heartache released them.

Hardly had she wiped them away when a pleasant-looking young Englishman strolled on to the platform and knocked at the station-master's door.

"Hi! Hi!" he called. "Come out, you lazy old reptile."

It took a lot of hammering to arouse the lethargic official. When at length he opened the ticket-window there ensued a long argument regarding a case which the Englishman was expecting.

According to the station-master it had not arrived, and several minutes elapsed in further assertions to that effect before the discovery was made that he was sitting upon it.

"There it is!" asserted the Englishman, catching sight of part of his name on the label. "Get off, you son of a pig! Fetch it out and put it on my motor, *ek dum!*"

He wheeled round and, suddenly catching sight of Jacynth, stared for a moment, then, took off his hat, hesitated, and addressed her.

"Are you waiting for anybody? Can I be of any use?" he asked in Hindustani.

"I'm waiting for a carriage from the palace which apparently nobody has the decency to send," Jacynth answered in her very perfect English. She had quite forgotten her discarded veil, or her rank and its conventional restraints.

"By Jove, that's rather rough on you." He changed his tone. "Ah—excuse my asking, but you're not—ah—you're English, aren't you?"

"Only in a way. My mother was English, but I am the *maharajah's* daughter."

The statement evidently staggered him. He seemed to be searching in vain for something to say.

"I have just come out from home—I mean England," Jacynth went on. "I've been here half an hour, sitting on this box."

He made no effort to conceal his surprise. To come across an English girl, as she undoubtedly seemed to be, though dressed in native costume, who seriously asserted that she was a *maharajah's* daughter, was something beyond his experience.

Yet, he had no reason to doubt her statement, and he fell to wondering what sort of a life she expected to lead in that stuffy old palace yonder, mewed up with her old rascal of a father and the notorious dancing-girl who had achieved the status of queen.

He could not help speculating as to what had brought her out. Possibly she had been coerced. It was outrageous. She looked so pretty—and so pathetic, too—sitting on that box.

He almost felt inclined to offer her the protection of his fiancée and her mother, but thought better of it.

After all, she had only expressed a desire for a conveyance to take her to her destination.

"It's odd they haven't sent to meet you," he said. "They've no end of carriages up there—moth-eaten looking arrangements—but they use 'em all the time. There's the *maharajah's* car as well. Unless it's in Calcutta being repaired. Expect it's there now," he added with a laugh.

"I fancy he uses it to thin out his population. Has a sort of private execution gymkana in the palace grounds, you know. That's how he damages it. At least, that's the *gup* —gossip—at the club; not necessarily true, though. We don't really know what goes on in his highness's private domains."

The stranger's pleasant voice and untrammeled talk were very refreshing.

Jacynth smiled encouragingly and waited to hear more.

"What I can't make out is," he went on, "why the old John—the *maharajah,* who's so fond of any excuse for a *tamasha*—didn't have the whole circus out to escort you home. Tell you what, let me drive you there. It's only five miles."

Five miles! And Mr. Rajanath had said two!

"Thank you very much," said Jacynth with alacrity. "I'm rather tired after three days and nights in the train." She could not keep a tremor out of her voice.

"Had any tiffin?"

"N-not yet."

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "What must they be thinking about? Look here, there are eatables in that case I came to fetch. Fortnum & Mason sort of things, you know. I'll borrow a hammer from the old chap and you can have some refreshment on the way."

Five minutes later Jacynth was seated in his car with *foie gras* and biscuits, game pie, and other European *delikatessen* before her. And while she picnicked on these good things her good Samaritan rattled on in his cheery way.

"This is a pretty battered looking conveyance," he apologized. "The roads here are awful and knock a car to pieces." He was stowing her luggage on his Panhard as he talked.

"By Jove, this brass box is pretty heavy. Jewelry, eh? We'll have it inside under the seat, then, for safety. Rohpore's said to have a tidy lot of jewels. All *rajahs* have, though.

"*Chalé jao,* you silly old porcupine!"—this to the station-master. "And next time you keep a case of mine rotting in your bally office, you'll have trouble with government offeshals. *Sunja?*"

He handed Jacynth a green umbrella, set the car going, and rather noisily started it on its journey. Then he turned to her with an apologetic smile.

"'Fraid I'm not talking or looking after you a bit as royalty should be. Hope you'll forgive me."

"I'll forgive you for anything since you've rescued me from that appalling station," said Jacinth. "If you hadn't turned up I think I should have gone back to Bombay!"

"You might have done worse."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, well, at best it's a life of restraint, isn't it? And with all due apologies for saying so, your father's a bit of a holy terror, ain't he?"

"Is he?"

"Don't you know?"

"I don't remember him. I was brought home from India when I was a baby."

"Then why did you ever come back? Not from choice surely?"

"From choice," she answered gravely.

He turned and gave her a look of surprise tempered with respect.

"Then I think you're jolly brave," he said.

The car hammered and hummed on over a road that was alternately

patches of loose stone and deep red dust. The tawny cloud it churned up obscured everything behind it.

But Jacynth looked only ahead, full of conjecture as to what the future held for her. Somewhere beyond the rise they were ascending lay her new home with its new ties.

"There's the palace, over to the left," said her companion.

Looking in the direction indicated she saw, topping a line of palms, the upper portions of a huge building. It was dusky red, irregular, and Saracenic in design. Each moment brought it closer.

Presently they turned a bend and came full upon the rock-hewn edifice of deep red sandstone.

It was very solid, very silent, behind its high wall pierced by one great arched gateway. Along its elaborately carved front ran two tiers of unglazed openings. Jacynth likened them to sightless eyes.

"Well, what d' you think of it?" he asked, regarding her with curiosity.

Her answer did not come readily, nor was it direct.

"That great wall, it's rather prison-like, is it not?"

"You couldn't get over it easily, and the gate is always guarded, I believe," he answered dryly. "By the way, have you any one you can thoroughly trust in case you ever wanted to get a message outside?"

"Yes, Narain, a law student. He has come out as my secretary. He is absolutely loyal."

"I'm glad you're not quite alone. You might get tired of the life. You never know."

He felt truly sorry for her. It did not seem fair to deliver her up without first letting her know, in some way, that this visit or return home of hers—whichever she preferred to call it—was likely to be irrevocable.

"I suppose you know that once there it won't be easy for you to get out," he said seriously.

Fear touched her for a moment. Tom had said the same thing. But then Tom's warning had been prejudiced, and she had discounted it.

This young man, however, was quite disinterested.

"Yes, I—I suppose so," she agreed. "But I hope I sha'n't want to get out. I belong there."

"Still, if you should ever want help," he said with a little hesitation, "send your Narain to me with a message. My name's Elwin. I'm a subaltern quartered in this God-forsaken hole. Hullo, here's the palace crowd if I'm not mistaken. There must have been some hitch. They've got the whole show out now, anyway."

He steered the car to the side of the road so as to give room to an approaching procession. It came on slowly and majestically.

Jacynth's eyes brightened. So she was to have some sort of welcome after all!

First came outriders dressed in tawdry liveries of red, green, and gold. No two of their mounts matched in size or color.

Half a score of native cavalry surrounded a gilt coach drawn by a pair of white horses with manes and tails dyed sky-blue. A small elephant surmounted by a wonderful howdah of silver gilt brought up the rear.

"Excuse me," said Elwin diffidently, "but hadn't you better lower your veil?"

"Oh, I forgot." Jacynth covered her face.

The procession had drawn level with them and come to a halt. Mr. Rajanath, who by now was arrayed in cool *tussor* silk, emerged from the gilt coach. He glanced at Elwin suspiciously.

"Wherefore did you not wait for our arrival, highness?" he asked peevishly.

"Rather, why was I kept waiting so long?" countered Jacynth.

Mr. Rajanath looked discomfited. "That was an unpremeditated mistake. It so seems that I gave notifi-

cation of wrong date. We were not offeeshally expected to arrive before to-morrow." He turned to Elwin. "We thank you for your services," he said pompously.

"That's all right," said Elwin. His eyes did not leave Jacynth.

Mr. Rajanath held open the door of gilt coach. It looked stuffy and uninviting. Moreover it appeared that she was expected to share it with the maharajah's emissary.

Elwin saw her hesitation.

"Why not take the elephant?" he suggested in an undertone, and seeing that she acquiesced, added aloud: "Her highness will ride on the elephant."

Mr. Rajanath gave the order irascibly. Everybody seemed to be conspiring to question his authority.

"Doubtless your highness has not ridden upon the pearl of beasts before," he observed querulously, as the animal at a word from the mahout gave a lurch forward and subsided on its knees.

But Jacynth's attention was otherwise engaged. Elwin was showing her how to perch on the gigantic foot and so mount to the *howdah*.

"Good-by, and thank you," she said, giving him her hand.

Elwin leaned forward. Mr. Rajanath had shut himself into the gilt coach.

"Don't forget. If you ever want to send a message I shall be only too pleased to be of service. But I hope you'll be happy. By the way, I'm engaged to a girl out here in Rohpore. If you knew her I'm sure you'd be friends. I'll tell her all about you; then you can count on two allies if you need 'em."

His friendliness had the effect of heartening her up. When the elephant was once more on its feet she leaned out of the *howdah,* smiling quite happily.

"Thanks. It's all so new to me. I'm sure I shall like it," she said, as though to an old friend.

The procession turned and started. Elwin drove off in the opposite direction, vanishing in a cloud of red dust.

The elephant plodded majestically along under its royal burden. Jacynth rather enjoyed the new sensation.

It was short enough. In less than ten minutes they had reached the walls of the palace. The heavy gates swung open. The cavalcade passed under the archway. The gates closed again with a clang.

At the sound, heavy and ominous, a feeling of depression descended on her once more.

The palace at close quarters was not as impressive as seen from a distance. Its exterior had an air of neglect. Its coloring was garish, giving the eye no rest.

Had it crumbled to the ground the *maharajah* would not have greatly minded. It had long been his dream to build a palatial red-brick villa upon its ruins — a modern villa with outrageous marble mantelpieces, startling tiles and the usual "new art" accessories. In the mean time, it made a picturesque landmark from a distance if a most dilapidated-looking residence close at hand.

Another disappointment was in store for Jacynth. She looked about the courtyard expectantly for her father.

With the exception of Narain and a coolie, who was sprinkling water lethargically, the place was empty.

The only sign of interest in her arrival seemed to come from some of the small windows up above. She saw nothing, only heard whisperings and the rustle of bead curtains.

Narain eyed her wistfully as he came forward to help her down from the *howdah.* Neither spoke, nor did Mr. Rajanath volunteer anything about the *maharajah.* Jacynth was too proud and too tired to ask questions.

In the shadow of the main doorway she could just discern the forms of several women. Mr. Rajanath con-

ducted her so far and addressed them curtly.

The women led her through a gloomy hall hung with gaudily framed mirrors, into a corridor and thence along innumerable passages, half-lit, mysterious, full of whispers, of muffled laughter, of stifled exclamations—sounds emanating from many women living behind the veil.

The *maharajah* had but one wife, but he collected women as other men collected china. Some of them he had seen once and might never see again. They were forgotten. But the palace would hold them until they died.

The close air of the palace was full of a smell of cooking, greasy, spiced, with which the scent of attar of roses and pungent incense mingled incongruously. Jacynth's gorge rose at the nauseating combination.

At last, when it seemed to her they must have burrowed into the depths of the earth, she was taken through a curtained recess to find herself in an enormous room, ill-lit and gloomily palatial.

The walls and ceiling were decorated with obscene frescoes, horrible to a woman's eyes. A brass four-poster bedstead with tawdry blue silk hangings occupied one end of the room, and a few carved gilt chairs, remnants of the old French occupation, looked beautiful and as alien to their surroundings as poor Jacynth herself was conscious of feeling.

In a corner, almost lost in the gloom, strangest anachronism of all, was a *priedieu* and a small plaster statue of the Virgin and Child.

Jacynth suddenly wondered if this had been her mother's room.

She was utterly tired and spent. Her one desire was for rest. The women brought her cool, scented water and washed her face, hands and feet. They also brought her food, spiced and messy, but she could not bring herself to touch it.

Finally she bade them leave her.

Her jewel case had been placed in the room. Among its barbaric treasures she had put a few of her own small knickknacks and photographs—relics of England.

She took them out and arranged them, and their insignificance in the vast apartment mocked at her. Tom's photograph looked strangely remote on the huge dressing-table. From the bed, so great was the distance, the face was a blur.

She sat on the edge of the bed and stared round with terrified eyes at those fearful frescoes. At night—how could she bear that room?

"If I don't like it, I shall go home," she told herself. "If I don't like it I can go home—next week."

Consoling herself with this sophistry she lay down and fell asleep.

CHAPTER X.

Queen and Princess.

SHE woke to the sound of whispering, to find herself surrounded by women—old women, young women, comely women, haggard women, prematurely aged women—a horde of women, all kindred to the ex-wives and present concubines of the *maharajah*.

They were appraising her, apparently from a marriage-market point of view; for their remarks left little to the imagination.

Sitting on the edge of the bed itself, but not chattering like the others, was a woman of about thirty, something of a beauty, scarlet-lipped, fine featured. Her curious slanting eyes were fixed steadily on Jacynth. The stare was not altogether unfriendly.

Jacynth sat up, naturally startled at finding the room so full. At a gesture of command from the woman on the bed the others withdrew, and the two were alone.

"Who were all those women?" Jacynth asked. "Who are you?"

The woman's upper lip lifted scornfully.

"Parrots are they," she answered. "Things of noise and foolishness. As for me, I am the queen. That is what I came to tell you."

"Why?"

"Because there is only room for one in the palace."

Jacynth read a certain menace in her tone.

"I have no wish to question your position," she said indifferently.

"That is well. In the *zenana* no one questions it."

"No doubt you are to be envied. I will take your authority for granted. Is that all you wished to say?"

"No. Why are you here?"

Jacynth appreciated that in this passage of arms she must hold her own. It was not a question of asserting her superiority; all she desired was to insure the other's respect.

"You speak very good English," she said, suppressing a yawn.

The queen looked taken aback. She almost got up to go. Then, altering her mind, she retorted with forced sweetness:

"But you speak no Hindi?"

"Very little," said Jacynth equably.

"So will you not know what is said or thought or done within these walls."

"I am not at all curious."

"But you will live here! For you it will be the life of one who is deaf and blind."

Jacynth laughed. It was not a very convincing laugh. She felt the truth of the queen's words.

True, she had an ally in Narain, and another in Elwin, but she knew it would be unwise to attach much importance to their capacity for help.

"Why do you speak as though I were an enemy?" she thought it as well to ask.

"Because you are a white woman, and because you are here," was the quick answer.

"I am here of my own free will."

"That is strange."

"You forget I am the maharajah's daughter."

"That is strangest of all," said the queen.

Jacynth looked sharply at her. The statement served to confirm her own perplexities regarding her parentage. It was the one subject she wanted to elucidate.

"Why strange? Because my mother was an Englishwoman?"

The queen shook her head. "We talk without purpose. That is waste of words. I will speak what is in my mind, then will you know how it is between you and me."

Her tone was less aggressive. Jacynth got the impression that at heart she was not really inimical, only anxious to discover a stranger's real attitude—the way in which they were to regard one another.

After all, this dark beauty was queen. She probably feared that her influence might be undermined by no less a person than the maharajah's daughter.

Jacynth, of course, had no intention of trying to supersede her. So long as the queen did not attempt to exercise authority over her she was quite willing to concede her all the advantages of precedence.

"I am listening. Between you and me there need be no ill-feeling," she said.

"There has been much talk of your coming, of your betrothal—"

Jacynth, startled, sat up. "My *betrothal?*" she cried.

"To Shamshud Singh. It is arranged. Have you not heard?"

"How—monstrous!"

Jacynth spoke to herself rather than the queen. She went hot and cold. She felt groping in the dark.

"Rajanath knew. Did he not tell you?" asked the queen.

Jacynth shook her head.

"Shamshud is to marry you when your caste is restored. That will be soon."

"I—I don't understand. Who is Shamshud Singh? And why should I marry him?"

"For one reason, Shamshud is rich, and the coffers of the maharajah are empty. For another, he has no heir. If I do not bear him a man-child the throne of Rohpore will fall to one for whom he has a great enmity."

"But—but you are young. You may still have a child," objected Jacynth. "And even if you did not, why should I—"

Her sentence trailed off. She was appalled at the thought of having been brought to India merely to be an instrument of political exigency.

She understood now why her presence had been desired. Her virginity revolted at it. Her predispositions toward everything Oriental became unreal. She saw that they must have been a sort of hysteria induced by emotional circumstance.

Her mind shuddered at the prospect of being thrown into the arms of a native—a man with a black skin!

"How will you help it?" inquired the queen. "It is already settled. What the maharajah wills is law."

A sudden doubt came into Jacynth's mind. Did the queen desire such a marriage? Her tone when speaking of her childlessness had sounded regretful.

"Tell me," she said: "do you also wish that I should marry—for the sake of an heir to the throne?"

"Does the moon seek to hide her face behind the clouds? Is it more pleasant to her that little stars should give light instead? That, for one reason, is my answer."

"There is another reason?"

"It is this: *I* do not bear enmity to the maharajah's nephew who will succeed him."

The admission seemed a strange one to Jacynth. Why should this woman run counter to her own husband's feelings in such a vital matter as the succession to the throne?

That circumstance did not, however, concern her. What did was that the queen had plainly shown she was opposed to any marriage, the result of which might conceivably place her in the background. That gave Jacynth hope. She meant to resist the imposition of a husband of any sort on her, and in that determination felt she had an ally.

"Who and what is this Shamshud Singh?" she asked.

"The Jam of Tetri." The queen made a contemptuous gesture. "His lands are large. They adjoin this kingdom. He is very English. What you call up to date."

Jacynth's interest in Shamshud Singh ended there. But in the case of the queen it was growing. She had great personality and a very odd charm that was not altogether to be explained by her good looks.

Jacynth asked her where she had learned to speak English.

"*Arr-ee!*" The queen's eyes narrowed reminiscently. "I have had opportunities. But five years ago I danced for the delight of men. To the sound of the sitar and the bubbling of *hukkas* did I dance, and the quickly drawn breath of men whose senses are stirred."

Unaccountably enough, Jacynth was not very shocked. All along, dimly, she seemed to have been aware of the queen's unmoral side. Her very admission of it was disarming.

"Englishmen did come to my house to watch my dancing and to listen for unguarded words. The government send their spies everywhere. For in the house of a dancing girl men talk what they would not whisper in the bazaar. I am in favor of the British *raj*. I like your men. Why did you not stay in your own country and marry one?"

"I came because I was needed. I—I came because I thought I should like to know more of my father and hear something of my mother."

A look of compassion came into the queen's face.

"You will know more of your father," she said ironically.

"And my mother? Do you know

anything concerning her?" There was great eagerness in the question.

"She has passed," returned the queen evasively. "I know naught of her. Of talk concerning her there is much, but where there are women there is always talk. The wise do not listen. This I know: the maharajah will hear no mention of her."

"I suppose that is because he loved her," was Jacynth's thoughtful comment. She was trying to conjure up a vision of the mother she had never known.

"How are you called?" asked the queen in a sociable tone.

"My name is Jacynth. You have not told me yours. Kasbi is it not?"

"*Kasbi!*" The word was flashed back at her. The blank surprise in her face stemmed the torrent of words that seemed about to flow from the queen's lips.

With fine control she asked calmly: "Who told you to call me Kasbi?"

"Is it not your name?"

The queen laughed. "It is a bazaar name for a bad woman."

Jacynth's face crimsoned.

"Call me Kathbela. And do not look so troubled. You did not understand. I do not mind. The good and the bad go sometimes together when one has been through the Workshop of the World."

And after a short silence she continued ruminatively:

"You are evidently chaste. It must be very dull. I do not remember a time when I was—dull." She stretched herself, setting all her beads and ornaments ajingle. "Do you dislike me?"

"No. I think I like you."

"And now that I have seen you face to face and heard your voice, I also like you. You were unwise to come. Already you are trapped, little sister. You will never get away. Like me you will live and die within these walls. Do you think I would not go back if I could?" She clenched her hands passionately. "I would give every *pice* that bought me, every jewel that tempted me, to be free once more.

"I wanted to be queen! Well, I am queen. I have *sarees* of gold, jewels without number; yet for all my splendor am I sad. Many times a day I array myself and change my jewels. For whom? For myself alone! Wo is me!"

"What is it you want then?"

"All that you have given up—and more. All that you have never known. Admiration, the desire of men, the substance of men.

"Does not a painter crave for his brush? Does not the musician need his instrument? Then how much more does a woman, whose need is such as mine, crave for the means of expressing it? Each week I risk death, and yet my desires are unsatisfied."

"I don't understand."

"You will—when you have put forth all your womanhood."

A light step sounded behind the hangings.

"The maharajah!" whispered Kathbela.

Jacynth's eyes went to the curtained entrance. Her heart fluttered with filial interest at the prospect of at last seeing her father. She had pictured him but vaguely, her conception of him being based on the portraits of other Indian potentates which she had seen in the illustrated papers.

Dignity and magnificence of apparel had been their prevailing characteristics. She expected to see something of both now.

But when the *chic* was pushed aside there entered a small middle-aged man of familiar native type. Nothing about him looked high-bred. He might have been an elder brother of Narain's.

Jacynth had been sitting on the bed. She rose, took a step toward him, and then paused irresolutely.

She could not help wondering how this very ordinary-looking dark gen-

tleman in a turban and silk garments, that reminded her of an elaborate suit of pajamas, would receive her. Was he going to kiss her, to adopt the usual Western attitude of father toward daughter?

Something in his leisurely approach convinced her that he was going to do neither. Her heart sank.

A set smile was on the maharajah's lips, but his eyes were busily studying Jacynth. They examined her with the closeness he might have given to some strange animal.

When he spoke his words sounded as if they had been committed to memory beforehand.

"How do you do? Is your health good? You look pale."

Jacynth forced herself to respond in a voice as dispassionate as his own.

"I am quite well, thank you."

"You are comfortable? You like this room?"

"No, I do not. I should prefer another."

"It was your mother's room. Very nice room, I think."

"Doubtless she does not like the pictures," suggested the queen.

"Neither did her mother," he grinned. "It will not be of long duration. After your caste is restored you will be betrothed. Shamshud Singh doubtless will wish to hasten the wedding. He is anxious for a white wife. In England he kept an actress."

Jacynth was amazed at the cool statement. A few moments elapsed before she could find anything to say.

"I am not interested in the person you mention," she got out. "Nor have I any intention of marrying."

The maharajah smiled tolerantly. "The arrangement of marriage is not with the bride in this country. We provide husband. You provide children. That is all; no questions asked."

Jacynth could not control her feelings any longer.

"Oh, my God!" she cried suddenly. "Why did I come?"

"Because I wished it," rejoined the maharajah suavely. "Also because of the mark on your foot—the five-headed cobra mark. I have seen the impression Rajanath took of it. You are of the royal blood of Rohpore. Now since you are here you will conform to our customs. Henceforth they are your customs."

"I do not recognize them. I shall not obey them," retorted Jacynth rebelliously. "I came here of my own free will, and if I choose I shall go of my own free will."

The maharajah laughed softly. It sounded to Jacynth like the purr of a cat.

The queen shook her head. "The fly enters the spider's web of its own free will, but of what avail is that when the fly is caught?"

This time the maharajah chuckled. He gave his queen a leer of approval.

"You speak wisely, Kathbela. My daughter, do not struggle. It is of no avail. Be dutiful. Obey the king, and for your comfort's sake, the queen. As for Shamshud Singh, he is not so very bad. He is moreover quite English in parts."

He turned wearily and left room.

Then Jacynth's surcharged feelings found vent. With the exception of Narain, she had not a friend in the palace. She was not wanted for herself at all. She was only a cipher, a political tool.

Oblivious of the queen's presence she cast herself on her knees and cried as if her heart would break. She cried on and on without stopping. Her body was torn by her sobs.

Presently a soft hand was laid on her hair, stroking it soothingly.

"Hush!" said the queen.

Jacynth raised her face.

"I want to go!" she cried wildly. "I've made an awful mistake. I want to go!"

The queen smiled sadly.

"That is impossible," she said. "Little sister, let us make a bargain. We are two women greatly differing in nature. I traffic in the Workshop

of the World. You are but a *jahil kargas"* (ignorant virgin). "Yet have we one thing in common. I would go back to my town, you to your country.

"Softly, little sister. Do not break your heart. Never before in my life have I offered friendship to a woman. Take it and be comforted.

"So! Are we friends? See, yonder! The white man with the strong face in the photograph; he is smiling. He would not smile to see you weeping thus.

"Is he your friend? Would he be your husband? Oh, foolish *butcha!* He would have taken you so tenderly by the hand and led you so honorably through the Workshop of the World—"

It was the third time she had used the phrase. Jacynth asked the meaning of it. The queen pondered her answer.

"It is a saying we have in this land," she said presently. "It means the forge of Nature—the temple of love and life. It means that—and more.

"Come, dry your eyes, little sister, we have talked enough."

CHAPTER XI.

A Road to Royalty.

TOM LUCAS had received no word from Jacynth since her departure. And she had promised to write.

Her silence filled him with foreboding. Had her letters been intercepted? He knew that was possible.

He found the suspense intolerable; yet he could do nothing. He had written to her by every mail. To write to her had been his only consolation.

But now many weeks had passed and no news had came from her. It was like writing to one who had vanished out of existence.

He went to see Mr. Vannam, but that gentleman was unable to relieve his anxiety.

"I'm sorry to have to say it, Mr. Lucas," said the solicitor, "but it is my opinion that we shall hear nothing more of her. If you make inquiries, you will probably meet with lies. Unfortunately, she was a free agent and a most obstinate young woman. If she had been my daughter, I should have smacked her and sent her to bed; and if she had been my sweetheart, I should have married her without delay."

"She wouldn't be married," said Tom in caustic tones, and left disconsolately.

But a week later he had indirect news of his beloved. It came in a letter from Narain Khuma Ghose, and it gave him food for deep thought.

THE PALACE,
Rohpore.

HONORED SIR:

I take this grand opportunity of inditing a few lines to your illustrious self. Please forgive the swank. Her augustness is as well as can be expected, but I have the pleasure of informing you that all is not well.

To my miserable knowledge she has written to your most honorable personality on several occasions. The first she did give to Mr. Rajanath to post. Possibly you were never recipient of this scrawl.

Two more she placed in my own hands here in the palace and I parted with them only to the postman. If you have not set eyes on these, then I am not extravagantly surprised. The postman is a low rascal who would trade his grandmother for a *pice.*

To make positively certain of this falling into your honorable hands I am, by stealth and deception, quitting the palace this night to secrete it in a letter-box not in the royal jurisdiction.

I will now proceed to detail the situations to you with lightning rapidity.

Since we come here it is all a great disappointment to her highness, and shortly she will become so highly insubordinate as to be dangerous to herself. You must know that the maharajah, her paternal boss, is, in your unvarnished language, no damn good, a rotter of all sorts. He nourishes no affection in his breast for her highness and has imported her here to serve his own terminations.

Upon the restoration of her caste, which is civil and religious ceremony, he will be

troth and speedily marry her while you wait to Shamshud Singh, of whom much good is spoken. It is extremely probable that her highness will shortly suffer molestation and perhaps be confined if still proving insurrectable.

The queen, it is said, has no wish for the marriage which is on the cards. Should it become squashed, or had her highness refused to come to this land, the State of Rohpore would have ultimately passed into the hands of Bakhsu Tanan, the next of kin, for whom the maharajah nourishes abomination. I hear it whispered that Bakhsu Tanan is the queen's lover, wherefore she has no wish to see her highness married to a rival and bear him a male child.

The time is short. We ourselves can make no appeal to the government to help stop.

Rest assured, most honored sir, that I who am her highness's servant will render my uttermost to protect her. Nevertheless, should you take a tip from one of my humble persuasion, it would be to take a ship and land here precipitately.

Oh, my dear sir, be jolly quick.

I have the honor to inscribe myself your honor's most truly

NARAIN KHUMA GHOSE.

Behind the quaint and faulty English Tom read all that Narain intended to convey.

Jacynth needed him—needed him urgently. But his common sense told him that it would not be of the slightest use to start hot-foot for India until he could hit upon some plan of gaining access to her.

He knew enough of the seclusion with which women of the East are hedged about to be aware that only with the greatest difficulty could he insure a meeting with her. Judging by Narain's letter even communication with her would be difficult. Without extraneous help he might even fail to gain entrance to the palace in which she was confined.

Government assistance was what he wanted in such a matter, but he knew no one at the India Office. The alternative was somebody versed in Indian ways. Luckily, he knew such a one.

So he took Narain's letter and his trouble to his friend's club, and caught him there.

Penfeather was an ex-civil servant. At first he listened with considerable amusement to Tom's story. He thought Tom was romancing. But his deadly earnestness presently convinced him to the contrary. The case, moreover, was beyond his experience. He doubted his ability—anybody's ability—to solve it as Tom wanted it solved. Tom read that in his face when he came to an end.

"What can I do? What's the best thing to do?" he asked anxiously. "Of course, I mean to go out there anyway. But I ought to have official backing. In the mean time, how about a cable to the viceroy?"

Penfeather looked dubious. "That wouldn't help you. The government wouldn't move on such scanty knowledge. They'd want the whole case—all the details—laid before them. They'd ask for substantiation—proofs. It would take weeks, perhaps months before they start investigating even. If there's one thing they are shy of it's interfering with the domestic affairs of the native rulers. Government prefers to let them go their own sweet way unless they do something particularly flagrant.

"As far as I can see this old *maharajah* rascal of yours is acting quite within his rights. The girl's his daughter. He can dispose of her as he likes. You'd never get the government to give the matter their consideration, or to regard it as vital."

"But it is vital, infernally vital—to us both," contested Tom hotly.

"To you and the lady, yes; but I'm afraid the powers that be will ignore that. They can't put the law in motion on behalf of private interests. In fact, I don't see where the law comes in. And you can't expect the viceroy to declare war on the *maharajah* Not that force would frighten him. He'd be advised by native lawyers—they 're contentious devils—to fight, and that's just what he would like."

"You're not very helpful," said Tom.

"Well, look here, I'll write to the deputy commissioner at Rohpore. He's a good chap. Perhaps he'll be able to help you. How will that do?"

"It would do all right if I weren't in an infernal hurry. What you don't seem to appreciate is that every hour's of consequence. Once they've married her—"

"But you say she objects."

"Of course she objects. But how will that help her if they use coercion, as they evidently mean to?"

"You needn't give up hope on that account. After all, coercion means time, and it's time you want."

Penfeather was sincerely desirous of being of assistance. But he didn't see how he was to give it. He seemed only able to counsel hope.

"What you want to do first is to get into touch with the maharajah," he said, after a pause. "My friend, the D. C., might help you there."

"And suppose he can't?"

"Then you'd have to depend on your wits. The *maharajah* doesn't know you," Penfeather went on thoughtfully. "If you don't let on what brought you, I don't see why you shouldn't get into touch with him."

"That's what I'm keen about—touch with him."

Tom's eyes glinted savagely.

"It has been done before," said Penfeather reflectively.

"What has?"

"The gudgeon business—the confidence trick. Now, look here, Lucas, you want to think of something that would make you *persona grata* in Rohpore."

"With the *maharajah*—how the deuce am I to manage that?"

"Some dodge—pianola, moving picture machine, aeroplane. Most of the native rulers are fearfully keen on that sort of stunt. An aeroplane would fetch your man better than anything. Do you fly?"

"I've done a little, but—"

"Oh, you needn't be an expert. If I were you I should buy a second-hand one cheap and pack off to India with it. It would do the trick of getting you admittance into the royal precincts, anyway."

Tom thought it a cranky project, but Penfeather, pleased with himself at having at last hit on a tangible suggestion, talked him over. He gave him a lot of first-hand information concerning the native idiosyncrasies—their prejudices and weaknesses.

Like most civil servants of lengthy Indian experience, he thought and spoke lightly of the native ruling class. A maharajah to him was an irresponsible creature, a sort of spoiled child, that was to be browbeaten or cajoled. His suggestion of an aeroplane, in or through which Tom was to approach the Rohpore "savage," appealed to him as quite practicable and very humorous.

The more he thought about it, the more he urged it. He knew nothing of flying beyond what he had read in the papers. He drew a comical picture of Tom soaring over the palace walls and alighting in the courtyard, a sort of envoy from Krishna straight from heaven to awe the *maharajah* and win his confidence.

What Tom was to do after that, he did not trouble to go into. He might take his prospective father-in-law for a trial trip and keep him up aloft as a hostage until he secured advantageous conditions, or he could swap the aeroplane for a handful of crown jewels, or fly off with the girl. That was for Tom to decide. His own share in the matter was limited to indicating a way to bring it to a successful issue, and he considered he had done that very effectively.

Tom was not impressed, but he knew of no one else to go to for advice. He quite appreciated that a flying machine would make as good a stalking-horse as anything else to cover his intentions in Rohpore, but because of his moderate knowledge of aviation he deemed it a cumbrous method of procedure.

Still the idea stuck in his mind. The spice of adventure it connoted had its attraction.

Moreover, Tom was a very modern product of civilization, one of those men who are among the first to make practical use of new devices in preference to old ones. He had the natural mechanical abilities of the machine age, and the cool pluck of those who go into perilous enterprizes for the sheer love of the danger surrounding them.

In the end, these characteristics sent him to one of the flying schools.

Even then he did not admit to himself that he was going to follow Penfeather's suggestion. The idea of flying to Jacynth's assistance was too fantastic. He did not even believe it to be feasible. But there was always the prospect that possession of an aeroplane might bring him into contact with the palace people.

He had flown several times as a passenger on a friend's machine. Indeed, he had picked up a working knowledge of the art of flying, having occasionally handled the controls of a biplane. Moreover, as a practical motorist, he had little to learn on the mechanical side.

At the aerodrome, accordingly, it was with quiet confidence in his potential abilities as an airman that he walked down the line of sheds in search of the man he wanted.

He found him at work on a dismantled Gnome engine. Holmes, a journalist by profession and an aviator by predilection, greeted him cheerily. A minute or so later, Tom was explaining what had brought him.

"How long will it take me to learn to fly?" he inquired.

"You. I'll guarantee you an aviator's certificate inside of a month," said Holmes.

Tom shook his head. "Too long. I can't wait. Besides, I'm not anxious about a certificate. I merely want to feel at home at the wheel of something fairly reliable."

Holmes regarded him narrowly. "You look a bit off color. Anything wrong? It doesn't do to begin flying when you're not up to the mark, you know."

"I'm perfectly well; only rather anxious to get away. Fact is, I'm off to India as soon as I can manage it."

"And you want to learn to fly first? What's the idea?"

Tom spoke of enlisting the interest of the Maharajah of Rohpore and the native princes generally in the subject of flight. He talked of opening for trade in the East. He did not mention Jacynth.

Holmes was quite satisfied with his explanation.

"Well, if that's your game, I dare say I can put you up to all you need know within a week or so. You're not like an ordinary beginner. You only want a bit of practice. What sort of machine are you going to take out?"

"I've got rather a fancy for a steady monoplane. A two-seater, for choice. If you can make me proficient in a week—"

"Sure!"

Holmes knew his man; was glad to instruct him in his pet subject. He found him more than apt.

During the following week he and Tom got through an extraordinary amount of work. After the first day they almost lived in the air.

Tom took to flying with the ease of a youngster to his first bicycle. He learned to bank with confidence, to volplane with safety. Even right-handed turns came natural to him. Holmes had never had such a quick pupil.

Meanwhile, Tom had booked his passage to Bombay. When he went on board the P. and O. liner at Southampton, his personal luggage was of the scantiest. But a considerable space in the vessel's hold was occupied by a large number of cases and queer-shaped packages containing the dismantled monoplane in which he and

Holmes had so constantly traversed the upper air of outer London.

And now he was at sea, steaming down-channel with the wind in his face, the salt air on his lips, moving steadily with each revolution of the propeller nearer to the girl who had elected to have none of him, but who, none the less, had he known it, nightly sobbed her heart out before his photograph and prayed God to bring him to her.

CHAPTER XII.

Plots and Intrigues.

JACYNTH leaned back with a tired sigh in the least uncomfortable of all the uncomfortable armchairs in Kathbela's apartments.

The queen had a bizarre taste for things European. In the strictly Oriental setting of her suite of rooms she had placed as much fumed-oak furniture, as many glaring oleographs and plush-covered abominations as they would hold. They gave the impression that she had purposely denuded Tottenham Court Road of its worst in order to make a freak show of an Indian palace.

Her pride in the appalling result was quite genuine. As for the chairs, they were merely a concession to modernity. She herself preferred to squat cross-legged on the floor.

"Thou art weary," she observed. "Thy face is waxen, sister."

"I am weary," admitted Jacynth. "At night I do not sleep. I am afraid. I hate the room so. And I have been a long time out in the sun this morning. My head aches. Oh, Kathbela, where is it all going to end?"

She spoke in Hindustani. It had come back to her almost completely, as a language learned in youth often will. The more proficient she became, the less did Kathbela insist on airing her English.

"Think not of the end before the beginning," she said sagely.

Jacynth pressed her hands to her throbbing temples. She was feeling beaten. The heat sapped all of the life out of her. It was the time of the year when white women migrate to the hills. In the palace little was done to mitigate the discomfort.

It was now noon, and all the morning she had been receiving instruction from a priest, preparatory to the restoration of her caste. Half her days were spent in ceremonial and prayers for this event, and in addition she had to go through various rites of purification, such as the bestowal of gifts on the poor, ceremonial ablutions, the filling of the food-bowls of many holy men, even to washing their feet.

Very shortly she would be anointed and the seal of her caste set upon her forehead.

Under different circumstances these rites and customs would have interested her. Now she went through them mechanically, not even seeking to know their significance.

Had she been more curious, she would have resented more strongly the one that appealed to her most. It concerned her toilet. When her waiting women bathed her they used a perfumed wash-bowl known as the *upten*.

This is a pleasantly scented affair composed of sandalwood, *zerumba, turmeris,* macerated wheat, poppy seeds, and cream, and is commonly used by the prospective bride and bridegroom of the East nine or ten days before marriage as a cosmetic to soften and cleanse the skin.

She hated her life. She dreaded the future. The climate robbed her of the grit and nerve she would otherwise have displayed. But for Kathbela's companionship she would have been utterly desolate.

All the privileges of a favorite were Kathbela's. She was free to walk in palace gardens accompanied by her women, and, efficiently guarded by soldiery, she was even allowed to drive without the walls.

She invariably insisted on Jacynth sharing these airings with her. If the *maharajah* had any views about the friendship between these two, he said nothing. In Kathbela he had met his match. He had given up interfering with her in trivial matters.

But these small concessions to liberty had their restrictions. The driver of the antiquated landau in which they "ate the air" was a spy on their conduct. It was impossible on any of these occasions to seek help from the English community in Rohpore. The two women were never unwatched, never alone, except at times in their own quarters, and even then they often spoke in lowered tones so that they should not be overheard.

"Rajanath has been gone five days," said Kathbela significantly. "We shall have news soon."

Jacynth nodded. She knew what the little man's absence signified. He had been sent to the neighboring state over which Shamshud Singh ruled.

She knew he had gone as an envoy, as courtiers of old journeyed to arrange royal betrothals. What she did not know was that, in conformity with diplomatic usages of a bygone age, Rajanath bore with him a picture of herself in evening dress, taken in England, to whet her suitor's appetite.

"Isn't there a way out before he comes back?" she asked despairingly. "It will surely be much more difficult to do anything when he comes."

"In haste there is often confusion. We must wait. Because I sit here, doing nothing, dost think I am idle? My brain is like a shuttle, weaving ceaselessly."

"I know you are my friend," said Jacynth; "but why should you risk your position for my sake?"

"It is not only because of thee that that I dislike this marriage. Bakshu Tanan is my lover. If no heir is born of thee, he will be *maharajah* in due course and I shall be his queen. Speak now: what of thy servant, Narain? Why hast thou brought him here if not to be of use? Peradventure they may have bribed him already."

"They could never bribe him," declared Jacynth. "But I cannot see him alone. When I send for him I am always told he is not to be found, or at a meal. I have only seen him to speak to once. And twice I gave him letters to post, and I have had no answer to them," she added. "Do you think they could have been taken from him?"

"Of a surety. Let us send for him. I would see him myself. I can read men." She struck a small gong.

A eunuch answered the summons and took her message.

Because it was Kathbela who had sent for him it got through. Narain came at once.

On the occasions when Jacynth had wanted him he had not even been informed of the fact. And he had waited daily, hourly, for the eagerly looked-for summons that came not, hearing only of his beloved mistress through others, guessing at her sorrows, but unable to relieve them. He had invoked the gods for guidance, but they had vouchsafed him no further vision.

When he was commanded to present himself before the queen he did not know what the summons portended. He had heard that she was friendly with Jacynth, but that might only be palace gossip. Just as Kathbela was uncertain of his own loyalty, so was he of hers toward his liege lady.

The curtain screening the doorway of Kathbela's room was little more than a sop to convention. One saw through its gossamer folds as through dull glass. Nor was it overscrupulously draped to hide the interior.

Narain had a clear view of the two women behind it, the one fierce-looking and regal, the other—to whom he had given all his devotion—beautiful as ever in his eyes but very pale.

He observed, too, that she had grown thinner. His heart swelled with compassion for her.

"Thy name is Narain," said the queen. "Art thou faithful? Art thou a friend?"

"Nay, a servant, highness, but with a friend's faithfulness," replied Narain.

"Then thou must take pleasure in thy service. Or is it that thou art overpaid?"

"True service is freely given. Mine is by the gods appointed."

"*Ar-ree!* The gods pay thee, I suppose?" suggested the queen, very much of an unbeliever and very much amused at his solemnity.

"The gods pay at the appointed time."

"And when is that?"

"The gods know," rejoined Narain simply.

Jacynth leaned forward.

"Narain," she said, "the queen is my friend. She has done much for me. She would do more. Not knowing you as I know you, knowing the treachery and back-talk that is all around, she would have proof of your loyalty."

"I need no proof," the queen interposed. "He is easy to read. He has but one face, whereas most men have many, and all women a different one for each day of the year. It is plain he is to be trusted."

She looked at him with some of the same kindliness that had once shone in the eyes of his English landlady when she had been moved to charge him less rent for his room.

"We will waste no more time in words," went on Kathbela, now entirely practical. "There is much to be done and but little time at our disposal. Thy mistress would be free."

Narain's eyes traveled to Jacynth's face. She nodded slowly, confirming Kathbela's words.

"I want help, badly, Narain," she said. "I have made a dreadful mistake. I want to go back."

The admission did not surprise him, though he heard it for the first time. Never before, indeed, had Jacynth expressed it in actual words.

Now that she had done so she felt relieved, as a penitent does who confesses culpability. Like a penitent, too, she felt it good to humble her pride and acknowledge the foolishness of the impulse that had brought her into this situation.

For all that, she could not help reproaching herself for having allowed Narain to come away with her, much as she had needed him. She had taken undue advantage of his loyalty.

What lives had she not interfered with in her selfishness? Tom's, Narain's, and now Kathbela's. Her action had been far-reaching. Its ends were shrouded in darkness.

"Narain, I am sorry," she went on, anxious to make all the amends she could, "that I took you away from your studies and brought you here where you are not even among your own people. Why should you not go to them?"

Kathbela listened impatiently.

"There are more important matters," she said. "Let us make plans. If money is needed I have a sufficiency. But first we must find the means of escape. We want help from without." She turned to Jacynth. "Thou didst speak of a white man who brought thee here."

"Mr. Elwin," said Jacynth. "Perhaps if I wrote to him—"

"Good!" said Kathbela.

She went to a cabinet and fetched stationery of a bright-pink hue, ornamented with purple pansies, and heavily scented. She could not write.

Narain's hand came through the curtain, offering a fountain pen.

Jacynth hesitated. She had thought of this expedient before, but the absence of replies to her other letters made her doubt whether it was worth while.

Besides, what help could Elwin afford her? He was only a subaltern.

"Write," repeated Kathbela.

Jacynth did so.

DEAR MR. ELWIN:

Remembering your kindness at the station the day I arrived in Rohpore, and your last words in particular, I am appealing to you now *to do anything you can for me.*

I cannot possibly stay here, and I cannot get out. The *maharajah* intends forcing me into a marriage against my will. Preparations for it are at this moment going on, so there isn't a moment to lose. Can you communicate with the viceroy or somebody in authority on my behalf? I *must* get away from this place.

If a plan could be made for my escape, two persons here will help—Narain, the bearer of this letter, and the queen. Of course, I mean to resist this marriage with all my power, but what is verbal resistance? I can't use force.

Help me if you can. *Please* help!

JACYNTH ELPHINSTONE.

She passed the letter to Kathbela, forgetting that her education was confined to a knowledge of dancing and conversational English.

"Read it to me," she said, waving it away.

Jacynth did so. Kathbela only made one interruption.

"Erase my name and Narain's," she said. "Were the *chic* to miscarry then wouldst thou bring needless danger to us both."

Jacynth made the alteration.

"Thou wilt deliver this without delay," was Kathbela's order to Narain as Jacynth handed him the note. "If thou seest the *sahib,* answer fully whatever questions he may put to thee. Assure him of the urgency of the matter."

Narain secreted the letter carefully upon his person and turned to go.

As he did so a faint commotion from the courtyard came to their ears. Kathbela went to the window and peeped through the shutters.

"It is Rajanath," she said. "Go quickly and gather news of his doings before thou settest out. Peradventure there may be more to tell Elwin Sahib."

Narain was not gone more than a quarter of an hour. When he returned his face was serious.

"Rajanath is greatly elated," he whispered. "The talk of the courtyard is that Shamshud Singh shows much eagerness for the betrothal. He has consented to all the maharajah's demands. It is said he is even now upon his way in his fleetest motor-car, newly imported from England. This is the talk. In a day or two at most he will be here. It is the *maharajah's* desire to consummate the marriage within a week."

At the first word of this Jacynth had started to her feet, full of apprehension.

The danger was so close and apparently so unavoidable. She seemed to hear the throb of the motor that was bringing Shamshud Singh nearer with every moment.

Quick to see her anxiety, Kathbela did her best to alleviate it.

"Patience, my sister," she advised. "Naught has happened that we did not expect. Nothing more can happen for a week. Meanwhile we may do much."

Silently she clapped her hands in a gesture of satisfaction. So far all had been talk; now the moment for action had arrived.

With pleasurable anticipation she foresaw intrigue, plotting. Both were congenial to her. The monotony of her cloistered life would soon be varied by something vital. The prospect excited her.

"Take the letter," she bade Narain. "There is nothing to add to it. By word of mouth thou canst impress upon the *sahib* the need of haste. I will send for thee on thy return. Go now."

On his way out Narain had to step back to allow a woman to pass. No sound of footsteps had announced her approach.

At sight of her Kathbela bit her lip. She was unable to tell whether the woman had been eavesdropping or not. She mistrusted most of the pal-

ace people and her own women in particular.

Narain passed out of sight.

"What dost thou here?" demanded Kathbela. "I called no one. Thou knowest this is the hour of rest."

The woman's face was quite impassive.

"I bring a message from the *maharajah,*" she replied, ignoring the rebuke and addressing Jacynth. He is even now in the highness's apartment and would speak to her at once. *Arree!*" She rubbed her hands. "There are to be great doings!"

"*Chuprao!*" flashed from the queen and dismissed her with a look. She disappeared as silently as she had come.

Jacynth turned to Kathbela.

"What does he want?" she asked with mistrust.

The queen laughed cynically.

"Doubtless he is moved to express affection for thee. Now that money is shortly to be forthcoming from Shamshud on thy account he regards thee as a pearl of great price!

"Hold thy peace. Say little. In thine own language, as I have heard the *havildar* call out on parade with a great shout that did reach even unto my window in the town: '*Mark time!*'"

CHAPTER XIII.

A Town Letter.

"YOU sent for me?"

The *maharajah* turned from an appreciative contemplation of the frescos that revolted Jacynth. He was smiling, he believed pleasantly; he felt pleasant, which is a very different thing.

Jacynth was now, or shortly would be, worth something like her weight in gold to him, and the sensation of being able to dispose of such a valuable commodity had a most cheering effect on him.

"I like to see you sometimes," he answered benignly.

Jacynth was strongly moved to tell him that if he meant his visit as a parental observance it was a tardy one. Instead, she contented herself with asking him to be seated.

There was only one chair in the room. She took that. The *maharajah* sat on some cushions.

"Well, now, tell me what you make do all day," he went on unctuously. As a rule, he disliked English and conversed in it with difficulty.

"I can speak Hindustani," said Jacynth.

"I like speak English," he rejoined obstinately. "It exercise me."

He did not intend to start a conversation in the vernacular with her. In his own language he could not pretend to misunderstand her if it should become politic to do so. He sometimes employed similar tactics when dealing with English government officials.

"You like Kathbela?" he pursued smoothly.

"Yes."

"You talk with her?"

"Oh, yes."

"What you talk about?"

"Many things."

She was not to be drawn. The *maharajah's* idea of conversation seemed to be confined to interrogations.

True, Jacynth did not help him out. She was as terse as himself. She remembered Kathbela's injunction to "mark time." Marking time, in this case, meant keeping her temper, not showing resistance. She could do that best by saying as little as possible.

"And he whom you bring with you from England, you also talk with him? He is useful?"

"I can hardly ever get hold of him when I want him."

"He was with you in the latter moment?"

"I saw him a little while ago, if that's what you mean. Kathbela sent for him."

"For what purpose?"

"Because we were dull."

"Dull? What is that?"

"Bored—tired."

"Tired?"

"*I* was tired. I have been with the priests all the morning."

"That is necessary."

"I dare say."

"You speak little, my daughter."

"I have little to say."

"That is true. Are you in fear of me?"

"Not in the least."

The touch of contempt conveyed by the last sentence did not conduce to better humor in the *maharajah*. There was less suavity in his next remark.

"Rajanath has returned. He brings news of your betrothed husband, Shamshud Singh. He comes quickly as the heart beats in a car that is new. Doubtless he will give it to me. It makes a race. You like to be married? You now not mind?"

"I'm waiting to see what he's like. He may be—very nice."

The *maharajah* was a little surprised at this unexpected amenability. He had anticipated a little opposition.

He, too, was often the victim of infinite boredom, which he was best able to relieve by antagonizing those who opposed his royal will. On the whole, this happened so infrequently that he was bored nearly all the time.

He certainly intended that Jacynth should marry Shamshud Singh, and as no amount of resistance on her part would have had the slightest effect on him, he rather resented her docility. At the same time he was a little suspicious of it, of her, even of her friendship with Kathbela.

More than all was he suspicious of Kathbela. So far, his queen had been more than a match for him. He wondered whether she had given Jacynth her confidence.

He was by no means assured of his favorite wife's single-heartedness.

"You understand that this marriage is of great desirability to me? You know that your son when he is born will reign in my shoes?"

"I know that is what you say."

"And that if no son is born of your body"—she winced at the bald way in which he put it—"Rohpore will pass into the hands of my kinsman, Bakshu Tanan? I do not esteem Bakshu Tanan. I would raise up many sons between him and my throne. Has the queen made mention of him at any time?" There was a curious gleam in his weary eyes.

"I can't remember. What should she have to say about him beyond what you have told me?"

"Has she not discoursed to you of his looks and his powers? Women talk of these things, and he is a woman's man."

Jacynth's expression of ignorance led him to assume either that Kathbela was discreet in her friendship, or that the flinty young girl before him was as deep as all women. He tried another tack. Perhaps he could lessen her frigidity by the granting of favors.

"Do you wish any boon that I can bestow?" he inquired. "In a little while you will no longer be daughter of my house, but wife in a province farther on. So ask what you would of my fatherly affection."

"I don't want anything in the way of gifts. You only seem to have jewels."

Jacynth spoke disdainfully. In his presence she did not feel afraid of this small, mean man who was so little like a potentate.

She almost scorned him. It seemed absurd to think that such an insignificant person had so much despotic authority, could use her for his own selfish purposes, had the power to keep her here or anywhere against her will.

And as she looked at him she could not bring herself to conceive how her mother, or indeed any white woman, could have voluntarily yielded herself to his control.

"But I would like to ask a question or two," she added. "You have been asking them ever since I came in."

The *maharajah* expressed himself

entirely willing to answer questions. A woman whose questions did not imply gifts was something of a novelty.

Besides, questions were easy to answer. One told the truth, or one did not, according to expediency.

"I should like to know more about my mother," said Jacynth. "No one here can tell me anything. Besides, you are the person who should talk to me of her. What was she like?"

"She was like you, my daughter."

"And where did you meet her?"

The *maharajah* was taking an unholy delight in being as uncommunicative as Jacynth had been.

"How should I remember? I have encountered so many women."

"Did her people let her marry you without any opposition?"

"I understand not that word. Opposeetion—what is it?"

"Well, if I said I refused to marry Shamshud Singh I dare say you would call that opposition."

"It would not matter," murmured the *maharajah* smoothly.

"But surely you can tell me something about her; what she did here; how she spent the time; whether she was happy—"

His shoulders lifted indifferently.

"She was like all women. Regarding her happiness I did not make inquiries. Moreover, I saw her not frequently. She was but one of a very many. She bore a child. She lived and she died."

"Poor woman," said Jacynth involuntarily. "Oh, poor woman!"

He took no offense at the remark.

"What is the purpose of women but to live and to breed sons and to die?" he asked.

"And what is the purpose of men according to your standard?" she demanded hotly, forgetting her resolve to keep calm. "To take women and break them and throw them on one side, or to trade them for money and power?"

"Sometimes one, sometimes the other. It depends."

He yawned and slowly rose to his feet. His system, temporarily invigorated by the glad tidings brought by Rajanath, was now craving for its customary opium.

He patted Jacynth on the head. She shrank from his touch.

"All ri'," he soothed. "Shamshud Singh will do more than caress your head. He is much fond of pretty women. Doubtless you are comely to an outside eye. I give you what I come to bring. It is from Shamshud Singh. He committed it to Rajanath to bestow upon you. It is an English custom, he said, which you will understand."

He produced a small package and watched Jacynth open it.

She was quite incurious about it. Nothing that came from such a source could interest her.

The package resolved itself into a small cardboard box in which lay a ring of Indian workmanship set with a single splendid ruby of theatrical dimensions.

The only effect it had on her was to make the personality of the donor more real and, if possible, more distasteful.

Far below her window lay dark and sluggish waters. She had often looked down into their murky depths and wondered whether she would have had the courage to end things that way if the window had been large enough to permit escape, which it was not. Perhaps the same thought had occurred to others before her. But she could put her hand through it.

Quick as thought, only without thought, or she would not have been so unwise, she did so now, and cast the ring from her.

"What do you do?" demanded the *maharajah* angrily.

"That is the English custom, which Shamshud Singh said I would understand," she maliciously replied.

He looked his unbelief. An ugly frown swept across his face.

"A foolish action," he said and, turning on his heel, left the room.

Owing to her own rashness, the interview had ended ominously. There was no mistaking the look of rankling dislike with which the *maharajah* had regarded her.

Later, she detailed the conversation to Kathbela. At mention of Bakshu Tanan she sat up alertly.

"He has suspicions. I have thought so," she commented. "Thou wert discreet. I thank thee. Bakshu Tanan must be warned. But thou wert misguided in casting the ring into the waters. Come, now; thou art spent. Rest, for the hour may come when thy strength will be needed. Therefore husband it."

She piled cushions on the divan in her sleeping room and insisted on Jacynth lying down.

She was overexcited and prostrate with the heat. Kathbela, quick-witted to a degree, knew that quiet and rest were what she most needed. She bathed the girl's hot forehead with scented water, and soothed it with soft and clever finger-tips, until sleep came to her.

She slept on for hours. It was evening when she awoke to find Kathbela by her side, fanning her. Her headache had gone. She felt refreshed.

But Kathbela's manner made it clear that something had occurred in the interval. She looked disturbed.

"What is it?" Jacynth asked. "Something has happened."

"Narain has returned. He delivered the note. Yet two hours later, as Elwin Sahib walked at dusk, he was shot in the mess compound."

"*Shot?*" echoed Jacynth, horrified.

"Aye. They say that even now he lies speechless; and he who wrought the deed has not been discovered."

Still dazed with sleep, Jacynth did not connect the outrage with her letter. Her concern for the victim of it prevented her from thinking of it in relation to her own affairs.

"Are you sure it is true?" she asked anxiously.

"Narain did bring the news. Of a surety is it the truth. There is treachery within these walls."

She broke off, listening, then silently as a cat she rose to her feet and glided toward the curtain. There she paused an instant with her hand at her waist.

Suddenly it shot out. There was a quick gleam of steel.

The knife rent the curtain, but met with no other resistance. Jacynth heard the distant patter of bare feet.

Kathbela drew the curtain aside and looked down the passage. Nothing was to be seen.

"What is that?" exclaimed Jacynth, now close behind her. "Look!"

Something pink, stained with a darker hue, lay in the passage just outside the entrance. Kathbela picked it up.

Over her shoulder Jacynth saw that it was a sheet of paper, crumpled and torn. There was a gash through the center of it, and where the stain did not show written words stood out.

. . . resistance? I can't use force.
Help me if you can. *Please* help!
JACYNTH ELPH.

It was the letter she had sent to Elwin!

CHAPTER XIV.

The Nameless Pit.

IT was fortunate that Jacynth had been able to sleep for a few hours that afternoon, for she spent a wakeful and fear-haunted night.

The attack on Elwin and the mysteriously sinister return of her letter to him, in spite of the fact that it had reached its destination, kept her brain in a state of distressing activity.

She tried to disassociate the two occurrences and could not. Bodily harm had now come to a comparative stranger through her. That alone would have been enough to keep her awake, but in addition she had to face the prospect of danger to herself.

It was evident now that the *maharajah* knew of her design to escape and

meant to frustrate it. The insignificance of his appearance belied him. Harmless as he looked, there was no longer any doubt that he would stop at nothing to gain his ends.

She was thankful that, through Kathbela's forethought she had deleted her name and Narain's from her letter. She had, at least, avoided involving those two in the calamity.

She had entire faith in Kathbela, but then *her* hands, too, were tied. She was a prisoner like herself; and the *maharajah* was suspicious of her.

As for Narain, what could he do? The palace was all eyes, all ears. No one in it, with the exception of those two, was to be trusted. Here, even in her own room, she had the feeling that she was being watched, spied upon.

She paced up and down the comfortless apartment for the greater part of the night. She could not get it out of her head that fate was working against her. The result was a waking nightmare.

She thought of England, of Tom, and the freedom she had given up so thoughtlessly. Her mind went back to the days she had spent in the Bloomsbury boarding-house; to the ordinary, nice people she had met there; to huge, good-natured Miss Ayres; to the gentle little woman whom she had looked on as a mother.

What uneventful days they had been, yet how pleasant and how free!

Stifling in her heated bedroom, she was tantalized with memories of events and places whose haunting sweetness seemed to belong to a previous existence—one, in particular, of a country lane on an evening in June, and the smell of sweetbrier.

All exiles, all prisoners know these torments, keen as those of hunger and thirst, more exquisitely refined.

But thirst she experienced as well on these burning nights. Always she had drained a *chatti* of water by the morning, and yet woke with dry lips and a parched throat.

There was no *punkah* in her room, such as Europeans are accustomed to. The hot air could not even circulate.

At dawn she was again occupied with the priest who gave her special instruction. She would have to "cram" now, since Shamshud Singh was coming by motor-car, instead of traveling more leisurely.

She did not rebel against this instruction. It was a distraction, filled up time, and daily made her more proficient in Hindustani.

She did not pretend to any great interest in its theological aspect; that had disappeared with her change of view about all things Oriental. When she finished with the priest it was her custom to proceed closely veiled to the courtyard for the daily acts of penitence and purification.

In the morning the courtyard was invariably thronged by the flotsam and jetsam of native mendicancy. Beggars and pilgrims, on the endless journeyings in search of alms and piety, used the palace much as the European tramp uses the casual ward.

Many of these were martyrs to disease, all ready to describe their infirmities, as dealers do their wares.

Often enough she was revolted by the unpleasant sights that met her eyes, but it was part of the ritual she was following to minister to these unhappy beings, and womanly pity helped to soften her heart toward them.

Another of her duties was to fill the food-bowls of pilgrims and holy men. This she did perfunctorily, seldom entering into conversation with them.

But on this particular morning she was attracted by an old man whom she had not seen there before. He was very venerable. His white beard nearly reached his knees. He wore nothing but a loin-cloth, and his body was smeared with ashes.

He used a staff, tapping the marble flags with it as he came toward her. He was nearly blind, benign, and sad-looking.

Jacynth was moved to sympathy by his age and fragility, and filled his

food-bowl generously with rice, *ghee*, and a curried mess.

"Hast thou come a great distance, my father?" she asked solicitously.

"Yea, daughter," he quavered. "The way of the Four Shrines have I traveled on foot, every *kos* of the weary round. Now I go to the waters of Garhwal. This achieved, I shall rest."

"Thou art weary."

He made a gesture of negation.

"Weariness is of the body. The body is but a vehicle. I travel. The spirit goes before me." He raised his almost sightless eyes to her face. "I am full of years and cannot see thee except as an image blurred. But thy voice is sad, my daughter."

"My heart is heavy," she answered. "I am confined when I would be free."

"It is the common lot of women."

"But I am a white woman, father. I do not like the *purdah*."

"There are worse things. The *purdah* but controls modesty; it does not subject one to bondage. Thou sayest thou art a white woman. Of thy race I know little, but I have heard of one like thee who lieth in the pit that hath no name, whence there is no return."

The place mentioned signified nothing to Jacynth. She had never heard of it. At another time she might have been struck by the sinister sound of its name; just now her attention was occupied by the *poonghi's* reference to the white woman confined within it.

"A white woman?" she repeated. "What knowest thou of her?"

"As little as thou, my daughter. It is but talk I heard on the way."

"And where is this place—this pit?"

"In the great swamp to the north." He made a wide gesture. "I know it not. These eyes see but inwardly. Those who have journeyed that way speak of it as a place of desolation."

The priest, who had been hovering out of earshot, now approached Jacynth. With a salutation of "Peace, my daughter," the *poonghi* moved away.

She had to pass another half-hour in the scorching heat of the courtyard.

But her conversation with the holy man stuck in her mind. She recounted it to Kathbela the same afternoon.

"The pit that hath no name," repeated Kathbela. "I know naught of such a place. The *poonghi* doubtless rambled in his speech after the manner of the aged. There is always idle talk of imprisoned white women. If there is truth in it it must be because of their foolishness. Like birds, they hop into the open cage, even as thou didst, little sister, and like birds beat their wings against the bars when the door is shut."

Kathbela had sent for Narain and was now expecting him. But when he came he had little to tell beyond the fact that Elwin was alive and evidently not in danger.

He, too, had been shocked by the unexpected attack on the young man. Sensitive to a degree, he felt that Jacynth might think he had bungled, in spite of the fact that he had faithfully delivered the note. He could have done no more.

Unfortunately Narain had been prevented from delivering any verbal message.

This was more Elwin's fault than his. As it happened, he was in the middle of a game of billiards at the mess when Narain arrived there. He came out reluctantly.

Narain, of course, was unknown to him, and he resented the interruption. Why couldn't the fellow have waited?

There were several officers on the veranda, lolling in cane chairs, reading newspapers, and drinking pegs. There was no privacy.

Narain produced his note. Elwin, hardly glancing at it, and not at all at Narain, thrust it carelessly into his pocket.

"All right. I'll see to it presently," he said. "Can't stop now."

"It is of a huge importance," began Narain. "Could I not see you a little on one side—"

But Elwin had not stopped to listen. He would have read the note at once had he known that it was something more than a commonplace *chit*. Never for a moment did he connect the bearer or the note itself with the *maharajah's* daughter.

He was in love, engaged, and it must be admitted, had scarcely thought of Jacynth since the day he had driven her to the palace.

Narain recounted all this to Jacynth. She saw that he was depressed by his bad luck, and tried to cheer him. So did Kathbela after her fashion.

"It was not thy fault," she said. "We do not blame thee. Had I delivered the note I would have constrained him to read it by power of the eye and not of speech. But that is woman's art. For a man, thou didst all that could be expected of thee."

Kathbela's brows were drawn in thought. She liked conspiring, though she had to confess that just now the stars in their courses seemed to be conspiring against her.

Luckily, her share in the affair was not openly manifest. She might be suspected, but she could rely on her own sharp wits to prevent proof of her part in it from leaking out.

Meanwhile she would have to devise something to counteract the check that had been given to their plans. For the moment they were working in the dark. They did not even know whether Elwin had or had not read the letter before he was shot.

At any rate, now that he was disabled they could expect no help from him.

"We must seek other means," she said aloud, and turned to Narain. "Thou sayest that in a vision thou wast by the gods appointed protector of thy mistress. Did the gods give thee no indication of the manner in which thou shouldst guide her into safety?"

Into Narain's eyes came an introspective look. He recalled the words he had heard in his miraculous vision. He repeated them aloud as a lesson learned by heart.

Kathbela listened with a skeptical smile curving her painted lips.

"Thus spoke they: '*Behold, student of the law, thou shalt attend upon the footsteps of a maiden, and sit in the shadow of one whose life it is ordained thou shalt serve. Watch while she sleeps; pray while she wakes; guard her always. Set apart is she by Siva's seal and the anointing of man. Danger compasseth her feet: yea, unto the mouth of the pit that hath no name.*'"

"What is that?" interrupted Kathbela sharply.

Jacynth, listening to every word, was also startled by his last ones.

Narain's recitative proceeded. Through the thin curtain they could see that his eyes were half closed. He was almost in a state of trance.

"'*Unto the mouth of the pit that hath no name, and with thee shall she pass through the great swamp that lies around it.*'"

Jacynth caught her breath. She put her hand through the curtain and touched him. He shook off his lethargy.

"Where are those places?" she asked. "Tell us."

"I know not, highness. Their position has not been vouchsafed to me. When the hour comes we shall be told," was his fatalistic answer.

"Phish!" went Kathbela impatiently. "We must know *before* the hour strikes. The gods are not to be trusted entirely," she added skeptically. "But I have some faith in thy vision, for without doubt the places are real and not figments of thy disordered brain as I was at first persuaded. Hear now what the *poonghi* said. Tell him, *bubu*."

Jacynth repeated the old man's words.

The coincidence did not greatly

surprise Narain. It merely confirmed the infallibility of his heaven-sent vision.

"The hour *has* struck," he said with conviction. "We shall go forth. The gods do not err."

"Talk not incessantly of the gods," Kathbela cut in, "since it is I who have to do their work."

Kathbela was making her toilet. Like many women who cultivate their beauty as a trade rather than an art, she was inclined to pay more attention to it in the evening than the daytime.

She was expecting the *maharajah*. She had sent him an invitation to come to her, an act of graciousness that stirred his sluggish blood.

Kathbela was not over-indulgent in this respect, and sometimes when he attempted to exercise his royal prerogative she was apt to repulse him—playfully but effectively—at the point of a jeweled dagger.

This treatment, though a shade irritating at times, appealed to the innate brutality of his disposition. He liked her all the better for her vixenish behavior.

For several weeks past he had not seen her except in the presence of her women, and he congratulated himself that this judicious policy had stimulated her desire for his company.

Kathbela was mistress of all the arts of personal embellishment. Her lashes were jet-blackened with collyrium, her lips were freshly painted. The soles of her tiny feet were reddened with lac.

Her whole seductive person was perfumed with attar-of-roses and sandal wood. She wore a robe of purple tissue, through which her brown-gold body gleamed. She had taken off all her clinking anklets, bangles and necklaces.

She looked what she meant to look—very soft and yielding.

When her lord made his appearance she was reclining, posed to the best advantage to display her seductiveness. An alluring smile curved her lips; her slanting eyes were half-closed, amorous.

The carefully-calculated effect she wished to produce on the *maharajah* was crowned with success. He unbent. He caricatured an air of youthful jocundity. The hand that patted her cheek strayed to her waist and embraced it.

But for reasons of her own Kathbela evinced an elusive demeanor. By one means and another she kept him at arms' length, displaying all those feminine arts and charms best calculated to make her appear more desirable in his eyes.

"*Bala*, wherefore art thou so perverse?" he at length asked.

"Doubtless it is the moon," she laughed. "Thou seest me little at this hour, or thou wouldst know how it affects me. Necromancers have called me daughter of the moon. Dost know why?"

"Perchance because of the difficulty of reaching thee," he said, approaching the divan upon which she had thrown herself.

"No; but by reason of the baleful light of my eyes. Seest thou not they are like moonbeams that blind men who lie long in their rays?"

The *maharajah* grunted skeptically. Kathbela's eyes might be seductive; they had no other effect upon him.

"Since thou dost scoff at their power I will put thee to the test," she went on, and disengaging herself from his arms extinguished the lamp.

"So be it," he chuckled. "Now come."

"First let us sup."

Near the divan stood a large dish of fruits. Perching beside it on her heels, her fingers sought and found a nectarine.

There was only one, so she could not mistake it!

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 Way of the Strong

by Ridgwell Cullum

Author of "The Trail of the Ax," "The Watchers of the Plains," "The Night-Riders," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

THE Yukon. Leo, who has just made his pile prospecting, is induced by his sweetheart, Audie, to start south in the middle of winter, so that they can reach civilization and be married. On the journey Leo's gold is lost. Desperate, he hurries to the camp of his former associates, Tug and Charlie. Tug is away and Charlie has died. Leo takes their gold, escaping with the sled and dogs, intending to overtake Audie, whom he had sent ahead with the Indian guide, her destination being her sister's home in California. Arriving there after a delay, Leo advertises for Audie, who has died in the meantime, leaving a child. Monica, Audie's sister, has promised the dying girl never to let the baby know the story of his mother's misfortune. Both Leo and Tug come following the advertisement, but Monica keeps her secret and puts them off the track.

Monica names the boy Frank, and poses as his mother. After a time she is employed by Alexander Hendrie, a big wheat operator, who falls in love with her. She returns his love and marries him, first sending Frank to a distant farm which Hendrie has given her. Her object is to get Frank out of the way, for she can't bring herself to tell his story to her husband. All goes well until Angus Moraine, Hendrie's manager, learns that Monica has secret interviews with a young man to whom she seems very much attached, and Moraine shows Hendrie the damning evidence.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Man's Torture.

DESPERATE, silent moments passed while the terrible eyes of the millionaire looked into, through, beyond, the almost expressionless face of his manager. Then at last his hand relaxed its painful grip upon the man's muscular shoulder, and—he laughed.

Alexander Hendrie walked across to the desk and flung his bulk into the upholstered chair that stood before it. He swung it round and pointed at a chair near by, and, facing him, so placed that the light fell full upon the face of its occupant.

"Sit down!" he commanded with cold authority.

Angus obeyed, waiting and wondering.

But the result was elusive.

Hendrie reached out and drew the cigar cabinet toward him. With deliberate care he selected a cigar and pushed the cabinet within the other's reach.

"Smoke," he said laconically, and Angus fingered one of the priceless cigars tenderly.

Hendrie pierced the end of his cigar with elaborate care. He lit it. Then he leaned back in the chair, and, locking his fingers, rested his elbows upon the arms of it, while his eyes re-

This story began in The All-Story Cavalier Weekly for September 5.

mained upon the blotting-sheet in front of him.

Presently he looked round, and a swift, cold glance shot into Angus Moraine's face.

"When I came in here I'd sent for you," he said. "You were in your quarters—which was not usual at this time." He paused. Then he went on: "Being in your quarters, you could have joined me in thirty seconds. You came after ten minutes or so. When you came you came quietly. Guess you stole into the room—to see what I was doing. Why? Because you had discovered this blotting-sheet — with its writing. You'd found it, examined it, and placed it back in the pad *reversed;* and — you knew it was my wife's writing. Guess you've something to tell me—go ahead."

The directness of the challenge was so characteristic of Hendrie that Angus was not wholly unprepared for it.

"How much d'you want to know?"

For a second Hendrie's cold, gray eyes lit, then his swift command came:

"All, damn you, all!"

Angus flushed. He pointed at the blotting-sheet.

"Guess that Frank has another name. Leastwise I should say it is 'Frank Smith,' who registers in that name at the Russell Hotel in Everton —mostly when you're away."

The millionaire's eyes were intent upon the blotting-sheet.

"The townsfolk have seen him riding with Mrs. Hendrie—quite a lot —when you're away. He's a big feller —bigger than you. He's got thick, fair hair, and is a good-looker."

For a second Hendrie's eyes lifted.

"Young?"

"Anything up to twenty-five."

Hendrie was no longer contemplating the incriminating paper He was gazing at it and beyond it, searching the cells of memory.

"Go on," he said. His cigar had gone out.

Angus eyed his employer squarely. He drew a deep breath.

"Yes," he said. "I saw that writing. I read it. I left it so that when you came in you couldn't miss it. I did these things because—of what I've seen."

"Seen?"

"Yes. It was soon after Mrs. Hendrie came here. You had gone away with the automobile. She wanted a buggy. She was away all day. That night I went into Everton. I came to the ford. I heard voices beyond the bluff that separated me from it. One was Mrs. Hendrie's."

"The other?"

"A man's."

Angus paused.

"They had spent the day together. The woman was saying what a great time they'd had together. She was arranging when she would see him again. They parted. I heard them kiss each other."

Hendrie swung his chair slowly round. He was smiling. Angus was alarmed. For the first time in his life he experienced a sensation of fear of another man.

"They—kissed?"

There was no emotion in the millionaire's voice. He might have been asking a question of merely ordinary interest.

Angus nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Then they parted. Mrs. Hendrie got back across the ford, onto the lower trail with the buggy. The man trapesed on to the hotel. I saw him. It was the man who registers there as 'Frank Smith.'"

"A big man, with thick, fair hair, and—a good-looker?"

Hendrie detailed the description as though registering it in his memory and comparing it with a picture already there.

"Anything else?"

The millionaire reached for a match and relit his cigar.

"Only this business of going to Calford — with you away. That on top of the writing. That writing was done last night, I guess, and Mrs.

Hendrie has mailed no letter since. Maybe she's taken it with her. Maybe she's going to meet him there. Maybe I'm only guessing, but I thought it time you—knew 'bout things."

Angus breathed a sigh. He had done all he intended to do, and now he—wondered.

"Well?" he said after a long silence.

Hendrie withdrew his gaze and turned to his desk again.

"Better not cancel the car. I'll need it after all."

Angus rose.

"That all?"

Hendrie reached for a pen and dipped it in the ink as though about to write. He replied without looking up.

"That's all."

Angus moved toward the door. As he reached it the millionaire's voice stopped him.

"Angus!"

The manager turned. Across the room he beheld a pair of glowing eyes fixed upon him.

"If what you've told me is not true I'll—kill you!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Progress of Affairs.

ANGUS MORAINE had done his work. That his motive in enlightening his employer upon those matters which went on in his absence was largely spleenful, even revengeful, there could be no doubt. He had kept to the baldest truth. As he marshaled his facts they were complete, entirely damning. In spite of Hendrie's threat against his life, he was well enough satisfied with the effect of his story.

Later on, when Hendrie finally departed, he was still more satisfied, for it was then, as the latter paced the broad, flagged terrace fronting the entrance to the house, he had walked at his side for more than half an hour, receiving final instructions.

Hendrie was going away, and Angus was to inform his wife, when she returned from Calford, that he did not expect to return for at least two weeks. In the mean time he gave his manager a telephone number in Gleber. Further, he told him that the only message he required from him was news of Mr. Frank Smith's reappearance in Everton. Furthermore, on Mr. Frank Smith's reappearance in Everton, Angus must hold himself on hand at the Russell Hotel.

"See here," Hendrie concluded in his concise fashion. "You'll need to be on hand at any moment while this man's around. And—you must know his movements to the last detail. Get me?"

Angus understood.

"Well," the other went on, with a calmness that was still the marvel of the Scot, "guess I'll get going. I'm going right on to Calford to meet Mrs. Hendrie. She'd be disappointed if I didn't look her up, having missed her here. So-long!"

Hendrie entered the waiting car, and the two men parted without a sign of that which lay between them. Angus watched the machine roll away down the winding trail, which followed the bend of the picturesque river-bank. Then, as it disappeared from view, he turned thoughtfully away and moved off in the direction of his quarters.

The supper-room in the Strathmore Hotel at Calford was a blaze of light. The string band, screened off behind a decorative display of palms and ferns, was playing the latest popular ragtime.

Monica was delighted at the absence of a crowd. For her it was one of those happy, utterly unanticipated moments in life which are too precious to miss. Just as she had retired to her room after dinner a chambermaid had announced the arrival of her husband.

Her journey had been taken quite openly. There had been no secrecy about it. She was here purely on business, the nature of which was her own.

Therefore, she had nothing to fear, and was frankly overjoyed at this unexpected reunion.

Alexander Hendrie was in his best spirits. He explained to her his journey in Deep Willows, and his subsequent disappointment at not finding her there. Then, hearing that she had driven over to Calford, he had followed her at once. The journey, he explained, suited his purpose well, for he must leave by the night mail for Winnipeg, and did not expect to return home for ten days, or even two weeks.

So Monica spent a happy evening with her husband. His manner was the brightest she had ever known. He never questioned her presence in Calford, but took it for granted she was "doing" the stores. He talked to her of his work and informed her of the progress of the trust.

Thus the brief evening was spent until the final meal of the day came round. Monica required nothing more to eat, and suggested that her husband's meal should be served in her sitting-room. But Hendrie demurred, and it was finally arranged that they should adjourn to the supper-room.

As the meal drew to a close, and the man leisurely sipped his coffee, he expressed his cordial regrets at his prolonged absences from home.

"It'll soon be over, Mon," he said thoughtfully. "I can see the end of things looming already. Such separations as ours are not good, are they? I shall be glad when—things are settled."

Monica gazed happily into his eyes.

"I'm simply yearning for that time to come, Alec," she cried, her eyes shining across the table into his.

At that moment a waiter approached.

"The east-bound mail has been signaled, Mr. Hendrie. She's due in twenty minutes."

"Thanks." Hendrie nodded and turned to Monica.

"Good-by!" he said, and held out his hand.

For a moment Monica hesitated. Then they shook hands.

"Good-by—dear!" she murmured.

A moment later the waiter was enveloping Hendrie in his light traveling coat.

With a nod and a wave of the hand he hastily followed the man through the hotel entrance to the railroad station.

Monica looked after him, feeling a little depressed. It was the first time since her marriage that her husband had left her with a formal parting. It would have been different had they supped in private—ah, well, soon there would be no such partings as these!

In contrast to the brilliant surroundings of the Strathmore Hotel the homestead over which Phyllis Raysun reigned was a crude affair. Poverty was stamped all over it, if dilapidation must be taken as the hallmark of poverty.

Phyllis did not admit such to be the case. She was a healthy, happy girl, loving and beloved, and she admitted she could ask no more of the perfect life in the midst of which she found herself.

For her mother's occasional grumbles she would adapt her mental attitude to a different focus. When her mother's bitterness and complaint found expression, Phyllis, with her ready understanding, sought to comfort her, to encourage her. Some such desire stirred her on a morning when a neighbor brought her a letter from Frank. He would be over at the midday meal, and Mrs. Raysun was deploring the poverty of their larder as she prepared a stew on the cook stove in their only living-room.

"It makes me fair ashamed, Phyl," the old woman cried in distress as she cut up the mixture of vegetables for the simmering pot. "It surely does. To think of your beau comin' over to a meal like this! And him a college-bred boy, with elegant manners, and with a ma with thousands o' dollars!"

Phyllis laughed in her buoyant fashion.

"Frank would rather have one of your stews here than oysters on the half shell in any other house."

"House? House, my dear? Call this hog-pen a—house?"

"It's a palace—to Frank and me—when we're eating your stew in it. Yes, mama, and the meal's a banquet. Oh, don't you see, dear? We're just two silly folks up to our eyes in love with each other, and—and nothing matters."

Nor was the girl's declaration lacking in confirmation when Frank appeared. He sniffed the air with appreciation, and Phyllis smiled across at her mother.

"I didn't know I was hungry until now," he declared. "It surely was a bright thought of mine letting you two know ahead I was coming, Phyl. I bet five dollars it's a jack-rabbit stew! Any takers?"

He looked from one to the other with his happy, open face, all smiles. Then, as Phyllis shook her head, he pretended disappointment.

"No luck," he said with an absurd air of dejection.

The girl admonished him in the lightest spirit of raillery.

"You don't want it all—the luck, I mean, not the stew," she said severely. "Anyway, you're not getting the stew yet. Mama's particular how long it cooks."

"Not for nigh an hour," smiled Pleasant from the stove.

"Then I'll tighten my belt like a starving explorer," cried the boy.

Together they passed out of the kitchen.

It was a favorite place of theirs to sit outside the low doorway of the sod-built barn. An old log served the girl as a resting-place, and the huge youth spread himself on the ground beside her, propping his elbow on the same log, so that his tawny head was nearly on a level with her rounded shoulder.

"Phyl," he cried as soon as they were settled, "mother's a—a trump! It's all fixed. I've given old Sam Bernard notice I'm quitting. I'm going to see mother and get the money, then I'm going to buy the farm. Then I'm going to see certain things put in readiness for fall work. Then I'm coming along back here, and we're going right in to Calford to buy up fixings for our new home. Then, after harvest, we're—going to get married. How?"

Phyllis smiled down into the eager, upturned face, bent over him, and, placing her arms about his great neck, kissed him very tenderly.

"And—and when am I going to see it all?" she asked.

The man's fair face flushed and beamed.

"Ah," he cried, "that's what I've been saving up! I never suggested your seeing it before, Phyl, because—because"—his eyes became thoughtful—"well, I didn't just want to take a risk. You see, I was 'most afraid something might happen to queer things. You're going with me to pay the money—you and your mother. Then we're going on to see the farm."

The girl did not answer. She was gazing out at the barren sky-line, all her happy soul shining in the wonderful light of her eyes. After a while she drew a deep sigh, and, reaching out, pointed away to the distant lines where the sharp horizon of the prairie cut across the sky.

"Look!" she cried in a thrilling voice. "Look, Frank, over there in the east! There's not a cloud anywhere. It's bright, bright. The sky's just blue with a wonderful color that shines down upon a thankful world, watching and waiting for the harvest. We're waiting for the harvest, too. Perhaps ours isn't just the same harvest other folks are waiting for. Maybe ours is the harvest of our souls. It's very, very bright."

Frank mechanically followed the direction of the girl's happy eyes. But his own feelings, though no less happy

and thankful, had no such means of expression.

"Yes," he said lamely. "It is bright, isn't it?"

"Bright?" The shining eyes looked down into his handsome face, and again they smiled with that sweet, motherly tenderness. "Yes, dear."

Her simple agreement set the other racking his brains to let her understand that he appreciated her mood. He flushed as he reached for one of her hands and squeezed it.

"Phyl, you do know an awful lot."

"I know I'm dreadfully happy!" she cried. Then she gazed into his eyes. "Tell me, Frank, doesn't it make you think—notions when you're dreadful happy?"

The other shook his head.

"I just feel—happy," he said. "That's all."

"Ho! you two folks, the stew's through!"

Frank swung round at the sound of Mrs. Raysun's voice calling, and he flushed as he realized the ridiculousness of his attitude. Phyl sprang from her seat and, catching hold of his great hand, helped him to his feet.

As they walked side by side toward the house she drew a deep breath.

"Heigho!" she sighed. "And to think in a few weeks we'll have left all this behind for a lovely, lovely farm of our own—a beautiful frame house—folks working for us and—and money in the bank. Frank, isn't it a beautiful world? It surely is—some world."

CHAPTER XVIII.

In the Moonlight.

ANGUS MORAINE flung down his pen impatiently. Leaning back in his chair, he turned toward the sunlit window, gazing through it at the distant view of golden wheat as a man will who seeks relief from intolerable thought.

His thought was intolerable. It was growing more and more intolerable as the days passed and the time drew on when he must hand Deep Willows over to his successor.

All the best years of his life had been spent in the making of Deep Willows. All his energy, all that was best in him, these things had been given freely, without stint, without thought of sparing himself in the work, and he believed the result to be a worthy achievement.

There was just one shadow of hope left to him. It was very slight, very vague, and he hardly understood whither it led; he hardly knew if it were worth serious consideration at all. But the feeling was there; nor would it be denied. If only he knew what far-reaching scheme, with regard to his wife, lay in the back of Hendrie's great head he might feel easier. But he did not know, and, until such schemes were put into practise, he was not likely to know.

The thought gave him some satisfaction. If—if only something would happen in time. If—only.

A horseman rode past the window and pulled up at his door. Angus Moraine rose swiftly from his chair and, crossing the room hastily, flung open the door. The horseman was a special messenger he had sent into Everton.

The man was one of his foremen, a young Swede to whom he generally entrusted any confidential duty.

"Well, Jan?" he demanded as the man flung out of the saddle.

"One letter, boss," replied the Swede, producing an ordinary business envelope.

"Anything else?" There was eagerness in Angus's inquiry as he took the letter and read the address in Hendrie's handwriting.

"Guess I took a peek at the hotel register," Jan replied at once.

"I see the name you wanted. Frank Smith. Guess he registered in at dinner-time."

The narrow eyes of the Scot lit.

"He's a tall guy. Sort o' tow hair. Young. He was sittin' in the office."

"Good."

The Swede mounted his horse. As he was about to ride off Angus detained him.

"Send me over my horse," he said casually.

The man rode off and Angus turned back into his office.

The manager's mood had entirely changed for the better. A sense of elation had replaced the desperate irritation of a few moments before. Was something going to happen at last? It almost looked like it. Frank Smith had registered at Everton, and here was a letter from Hendrie. A letter. It was not Hendrie's way to write letters with the telegraph handy and the telephone to his hand. He sat down and tore the envelope open.

It contained eight closely written sheets of very thin paper, and Angus smiled as he realized the writer's purpose. The envelope had appeared quite thin. There had been nothing about it to attract attention from the curious.

Straightening out the sheets, he settled himself to the perusal of his chief's letter. It was very long and full of carefully detailed instructions. Furthermore, it was dated at Gleber, and it also informed him of Frank Smith's arrival in Everton. With his first reading of the letter a wild hope leaped within him, and by the time he had finished his second reading he realized that he need have no further fears of being banished from Deep Willows.

But there was no time to indulge in the pleasurable reaction inspired by his letter. His orders were imperative and demanded prompt attention. Therefore he refolded the pages and bestowed them safely. Then, with his horse arrived, he set out at once in the direction of Everton.

The night closed down brilliantly fine, with a chill pervading the air. The full moon shone down upon the golden world with a steely gleam upon its cold face.

The village of Everton was very still and silent amid the woodland shadows in which it lay. The little wooden houses were in darkness, and no sign of life was visible anywhere, except at the hotel.

It was nearly ten o'clock when the glass door of the hotel was pushed open, and a tall man stood gazing out into the brilliant night. The doorway was narrow, and he almost entirely filled it. The yellow lamplight from behind shone dully upon his fair, bare head, and the cold moonlight shed an artificial pallor upon his good-looking face.

He stood for some moments thus, and his expression was scarcely happy. He seemed lost in some thought which gave him little enough pleasure. Presently he stirred and thrust the prairie hat he held in his hand upon his head and drew the brim well down over his eyes. Then with a hunch of the shoulders, the deliberate movement as of a man spurring himself to an unpleasant task, he stepped from the doorway out into the full light of the moon and started down the trail.

Scarcely had the last sound of his retreating steps died out when the door of a near-by house opened and a man stepped out on to the veranda. He waited for a moment, gazing about him; then, as another figure appeared round the side of the hotel, he quickly left his veranda and hurried across the intervening space to join the newcomer.

After a few moments' earnest conversation they, too, set off down the trail.

Within ten minutes the hotel door was against thrust open. This time the figure that appeared was a familiar one. It was Angus Moraine, and he was accompanied by the proprietor of the place. As he appeared a "hand" brought his horse round from the barn.

Angus stepped from the porch, took his horse from the "hired" man, and sprang lightly into the saddle.

He set off down the trail, and in a few moments he, too, was swallowed up by the woodland shadows.

The sumptuous library at Deep Willows held a great fascination for Monica. She used it in her solitary moments, during her husband's absences, more than any other living-room in the great house. Perhaps the attraction was the suggestion of office which the beautifully carved mahogany desk gave it. There was the great safe, too, let deep into the wall just behind it, with its disguising simple mahogany door. There were the elaborate filing drawers and various other appurtenances necessary in a room where business was transacted. Perhaps these things helped to remind her of other days.

Monica loved the room. There was the character of the man she loved peeping out from every corner at her, every shelf of the bookcases. There was a simple, direct, almost severe style about the place which reminded her so much of the strength of the man who had taken possession of her soul.

Something of this was in her thought as she sat there in a comfortable rocker on this particular night. A book was in her lap, but she was not reading.

She made a beautiful picture sitting there in the soft lamplight. She was happy — very, very happy — and to-night even more so than usual.

To-night! Ah, yes, she had reason to be happy to-night. Was it not the night when the culmination of so many little plans of hers was to be reached? Little plans that had for their inception the purest affection, the most tender loyalty to the dead as well as the living? Her gaze wandered across at the mahogany door of the safe, and she smiled as she thought that behind it lay the treasure awaiting distribution. From the safe her eyes passed on to the clock upon the desk. Its hands were nearing midnight.

The whole house was silent. The servants had long since retired; even her maid had been satisfactorily dismissed for the night. Angus had returned. She had just heard him ride past the house on his way to hand over his horse to the sleepy stable-hand awaiting him. There was nothing—nothing at all to interfere with her—Hark!

She started from her seat and darted across to the heavy curtains drawn over the French window, which she had purposely left open. The sound of steps approaching had reached her. She stood for a moment with hands ready to draw the curtains aside. Then she flung them open, and, with a low exclamation, embraced the fair-haired young giant who stepped in through the window.

"Frank—oh, Frank!" she cried. "My dearest, dearest boy! I'm so thankful you've come! I knew you wouldn't fail me in spite of—of what you said in your letter."

The young man gently released himself and glanced back shamefacedly at the curtains which closed behind him.

"That's just it, mother," he said, his honest face flushing. "I—I just hate this back-door business. Oh, I know it's all right," he went on, as Monica shook her head. "I know there's nothing wrong in it. It's not that. It's the feeling it gives me. You don't know how mean it makes me feel."

For a moment a slight look of alarm shadowed Monica's eyes. In the joy at seeing her boy again she had lost sight of the risk this visit really entailed. But she recovered herself quickly.

"Don't let's think of it. Alec is away, and the whole household is in bed and asleep. The last person to go to bed here is Angus Moraine, and he came in from town a few minutes ago. So—"

"Angus Moraine?" Frank raised his brows inquiringly. "He was at the hotel. I saw him there. I have seen him often, and—I don't think I like him."

Monica smiled as she walked across to the safe.

"Sit down at that desk, dear," she said happily, "while I hand you a wedding present, birthday present, coming of age present, all rolled into one. Talking of Angus, I don't think I like him, either. But there, we two are very much the same in our likes and dislikes, aren't we? We both like Phyl Raysun, don't we?" she added slyly.

Frank jumped up from his chair, and his young face had lost its last look of trouble.

"I'm so glad you like her, mother," he cried. "She's a perfect delight. She's so—so wise, too. You noticed that. I remember you said so in your letter. And—and isn't she beautiful?"

The safe door swung open, and Monica drew out a large bundle of notes.

"She's as beautiful as only a lover's eyes can see her," she said, with a smile. "She's such a delight, and so beautiful, and so wise, that I'm adding a dowry to the amount I am going to give you to start in business with. It's just a little extra housekeeping money."

There was no doubt of Monica's happiness at that moment. Her eyes were shining with the perfect delight of giving to those she loved.

"Seriously," she went on, "I'm very pleased with Phyl—a pretty name by the way. I'm so glad she is poor, and has been brought up as she has. I don't think you could possibly have made a better choice."

She sighed happily and glanced down at the notes in her hand. Then she went on—

"Now let us consider something more material. Here is the money, dear. There are twelve thousand dollars in this bundle for you, and another five thousand for your Phyl, and all my love to you both goes with them."

Monica laid the packet of notes on the desk in front of the man, who stared up at her in wondering amazement.

"Oh, mother," he cried, "this is too good altogether. You surely don't mean—"

But his protest was interrupted by the sharp ringing of the telephone bell, and his amazed look was abruptly changed to one of something like apprehension as he stared at the instrument.

But the sudden emergency found Monica alert. She snatched up the receiver and placed it against her ear.

Two men moved silently along in the shadow of the house. Their feet gave out no sound as they stealthily drew on toward the library windows. One of them was leading by some yards, as though he were the principal actor in the scene.

The face of the leader was stern and set. He drew near the open French window and paused listening. He could hear voices; a man's and a woman's, and for a moment, wondered that the window had been left open.

He was waiting—waiting for something, and the strain upon his patience was very great.

Then suddenly, faint and muffled, he heard the ring of a telephone bell. He breathed a sigh as of relief, and, signing to his companion to remain where he was, moved cautiously forward until he stood within the opening of the window.

Now he could plainly hear the woman's voice at the telephone. The man's teeth shut with a vicious snap.

"A letter, did you say? Oh! Yes, I heard you pass. I was busy with some work. Oh, you must see me tonight? Oh. Imperative I act on his instructions to-morrow morning. I see. Well, if it's so important I'll come along to your office. No, don't

come to me. I'll be with you in a moment. You won't keep me more than a few minutes? All right. It's no trouble."

The waiting man heard the receiver being hung up in its place. Then the woman began speaking rapidly to her companion.

"Oh, Frank, what a nuisance," she cried, in unmistakable annoyance. "It's Angus Moraine. He's had a letter from Alec. It's full of important instructions which he wants me to act on to-morrow morning, so I've got to get them to-night. He says he saw a light in the library when he passed and was relieved to find I was still up. It is a bother, dear, just when I wanted to be with you. Still, he says he won't keep me more than a few minutes. You wait here, Frank. I'll be back directly."

"What if any one comes?" The question came sharply from the man—and the eavesdropper's lips pursed grimly.

"No one will come," said the woman promptly.

The man at the window writhed as he heard the distinct sound of a kiss. The next moment the rustle of skirts, and, at last, the closing of a door, told him all he had been waiting for. Suddenly he pushed open the window, drew the curtains apart, closed them sharply behind him, and stepped into the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

A Man's Honor.

"WELL?"

The monosyllabic challenge bit through the silence of the room. It was full of menace.

The man at the desk leaped from his seat and faced about, glaring in the direction whence the voice had proceeded.

He faced the accusing figure of Alexander Hendrie with a desperate, hunted look in his widening eyes, and, curiously, in the horror of the moment, amid the turmoil of alarm that filled his heart and brain, he found himself surveying the intruder with a closeness of observation only to be expected in moments of perfect tranquillity.

His eyes caught the man's mane of hair, slightly graying at the temples. He noted the cold gleam of the gray eyes leveled straight at his. He realized the meaning of the harsh, tightly compressed mouth, and the gripping muscles of the wide, bull-dog jaw. There was a peculiar hunch to the man's broad shoulders, which suggested nothing so much as a wild animal crouching to spring upon its victim.

In a flash his own nerve steadied, and a desperate calmness succeeded the first shock of horror.

"Well?" he retorted, and moistened his parching lips.

To an on-looker, undisturbed by the tension of the moment, a curious realization must inevitably have occurred. It was the extraordinary likeness existing between these two. The older man displayed the maturity of his years in his increasing bulk, but the likeness was scarcely lessened by it. There was the same hair, the same cast of feature. The younger man's eyes were blue and his height was greater, but the breadth of shoulder, the bone and muscle were similar.

Hendrie pointed at the open safe and the bundle of notes which Frank still clutched in his hand.

"Red-handed," he said. Then, as the incredulous youth made a movement of protest, the other's hand slipped round to his hip pocket with a movement not to be mistaken. "Don't move," he said quickly.

Hendrie's command had instant effect. Frank stood quite still. Then his appalled amazement found sudden and violent expression.

"Good God!" he cried. "What do you mean? Do you take me for—a thief?"

Hendrie's eyes never once relaxed their cruel stare.

"What are you, then?"

Frank glanced at the open safe, and his horrified eyes came back to the pile of notes he was still grasping.

"You mean—" he began. Then indignation overcame every other feeling. "This money was—"

Again he broke off, and this time a cold sweat broke out upon his forehead. Only just in time did he realize what the admission he was about to make would entail. Suddenly he beheld the hideous trap gaping to ensnare him.

To say that his mother, this man's wife, had given him the money, that her hand had unlocked the safe, that he and she had been in that room together, would be to betray her secret and yield up to the last man in the world whom she wished should learn it, the story of—her shame.

His throat had dried up suddenly. What could he do? He could only stand there, a convicted felon, caught, as Hendrie had so mercilessly declared, "red-handed."

He looked into the merciless eyes of his accuser whose harsh voice broke the silence—

"You were going to say that that money had been given you by some one — my wife?" He laughed without mirth. "Guess you'd best finish your story. Shall I send for my wife to corroborate it? How'd you fancy that?"

The man's sarcasm goaded his victim beyond endurance, and dogged silence gave way before it.

"You lie," he cried passionately. "I am no thief!"

The younger man's sudden heat was not without its effect upon Hendrie. A flush crept over his level brows. It dyed his cheeks, and added a fresh gleam of malignant hatred to the cold cruelty of his eyes.

"You're a thief," he cried. "Do you get me? A thief. You're a low-down, dirty cur of a thief, not half as good as the man who steals money. Say, you're the sort of skunk who steals in through back doors chasing other men's women-folk. You came to steal my wife. You've been at the game weeks. You've been watched—both of you—you and your paramour. Back!"

In a wild fury Frank precipitated himself to choke the accusations in the man's throat. But he was brought to a stand by the shining muzzle of a revolver, held at his body.

He dropped back.

"Say, you can quit that right here," Hendrie went on. "I fixed this trap for you. Maybe you don't know what you're up against. You're going to pay—and pay bad. I'm ready to spend my last cent so you get the dose I want you to get.

"But you've made it easy for me. Plumb easy. I find you here with my safe open, and a pile of money taken from it. A safe robber, eh? The money in your hand, and you got in through this window. Get me? Burglary. House-breaking. Safe-robbing. When the law's fixed you right for that, and you've served your term—then, why, I guess there's more to follow. Say, you're going to get it good for just so long as we both live.

"Oh, I know you've not stolen that money," he went on savagely. "I know that. I recognize you for the man whose picture I tore up in my wife's rooms before I married her. You're her lover, I know, but you're going to be treated just as hard as the law can fix you for—those other things."

Under the merciless lash of the millionaire's tongue Frank grew steadily calmer. As Hendrie paused he felt, though he knew denial was useless, that he must make a final effort.

"I tell you, you are wrong—utterly wrong," he cried desperately. "I have never stolen anything in my life. As for your wife, if you would only put this madness out of your head you would see that there is only one man

in all the world she loves, and that man is you. I tell you the day will come when you will regret it, regret the wrong you are doing your wife—me, and would give your right hand to undo the mischief you have wrought through this—this insane jealousy."

The millionaire gazed at the earnest young face, and slowly a smile grew in his eyes, a smile which only rendered their expression more tigerish.

"Come," he said, in his level tones, "that's better. If what you say is true guess the whole thing's up to you. You'll have your opportunity in the prisoner's dock. Just explain things to the court, to the press reporters, waiting to telegraph the news all over America. Just tell 'em what your relations with the wife of Alexander Hendrie are. Call her a witness that she gave you that money."

Frank saw more clearly than ever the necessity for silence and submission. But, realizing these things, he saw, too, an added danger.

"One moment," he said, with studied calmness. He had half read the other's intention as he moved the curtains. "What will happen when—Mrs. Hendrie hears of my conviction? Have you considered that?"

The millionaire glanced over his shoulder. A triumphant light shone in his eyes.

"Guess I've considered everything. Your—paramour—after to-night, will never see or hear of you again—unless you call her as a witness at your trial."

He waited for the anticipated outburst. But it did not come. To his surprise his victim's face was smiling, and the sight of it set him searching for its cause.

Frank nodded.

"Right," he said, almost cheerily. "I have no intention to resist—now."

The next moment a man stepped into the room through the parted curtains. Frank surveyed him alost indifferently. He recognized him as Douglas, the sheriff of Everton.

His heart sank. He thought of Phyllis, he thought of the farm he was to have purchased, he thought of a hundred and one things. Presently he was roused to a sense of his position as the cold irons were slipped upon his wrist.

Then he found himself standing up. Somebody passed him his hat. Then he knew that he was walking beside the sheriff, and passing out of the room by the window through which he had entered it.

Alexander Hendrie gazed after the two retreating figures until they dropped down to the lower level of the river-bank. Then he crossed swiftly to the safe and closed it. He thrust the packet of money into an inner pocket of his coat. After that he passed out through the window, carefully closing it behind him.

Ten minutes later a high-powered automobile was approaching Deep Willows by the Everton trail. It only had two occupants. The chauffeur was in the driving seat. Behind him, surrounded by his baggage, and enveloped in his heavy traveling coat, sat Alexander Hendrie.

CHAPTER XX.

The Return of Alexander Hendrie.

"GUESS he won't make home to-night, ma'am."

Angus Moraine broke the silence which followed on the protracted, but absorbing discussion which had just taken place in the stuffy precincts of his office.

Monica smiled. She was sitting in a well-worn chair, Angus Moraine's own particular chair, which he had placed for her beside his desk in the full light of the lamp, and directly facing him.

"It's impossible to say," she replied, with the confidence of her understanding of the man under discussion. "If business does not interfere, and the mood takes him, Mr. Hendrie will be home to-night."

The moment she entered his room and glanced at the long letter which Angus promptly handed her, she became fully interested.

The letter had been written with the express purpose of interesting her. The writer's whole object had been to afford food for discussion, so that his instructions to Angus, to keep her there for a definite time, might the more easily be carried out.

The paragraph which chiefly held her interest had been subtly placed by the writer at the opening of the letter.

He wrote:

There is a big labor movement afoot. It is normally the bonding of all agriculturists, and has for its stated purpose their protection against employers. This may be so. But I have a shrewd idea that the primary object is the furthering of the socialistic movement that is causing so much harm to the world's industries, and is fostering the deplorable discontent prevailing in labor circles all the world over. However, with such a movement afoot, it is, of course, quite impossible to forecast what unpleasant developments the near future may have for us at Deep Willows.

In removing you, and leaving Mrs. Hendrie in control of my interests there, I am confident enough of successful operation in the ordinary way. But under these new conditions I do not feel so sure. It seems to me that the necessity for the strength of a man's controlling hand in dealing with the situation will soon make itself apparent. Therefore it is better to anticipate. Such anticipation will cause a change of plans.

I shall, therefore, require you to remain at Deep Willows, and I will ask you to see Mrs. Hendrie at once, convey her my compliments, and urgently request her to join me in Winnipeg by the first eastbound mail. I find that affairs will keep me pretty well tied to Winnipeg and its surroundings. There is also a great deal to be done on the social side. It is becoming more and more necessary to entertain largely, and this, of course, I cannot do without my wife's cooperation.

I am sorely pressed for time or I should have written Mrs. Hendrie fully on the subject. But, as this would have entailed two long letters of explanation, and since it is imperative to write you upon other matters relating to the work in hand, I must ask you to convey my apologies to my wife for thus sending her instructions through a third party. Anyway, this letter is only precautionary lest I should not be able to reach Deep Willows as I hope to.

Just for one moment, while reading, Monica had experienced the slightest feeling of pique that her husband should have chosen Angus as the recipient of his instructions for herself. But such smallness was quickly banished as she read on to the end of the letter, through a perfect maze of intricate orders and countermandings of affairs connected with Deep Willows.

Now they were considering Hendrie's possible return that night. Angus had done his work, and was waiting, sitting there expectantly till the time of the final development which was yet to come.

"It'll need to be a 'special,' ma'am," he said with a smile.

Monica laughed lightly.

"Then let it be a 'special.' That, and his automobile, will serve him well enough. You see—"

She broke off, listening. Faintly, but quite distinctly, the low purr of a high-powered car penetrated the dense atmosphere of the office.

Angus started up. He, too, heard the sound, and turned to the waiting woman.

"Guess it was a special, all right—"

He broke off as his narrow eyes took in the expression of Monica's face. He ran to her side as though to support her.

"You're faint, ma'am!" he cried. "It's the heat of this room. It's—"

But Monica shook him off. Her face was deadly pale, and she stood supporting herself against the arm of her chair. Her eyes were alight with a dreadful alarm as she gazed incredulously at the hands of the clock on the desk.

It was half past one, and all this time Frank had been waiting in the library for her. The thought of her folly and carelessness was maddening. She would never, never forgive herself if harm came through it. Harm? It

must not. She must get away at once. She must give him warning.

"I'll go and open the front door," she said with studied calmness. "Everybody is in bed. I—"

"Guess you don't need to worry with that door," he said. "He's coming along over the upper trail. He'll pass us here."

So Monica had no alternative. She must remain. And this knowledge threw her into a fresh fever of apprehension. In a few moments there came the ominous metallic clank as the clutch was released, and the brakes drew the millionaire's machine to a standstill at the door.

Already her husband's voice could be heard talking to the chauffeur.

"Hand me that suit-case and leave the rest in the car," he said. "Be ready for an early start to-morrow."

There was nothing left for Monica but to go out and meet him.

"Why, Mon, this is great. I hadn't expected it."

Hendrie spoke heartily, and the troubled woman felt a thrill of satisfaction, even though danger was pressing.

"I've moved some to get here," he went on. Then he came up to her as she stood in the doorway and, under the watchful eyes of Angus, embraced her warmly.

For a moment he stood her off at arm's length.

"But what are you doing up at this hour?" he demanded with pretended severity.

"You've got your own letter to blame for that, Alec," retorted Monica. "If you must send messages to your wife through Angus—you must expect the—unexpected."

Hendrie responded with a smile.

"Well, as long as he's told you everything I'll forgive him—this time." He drew out his cigar-case and carefully selected a cigar. His eyes were shadowed for a moment and their expression was hidden from his wife. "Will you be able to start East first thing to-morrow. It's—important."

"Why, yes, dear," she said at once. "We can go on ahead, and Margaret can pack up and follow later. That will be quite easy."

The command died out of the man's eyes as he surveyed her. She was very, very beautiful as she stood there in the lamplight. Her fascination for him was enormous.

Hendrie lived at fever heat. He had no desire to seek understanding through tolerance. It was for him to dominate. It was for him to bend and even break those who ran foul of his will.

"Splendid, Mon," he cried as he pierced the end of his cigar and placed it firmly between his teeth. "You're always ready to help me. Now see, Mon, you best get right off to bed. It's late, and you've got some journey in front of you. Just give me half an hour with Angus and I'll join you."

Monica's heart leaped. Here was all she needed to dispel the last shadow. She could warn—

"Yes, I am tired, dear," she said readily. "It's been a long day, and I have been working hard."

Hendrie nodded.

Monica was quite herself again, and she laughed as she picked up her husband's suit-case. "I'll take this along for you, dear," she went on. "Good night, Angus. Good night, Alec—for the present."

She hurried out of the room and the door closed.

For some moments Hendrie did not move. His great head was slightly inclined out of its usual erect position.

At last the cigar in the millionaire's mouth was tilted and he turned. He reached out and drew the chair Monica had occupied toward him. Then he sat down suddenly.

"Guess she'll find the library empty," he said in a curiously dull tone. "He's well on his way to Calford—now."

The millionaire did not display the

least elation at the success of the trap he had laid and successfully worked. His cigar glowed under the pressure at which he was smoking, and this was the only indication Angus beheld of any unusual emotion.

The manager stirred uneasily at the lengthening silence.

But at last the great head was lifted alertly and the steady eyes lit anew.

"Guess you don't know much about women, Angus," he said thoughtfully.

Angus smiled. But there was no smile in Hendrie's eyes. He was gazing steadily before him, his cigar poised, forgotten, in his hand.

"Pshaw! What's the use?" he cried suddenly, with an irritable shift of his position. "It's not the woman's fault—ever. It's the man's—the dirty, low-down cur who can always trade on her weakness. I ought to know."

He picked up a match almost mechanically and struck it. But his cigar remained where it was, and the match was allowed to burn out in his fingers.

Suddenly he looked up and caught his manager's eyes fixed on him curiously.

"What are you staring at, man?" he cried. Then with sudden heat, "What are you staring at? Do you think me a doddering fool—a weak imbecile? That's it!" he cried, working himself up into a sort of frenzy and breaking into a laugh, as terrible a sound as Angus remembered to have heard. "I tell you she's not to blame," he went on furiously. "I tell you I'll not give her up. Say, you cold-blooded, herring-bodied Scotchman, have you ever loved a woman in the whole of your grouchy life?"

Again he laughed. "Thank your God, you cold-blooded fish, you are incapable of loving any woman."

He reached out again for a match and struck it. But he threw it away from him at once.

"I can't give her up," he said in a low, passionate tone. "I can win her back. I will win her back." His voice rose. "She's mine, and he—God have mercy on him, for I won't. He'll be tried and condemned, and not a word of his trial will reach the outside world. He is utterly cut off from the world. I have seen to that. And then afterward. By God, I'll hunt him down. I'll hunt him to his grave, if it costs me every cent I possess."

Again he broke off, and his companion waited uneasily for what might come. All abruptly the gray eyes lit anew and flashed in his direction.

"Why don't you say something?" he cried fiercely. "Why do you sit here in silence? Are you afraid to speak? Bah! Say, Angus, when you told me those things I promised you, if they were not true, I'd—kill you. You remember? They were true. And because they were true"—the man's eyes glowered—"I'd like—to kill you—anyway. Yes, I'd like to tear your miserable heart out of you, as you have helped to tear the heart out of me."

Angus offered no protest. He sat there still and watchful. He knew that the man's brain was fighting for sanity. Now had come the reaction. The man was breathing hard, and his usually cold eyes were staring and burning.

Presently a deep sigh came from between his clenched teeth. He moved. Angus saw the movement. He understood the relaxing of tension which permitted such a movement. Had the battle worn itself out? Had the man emerged victorious?

Suddenly Hendrie turned to the cigar, still poised between his fingers. He smiled. And Angus knew that victory was within sight. A match was again struck, and this time the millionaire lit his cigar. The next moment his companion beheld a glimpse of the suffering so deeply hidden in that broad bosom.

"I'm—I'm sorry, old friend," Hendrie said with an unusual note of kindness in his voice. "I'm sorry. Maybe you'll forget. Maybe you understand something of what I'm feel-

ing about now. You see—I—just love her, and, well—I just love her."

CHAPTER XXI.

The Verdict.

THE machinery at the command of Alexander Hendrie had been set in motion. Nor was its power in doubt for a single moment. Wealth may not be able to bias the ruling of a court, but it can do all those things which can force conviction upon the mind of the most upright judge on the bench.

Frank Burton, charged in Calford as Frank Smith, a name which, to the last, he claimed for his own, was soon enough to learn something of this extraordinary, intangible power. To his horror he found himself utterly powerless before an array of evidence which conveyed a cruelly complete story of his alleged malefactions, characterized as house-breaking—with violence. The charge was made by Angus Moraine.

For his defense he had only his absurdly bare declaration of innocence, a declaration made from the passionate depths of an innocent heart, but one which, in the eyes of the court, amounted to nothing more than the prerogative of the vilest criminal.

What use to fight? His counsel, the counsel appointed by the court, did his conscientious best, but he knew he was fighting a losing battle. There was no hope from the outset, and he knew it.

In the mean time Alexander Hendrie was no nearer the scene of prosecution than Winnipeg, but the six hundred odd miles was bridged by telephone wires, and he was in constant touch with those whose service was at his command.

No feeling of pity stirred him as he sat in his office, with the telephone close to his hand, on the afternoon of his victim's trial. He was waiting for the news of the verdict.

Even now, while he waited, his thoughts were in that up-town mansion where Monica was waiting for him. Nor were they the harsh thoughts of the wronged husband for the woman in whom his faith had been shattered. He was thinking of her as the wonderful creature, so fair, so perfect, so delightful in the appeal of her whole personality, around whom shone the deepest, most glowing fires of his hopes. She was to him the most desirable thing in the world.

The fierce tempest which had so bitterly raged in his soul at the first discovery of her frailty had almost worn itself out. Another might have cast the woman out of his life; another of lesser caliber. This man might have turned and rent her, as he had turned and rent the man who was her secret lover. But such was not Alexander Hendrie. His passions were part of him, uncontrolled by any lukewarm considerations of right and wrong. To have cast Monica out of his life would have been to tear the heart from the depths of his bosom.

The time crept on and still the telephone remained silent. But the waiting man's patience seemed inexhaustible. His was the patience of certainty. So he smoked on in his leisurely fashion.

He had no thought for the innocent young life he was crushing with the power of his wealth so many miles away. His thwarted love for his erring wife filled all his dreams to the exclusion of every other consideration.

The bur-r-r of the telephone's dummy bell broke the silence. Without haste, without a sign of emotion, he drew his chair forward again and leisurely placed the receiver to his ear.

"Yes. Who's that? Oh—Calford." Hendrie waited a moment, the fingers, of his right hand drumming idly on his desk. Presently he went on: "Yes, yes—you are Calford. Who is speaking? Eh? That you, Angus? This is Hendrie. Well? Oh. Finished, is it? Yes. And—oh— Five

years. Good. Five years penitentiary. Thanks. Good-by."

He replaced the receiver and quietly began to deal with the accumulation of work which had lain so long untouched upon his desk.

In the rush of new life in Winnipeg, Monica was left with little enough time for anything but those duties which, in her husband's interests, were demanded of her. A fresh vista of life's panorama had opened out before her making it necessary to obtain a definite readjustment of focus.

She quickly found herself tossed about amid the rapids of the social stream, and, however little the buffeting of its wayward currents appealed to her, hers was a nature not likely to shrink before it. It was her duty, as the wife of one of the richest men in the country, to make herself one of the pivots about which revolved a narrow, exclusive social circle, and toward that end she strove with her greatest might.

So, in her great mansion in the most exclusive portion of the city, she dispensed lavish and tasteful hospitality, and in turn took part in all the functions that went to make up the program of the set in which she found herself something more than an ordinary star. Within three months her popularity was achieved, and in six she was voted the most brilliant hostess in the city.

Hendrie's satisfaction with her was very apparent. Whatever his secret thoughts and feelings, whatever his bitterness of memory, no sign of these was permitted to escape him. She moved through his life an idol.

Thus Monica was absorbed during her first six months of Winnipeg. But in her moments of respite her thoughts more than frequently drifted in the direction of young Frank and the girl he was to make his wife.

At first she recalled with satisfaction the fact that she had been able to help him, and she found herself building many castles for his occupation. Then, as the time slipped by, she began to wonder at his silence. There was no sense of alarm. She just wondered and went on with her pictures of his future. She thought of the new home she had helped him select, and saw him in its midst, preparing it for the reception of the young wife he was so soon to take to his bosom.

Frank married! It seemed absurd to think of Frank married. And yet—

Why had he not written? She was puzzled. At first her puzzlement was merely passing. But, as the days passed without any word, it recurred with greater and greater frequency. Gradually a subtle worry set in.

She reviewed the night of her husband's sudden return to Deep Willows. She remembered how, immediately on leaving Angus's office, she had gone straight to her library. It was empty. The safe was locked; all was in order. Even the window was closed. All this told her what she wanted to know. Frank had taken his departure safely.

Then she thought of the money. It was a large sum. Had he been robbed? It was a possibility, but one that did not carry conviction. At length she wrote to him. This was about three months after her arrival in Winnipeg. She wrote him at the farm where he had worked, feeling that the letter would be forwarded on if he had left the place.

Days passed; two weeks. There was no reply to her letter, and her fears increased. A month later she wrote again, this time addressing the letter to his new farm. His silence remained unbroken.

Then came a shock which reduced her to a condition of panic. Her first letter was returned to her through the mail, and the envelope bore the ominous blue-pencil message, "Not known." A few days later her second letter came back with similar words.

The return of the second letter had a curious effect upon Monica. For a

long time she found herself unable to think clearly upon the matter. Her panic seemed to have paralyzed her capacity for clear thought, and she was left helplessly dreading.

Nor was her trouble without its outward, physical effect. Sleepless nights and anxiety began rapidly to leave their mark. She became nervous and irritable. Her beautiful, rounded cheeks lost something of their delicate beauty; her great eyes shadowed, and the nervous strain left bloodshot markings in the pearly whiteness of her eyes.

She set herself again to study the dreary list of possibilities. It was a hopeless, blind sort of groping, and led nowhither. Nor was it until some days had passed that her inspiration really came. It came in the middle of a long, sleepless night. If there was one person in the world likely to know of Frank's whereabouts it was Phyllis Raysun. Why had she not thought of it before?

Forthwith she left her bed and wrote a letter. Nor did the possible consequences of what she was doing occur to her until she had sealed the envelope. Then realization came. She remembered Phyllis's unusual keenness. Who was she, Monica, to require information about Frank? What relationship was there between them? The girl was aware of Frank's illegitimacy. Well? Yes, she would guess the secret she, Monica, had been at such pains to keep.

On the impulse of the moment she tore the letter up; but almost immediately she wrote another. With the letter written she enjoyed the first real night's sleep she had had for many days. She felt she was on the right track.

She mailed the letter herself next morning, and then prepared to await the result with what patience she could. In due course her answer arrived. It came in the shape of a cheap envelope bulging to its capacity. She tore off the outer covering. But the first paragraph, written in a girlish hand, dashed every hope and plunged her to the depths of despair.

Monica read the simple story of a heart-broken girl who, like herself, had been waiting for word from the man who was her whole world. She had no news of him whatsoever. She knew nothing of his whereabouts. She could find no trace of him. He had vanished.

From that moment a definite change became very marked in Monica. All her old keenness and aptitude for business returned to her aid. No stone should be left unturned to discover the boy, whatever it cost her. Grown to manhood as he was, he was still her charge, bound to her by the ties of her duty to the dead, bound to her by the tie of a wonderful maternal love.

She engaged the services of the best detectives in the country and set them to work. In their supreme confidence they promised her that if the man was above ground they would find him. If he were not, then they would at least point the spot at which he was buried.

Monica wrote a warm, womanly letter of great kindness to Phyllis and told her what she was doing. She also told her the story of Frank's birth as she had told it to the boy himself. The ice having been broken, she kept in constant communication with Phyllis, and the intercourse helped her to endure the dreary waiting.

Once, in a fit of depression, Monica made up her mind to abandon Winnipeg and return to Deep Willows. She told her husband of her purpose one night on their way to dinner at the house of Joseph P. Lachlan, a great railroad magnate.

Hendrie appeared to display the keenest sympathy. "You've done great work, Mon," he said cordially. "I don't know how I should have got through without your help on the social side. You're a bully partner. You've never grumbled. And yet you must be worn out. You certainly must have a holiday.

"I hope to be finished soon; then I shall be able to join you. But there are one or two matters I can't leave yet. I hope to bring off a big coup the night of our big reception, a month hence. Cyrus Burd, the New York banker, must be brought into the trust. Burd is the man we want.

"I dare say I can worry that reception through without you. I shall have to. Anyway, your health is the first consideration with me, and Deep Willows is just the place for you to recuperate in."

Instantly Monica's denial leaped. Her health was nothing to his affairs, she said. There must be no chance of anything going wrong through her defection. She would not leave Winnipeg until after that reception.

Then Hendrie tried to persuade her to go; but her mind, she declared, was definitely made up and she was quite unmovable. So Hendrie, with an air of reluctance, was finally forced to acquiesce.

She had reason to be glad of her decision two weeks later. It was nearly noon when her private telephone at the side of her bed rang. It was the Redtown Inquiry Agency, and Monica's heart leaped as she listened.

Their representative wanted to see her urgently. Would she call upon him before two o'clock? It was preferable she should go to him. Would she kindly do so? He could not trust a message of importance to the wire.

It was just one when Monica was ushered into the private office of Mr. Verdant, the representative of the Redtown Agency.

Mr. Verdant greeted her with the cordiality he always displayed toward a rich client. After placing her in a chair, where the light from the window shone full upon her face, he moved noiselessly over to the door and, with some display, ascertained that it was tightly shut.

"We have not found your—the person you are interested in, Mrs. Hendrie," he said, with studied effect.

"You have not found him?" Monica's heart sank. Then she went on in an aggrieved tone: "Then why have you sent for me?"

"I have brought you here to tell you that my people have decided to abandon the case."

Monica stared. "But—but I don't understand." Monica was angry.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," Mr. Verdant went on, "but we're business men as well as inquiry agents. You'll naturally understand that our inquiries frequently land us up against people whom, as business men, we cannot afford to run up against. This is our position now with regard to your—er—inquiries."

"You mean—you are afraid to go on with my case?" Monica made no attempt to conceal her annoyance, even contempt.

"You can put it that way if you choose," Mr. Verdant went on imperturbably.

"But this is outrageous!" cried Monica, suddenly giving full vent to angry disappointment.

"Madam," he said, "you are hard on us. There are some things far better left alone. We have gone as far as we dare in our investigations."

But Monica was not so easily appeased.

"If you have done the work you say; if you have made discoveries which you refuse to disclose to me, after accepting my money for your work, then you are committing a fraud which the law will not tolerate."

Mr. Verdant listened quite unimpressed.

"One moment, madam. I beg of you to keep calm. I have done my duty as an official of this agency. Now I am going to do my duty by you as the detective in charge of your case. You desire to know the whereabouts of Mr. Frank Burton. I can tell you how to find his whereabouts. Ask your husband. Ask Mr. Alexander Hendrie where he is."

Mr. Verdant had risen from his

seat as he spoke, and now stood holding the door open for his visitor to pass out.

CHAPTER XXII.

When Vows Must Yield.

"ASK your husband. Ask Mr. Alexander Hendrie where he is."

The words beat into Monica's brain. They hammered upon her ear-drums. They rose before her eyes, mocking her.

She was back in her own home. She had gone straight to her bedroom and locked herself in. Monica paced her room for hours. She was trying desperately to fathom the meaning of the man Verdant's challenge. It was useless. Her thoughts tumbled pell-mell through her harassed brain, eluded her grasp, and vanished in the darkness whence they had leaped.

"Ask your husband. Ask Mr. Alexander Hendrie where he is."

A hundred times the words came back, but she could proceed no farther. Instinctively she understood something of the ugliness lying beyond them.

If her husband knew of Frank's whereabouts then—but she dared go no farther. Once she paused in her restless pacing and stood before the mirror on her dressing-table. She stared at it as though reading the man's words written there. Suddenly she became aware of her own reflection, which seemed to be mocking her. She fled precipitately and flung herself into a chair, burying her face in her hands.

The late afternoon sun had just fallen athwart the great bay window, when the troubled woman, with a sigh as of utter exhaustion, flung herself upon her bed in a flood of hysterical tears. For a while the storm remained unabating. But it was the saving reaction. Within half an hour the storm had lessened. Monica pushed the electric bell at her bedside.

Margaret obeyed the summons with suspicious alacrity. Truth to tell, the devoted girl had been near by, waiting for the summons. Her mistress's unusual attitude had seriously troubled her. Now she came, hoping but anxious, and after one glance at Monica's swollen eyes she gave vent to her distress.

"Oh, but, madam—" she cried.

She was silenced with a look.

"I'll begin to dress—now," Monica said coldly.

But the girl's anxiety was too sincere.

"But, madam, it is only half past five! Dinner—dinner is at eight."

Monica turned away coldly and seated herself upon the ottoman, which stood in the center of the room.

"I will dress now," she said finally.

Margaret understood her charge. It was useless to protest when Monica's mind was made up. So she set about her work at once.

She endured the process of her toilet like one in a dream. Promptly selection was made. Monica knew the value of soft black chiffon against her beautiful fair hair and fairer skin.

Monica surveyed herself in the mirror. She gazed at herself from every point of view. She knew that she was very beautiful.

She turned at last to the waiting girl, who was gazing at her in open admiration.

"Go and find out if Mr. Hendrie has come in yet. If he hasn't, leave word I am to be told the moment he arrives. Also, let him be told that I wish to see him in the library before he goes to dress."

Monica was standing in the archway beyond which two great French windows looked out over the street. One arm was upraised, and its bejeweled hand was nervously clutching the edge of the heavy crimson curtain. It was no pose. She was clinging to the curtain for support.

The sound of a step in the hall beyond startled her. She clutched the

curtain still more tightly. She knew that firm tread. The handle of the door turned. Instantly she yielded her hold upon the curtain. Her husband must witness no sign of her fear. The next moment a deep, familiar voice greeted her.

"I'm sorry if I kept you waiting, Mon. I—"

Hendrie broke off in astonishment.

"Why, Mon!" he cried. Then in a sudden burst of admiration: "You—you look just splendid!"

Monica smiled up at him.

"You haven't kept me waiting. I—I was anxious to see you at once, so I—I dressed early."

Hendrie had drawn nearer, as though about to embrace her. But her halting fashion of explanation checked him.

"Something—important?"

The woman was seized with a mad longing to flee from the room.

"Yes—I'm afraid it is," she said in a low, unsteady voice, while she turned away toward the window.

"Afraid?"

"Yes," she said, and stammered on: "I—I—hardly know where—to—begin."

Hendrie left the table and drew a step nearer.

"You're in some trouble, my Mon," he said kindly.

Monica's fears lessened, and something of her courage returned. Suddenly she threw up her head.

"Tell me, Alec!" she cried. "Tell me truly, as though you were answering your own soul, is there—is there a condition, a moment, a situation in life when it becomes wrong to keep a solemn vow given—to the dead? I hold that a vow to the dead is the most sacred thing in—life. Am I right—or wrong?"

The man's gray eyes expressed neither surprise nor curiosity.

"You are wrong," he said simply. "The most sacred thing in life is—truth. When truth demands, no vow to dead or living can bind."

Monica sighed. "You are sure?"

"Sure—quite sure."

The man was deliberate. As no answer was forthcoming he went on:

"Come, Mon, tell me. Guess there's something behind all this. Well—I am here to listen."

The woman stirred. She clenched her hands. Then her answer came.

"And I am here to tell you," she cried with a sharp intake of breath. "I have lost something. I have lost something which is almost as precious to me as—as your love. I have been told that you can tell me where to find—him."

"Him?" The word rang through the quiet room.

"Yes—him, him!" cried Monica, becoming hysterical. "My—my dead sister's child!"

Hendrie smoothed back his hair like a man at a loss.

"I—don't think I quite—get it," he said slowly. Then his bushy brows lifted questioningly: "Your sister's child? I didn't know you had a sister. You never told me."

Monica swallowed with difficulty. Her throat and tongue were parched.

"No," she said, struggling for calmness. "I never told you because—because I had vowed to keep the secret. Questions would have followed the telling which I could not have answered. I was bound—and I could not break my promise."

"You best tell me all there is to tell," the man said coldly. "This secrecy, this promise. I don't understand—any of it."

Monica suddenly thrust out her hands in appeal.

"Oh, Alec, it is so hard even now to—to break my faith with the dead. And yet I know you are right. It—it is more than time for the truth. I think—yes, I believe if poor Elsie knew all she would forgive me."

"Elsie?" The man's voice was sharply questioning.

"Yes, Elsie—my poor dead sister!"

"Go on."

"Yes, yes! I must go on." Monica drew a deep breath. "I can't understand. I don't seem to— Oh, tell me where he is! My Frank, my poor Frank, Elsie's boy — the boy I have brought up to manhood, the boy I have cared for all these years, the boy I have struggled and fought for. He — he is — lost! He has been spirited away as though he had never existed. And—I am told by the detectives to ask you where he is."

Hendrie's eyes were upon the carpet.

"Tell me," he said sharply, "when did you see him last?"

His manner had become suddenly compelling.

"It was the last night I spent at Deep Willows," she said at once. "Just before you came home."

"Tell me!" he cried fiercely. "Tell me—as quickly as you can!"

Monica was caught in the man's sudden excitement.

"Yes, yes, I will!" she cried. "Oh, but it is a long story! It all happened when I was a young girl. I was only seventeen. Poor Elsie! She had been away a long time from home. Then she came home to me, her only relative. She came home to die, and, dying, gave birth to her son. You see, she was never married."

She paused, but went on at once at the man's prompt urging:

"The man left her in the hour of her direst need. Poor girl, even in her extremity she did not blame him. She loved him almost as much as she loved his little baby boy. Her anxiety was chiefly that the child should never know of his mother's shame. So, almost with her last breath, she made me swear that I would bring him up as my own child; that I would keep her secret from him and account for his father as being dead with any story I chose to tell him. And I—I, a girl of seventeen, promised."

She paused. Then she hurried on as the questioning eyes of the man were again raised to her face.

"From that day Frank became my own son, and for nearly twenty years I battled with the world for him. I have had to lie, lie, lie all through. And when you came into my life I had to lie harder than ever. It was either that or betray my sister's secret."

Hendrie looked up with something like anguish in his eyes.

"Oh, woman, woman," he cried, "why didn't you take me into your confidence? These lies could have been saved, and—and all these other, and even more, terrible consequences. Listen to me, and I will tell you all the rest. I can see it now. I can see it more clearly than you can tell me. He called himself Frank—Smith?"

Monica started.

"Yes. Whenever he visited me at Deep Willows. His real name was Frank Burton."

Monica stepped eagerly forward from the shadow of the curtains.

"You — you know where he is?" she demanded.

Hendrie nodded. Then a strange thing happened. A harsh, mirthless laugh rang through the darkening room. Monica stared at the man's unsmiling face.

"Then where is he?" she cried blankly.

"He is in the penitentiary, serving five years for breaking into Deep Willows and robbing my safe of a bunch of money that belonged to you."

"Oh, God have mercy!"

The cry rang through the room. Monica reeled and would have fallen. In a moment her husband's arms were about her. But she flung him off, and her action was one of something like loathing.

"You — you!" she cried fiercely. Then: "Go on! Tell me — tell me quickly! It is you — you who have done this!"

Hendrie drew himself up. There was no hesitation about him, no shrinking before the story he had to tell.

"Yes, I did it," he said. "I—I! I have listened to your story. Now lis-

ten to mine. I saw that picture in your rooms and took the man to be an old lover. After we were married I became aware of the clandestine visits of a man to you at Deep Willows. You were known to have embraced him. I determined to crush this man I believed to be your lover. So I set to work. I need not tell you how I tracked him down and kept him watched. It is sufficient that I knew of his visit to Deep Willows on the night in question. My plans were carefully laid. I left very little to chance. You were in the library with him, and Angus summoned you to give you some important news he had received from me. I had arranged that. At the time the telephone-bell rang I was beyond the window with the sheriff of Everton. The moment you left the room I entered it. I found this man with a bunch of money in his hand and the safe open behind him. I had not hoped for such luck. I charged him then and there with the theft. Oh, I knew he had not stolen it! You had given it to him, and it made me the more furious. I could have shot him where he stood. But it would not have been sufficient punishment. I meant to crush him.

"Then I did the cruelest thing I could think of. I told him that I knew he had not stolen the money. I told him that he could clear himself of the charge by calling you into the witness-box. But soon I was to see the stuff he was made of. He would not drag your name into the matter. He submitted to the charge with a simple declaration of his innocence, and I was well enough satisfied. The rest was sheriff's work. Within certain limits I knew I could buy the law, and I bought it. The case was kept out of the papers, and you were sent well away from any possibility of hearing of it."

Hendrie ceased speaking. Monica remained silent. She stood quite still, looking into his face as though she were striving to read all that lay behind it, trying to fathom to the very limits the primitive motives which had driven this man to the dreadful cruelty he had so readily inflicted.

At last she spoke. Her voice was hard and cold. In it Hendrie detected, he believed, the sentence her woman's heart had passed upon him.

"He must be released at once," she said in a tone that warned him of all he had lost.

The man made a slight movement. It was as though he had flinched before a blow in the face.

"He shall be released," he said.

She turned away, moving toward the door. Then suddenly she paused, and a moan of despair broke from her.

"Oh, Alec," she cried, "how—how could you? How could you do it?"

The man was at her side in a moment.

"I love you, Mon!" he cried in deep tones. "You are more precious to me than all the world—than life itself! Can't you understand?"

There was a dreadful moment of doubt, of anxiety, while the man awaited an answer to his appeal. No prisoner could have awaited sentence with more desperate hope.

It seemed an endless waiting. Then she gave a sign. She turned to him and raised a pair of eyes, whose sadness and distress smote him to the heart, and looked up into his face. Then he knew, however undeserved, her love was still his.

"Perhaps I can understand, Alec, but—but give me time." Monica spoke in a deep, tender voice that was full of pain, full of suffering. "I am beginning to understand many things I did not comprehend before. You perhaps are not so much to blame as I thought. I have been so weak, too. A little candor and honesty on my part might have saved it all."

He bent and kissed her upturned face while she clung to him for support.

"Tell me of her—of him," said Hendrie, his eyes turned upon the

streaming light from the bright street lamps.

"I know so little about him," she said after a slight pause. "You see, I never saw him; and Elsie—she would say so little. It seems she met him in New York. I forgot to tell you Elsie was an actress. She acted under the name of Audie Thorne."

The man started. Then, slowly, his eyes came back to her face. His mind was far back in a dim, almost forgotten past.

"I don't know how it all happened," Monica went on. "She was doing so well on the stage. Then she met this man, Leo. I suppose it was the coming of Elsie's baby which frightened him—the cowardly brute."

Hendrie nodded, his face studiously averted.

"But—you sheltered her? You cared for her?" The man's voice was almost pleading.

"Thank God, I could at least do that—but it was not through any doing of his. Oh, if only I had the punishing of such—as he."

"Perhaps he will get his punishment, even as you could desire it. Perhaps he has got it."

"I pray God it may be so."

The man moved suddenly across to his desk, and one hand fell heavily upon the carved mahogany of it. He looked across into the face of the woman he loved, and the fire of a great purpose shone in his eyes.

"Thank God I am the rich man I am!" he cried. "Thank God for the power of wealth. You shall see, Mon, you shall see! Leave me now, for I must—work. Hark!"

The deep note of the dinner gong rang out its opulent song in the hall.

"Dinner!" he announced, still standing. "You had better go, now."

Monica reluctantly moved toward the door and opened it.

"Very well, dear," she said. "You will tell me all you have done—later. Thank God, there is no more need for secrecy between us."

The door closed. For some moments the man remained standing where he was. His face was ghastly. His eyes were full of horror. He raised one great hand and passed the fingers of it through his mane of tawny hair. It was the movement of a man half dazed. Then his lips moved.

"Audie!" he murmured in a hoarse whisper. "Audie!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

Two Letters.

NUMBER "Forty-nine" was sitting just inside of the door of his cell. It was dinner time in the Alston penitentiary. On the gallery outside the faint hubbub of the distribution of food just reached him. He was hungry, even for prison fare.

The door of the cell suddenly opened, and the burly form of a rubber-shod warder appeared.

"Forty-nine! For the governor. Right away!"

There was just a suspicion of softening from the warder's usual manner in the order.

"Forty-nine" stood up obediently. His manner was pathetically submissive. His great frame, little more than frame, towered over his guard.

The governor looked up from his desk in the center of a large, simply furnished hall. Behind a wrought iron cage at the far end of the apartment stood number "Forty-nine," with the warder close behind.

"I am pleased to be able to inform you—er—a free pardon has been—er—extended to you."

The announcement was made in formal tones.

"Forty-nine" started. For a moment the settled melancholy of his cadaverous face lightened. A hand went up to his head as though to ascertain that he was not dreaming. It came into contact with the bristles of his

cropped hair, and dropped at once to his side.

"I'm to go—free, sir?"

"That's precisely what I'm telling you."

"Forty-nine's" eyes rolled. He looked from the governor to the secretary.

"Pardon?" he said. Then a hot light grew in his eyes at an inner sense of injustice in the method of his release. "But I've done nothing wrong, sir."

Charles Raymond smiled. But his smile was genuine, and expressed none of the usual incredulity.

"That is a matter for yourself. I simply receive my orders from the usual authorities. Those orders are that a free pardon has been extended to you. I also have here a letter for you, which, since it is in a lady's handwriting, and you are to be released at once, I have waived the regulations and refrained from opening. You will receive your railroad fare to whatever place in the country you wish to go. Also the usual prison allowance in cash. That will do. The prison chaplain will visit you before you go out."

"I don't need to see him, sir. He tires me."

The secretary looked up sharply at the fiercely resentful tone of the prisoner's denial. But the governor only smiled.

"As you will," he said, and signed to the warder.

It was late in the afternon when Frank Burton found himself at the outer wicket of the prison. He was clad now in his own clothes; the clothes he had worn on the night of his arrest. His prairie hat was crushed unusually low upon his close-cropped head. As he approached he called out his number for the last time.

"Forty-nine!"

The guard was ready for him.

"Going to Toronto?" he said, pushing a paper and pen toward him. "Twenty-eight dollars and seventy cents. Prison allowance four dollars fifty. Your letter. Sign!"

The money was handed to him in separate amounts, and the letter was placed beside them. Frank signed in a trembling hand, and took his possessions. Then he moved toward the wicket.

"So-long!" cried the chief guard. Then he added facetiously: "Maybe I'll see you again some day."

Frank made no answer. He passed through the wicket and stood outside in the summer evening light—a free man.

But he experienced no feeling of elation. A sort of apathy had got hold of him. His liberty now seemed almost a matter of indifference.

He moved on, quite slowly. His letter was still unopened in his pocket, whence it had been thrust along with his money. The trail wound its way down the hill upon which the prison stood. It led on, nearly two miles away, to the village of Alston. But it might have been Chicago for all Frank cared.

For him life seemed to be ended. Whichever way he looked it was the same. Nothing could help him, nothing could save him from the hideous stigma under which he lay. He was a convict, an ex-convict, and to the hour of his death so he would remain. Wherever he went the pointing finger would follow him.

He told himself that he belonged to the underworld, to the same world to which some of those wretched beings belonged who had only escaped death at the hands of the law on some slight quibble, and with whom he had so recently herded.

He sank wearily at the roadside. His weariness was of spirit. His body was as hard as nails from the tremendous physical labors of the past year. A morbid craving to review his wrongs was upon him, that and an invincible desire to wait for the gathering of the evening shadows.

For long hours he sat brooding, and

with each passing minute his morbid fancies grew. He felt that from the beginning he had been doomed to disaster, and he only wondered that he had not realized it before. Was he not a nobody?

His thoughts drifted on to Phyllis. She had not understood when he told her. How could she? She was clean, she was wholesome. She—but he turned impatiently from the drift of his thoughts. He could never go back to her. She was a part of that life which was over and done with. He belonged to another world now. The underworld.

And his mother. His gentle mother. He caught his breath.

He remembered his unopened letter and drew it from his pocket. He looked at the envelope and felt the hot blood of shame sweep up to his tired brain as he saw that it bore his mother's handwriting. He opened it reluctantly enough.

Folded carefully inside a number of sheets of closely written paper was a large sum of money. He took it out and examined it. There were five thousand dollars. Most of it was in bills of large denomination, but on the top, with careful forethought, there were half a dozen which ran from ten dollars down to one dollar bills. He understood, and the careful attention only left him the more pained.

With these was a smaller envelope. It was addressed in Phyllis's hand. This, with the money, he bestowed in an inner pocket and proceeded to read his mother's letter first.

It was a long, long story that Monica had to tell him. From the very outset she told him the facts of his birth, and it was with something approaching regret that he learned that she, Monica, was not his mother. Somehow the shame of his birth, as it had reflected upon her, was forgotten. Somehow the stigma seemed to belong to him solely.

In her story she carried him through the old, old days of their life together. Then she passed on to the manner in which he had been trapped by her husband. She gave all the details in uncolored nakedness, and while condemningly utterly the cruelty and injustice of her husband, she yet pleaded for him.

Finally she appealed to him to come back to her and receive all the reparation which she and her husband were yearning to make.

At the end of the reading Frank refolded the letter and returned it to his pocket. There was no sign of softening in his now hardened blue eyes.

It was different, however, with his second letter. Phyllis had no story to tell. She loved him, she wanted him, as she believed he loved and wanted her; and so she just told him.

As he returned this letter to his pocket there was a marked difference in his manner. There was a lingering tenderness in his actions, and a dewy moisture about his hollow eyes.

The sun had set, and a golden twilight was softening the world to a gentle, almost velvet tone as he rose from the edge of the grass-lined trail. He stood erect. That painful slouch he had acquired during the past year appeared to have left his shoulders. His head was lifted, and he began to walk down the trail at a gait full of decision and purpose. Phyllis's love had heartened him as it always heartened him. At Alston he made his way to a store where he could get letter paper and envelopes. His next effort was a restaurant. He was a long time making his selection. Finally he accepted the doubtful hospitality of a Chinese establishment where they dispensed a cheap chop-suey. He gave his order and sat down at a corner table.

Here he drew out his letter paper and laid it on the much-stained table before him, and, in a moment, had forgotten the almond-eyed attendant who was preparing his food.

His meal finished and bill settled, he placed the letter and the five thousand dollars into an envelope and addressed

it to Monica at Winnipeg. It was his intention to mail the packet from Toronto.

CHAPTER XXIV.

On the Railroad.

NO man may serve a term of imprisonment in a modern prison and return to freedom on the same moral plane as he left it. A man may fall, but he may rise again, provided he is saved from the lifelong branding which a penal prison leaves upon its victim. Innocent or guilty, the modern prison system is an invention which must rob its victim forever of his confidence, his self-respect, almost his hope.

These were some of the reflections forced upon Frank Burton after twelve months' bitter experience in Alston Penitentiary. And now, with each passing moment of his new freedom, the truth of these painful observations was more and more surely brought home to him.

He knew he could never go back to the old life. That he had long since made up his mind up to. More than that, he could not accept benefits from those who belonged to it, whom he had known and loved. Even Phyllis, for all her ardent affection, she, too, belonged to a life that was wholly dead.

Phyllis must go, too. The brand of the criminal had sunk too deeply into his soul. She must be left free. No such contamination must be brought into her life.

The journey from Alston to Fieldcoats, in the old-fashioned rumbling "stage," was given up to these hopeless meditations of an outcast. It was dark when the twinkling lights of Fieldcoats, the nearest town where he would take train for Toronto, came into view, and he was glad of that friendly obscurity. His shrinking from the light was no morbid feeling. With his close-cropped head, the story of his recent past was open for every one to read.

He did not complete the journey to the final halting place of the stage, but dropped off it in the lower and more obscure part of the town. It was here that he meant to begin his new life. A cheap, clean bed was all he desired—just a place where he could rest between sheets and write his long letter to Phyllis.

He found the place he required without difficulty. It vaunted the title "The Alexandra Hotel," and its beds, in cubicles, were let out at twenty-five cents and ten cents a night. He booked one of the higher priced cubicles and ascertained that it was clean. Then, with a sigh of resignation and some squaring of the shoulders, he prepared to face the curious eyes of the derelicts who haunted the "office" of the establishment.

To face even these, with his close-cropped head, Frank found no light task. The only thing possible was a desperately bold front. So he entered the room and calmly looked about him. He was big, spare, and enormously powerful. His hard, blue eyes deliberately sought for any eye that might be turned in his direction. His trouble was wasted. He forgot that these poor creatures, lounging upon the hard Windsor chairs, reading papers or staring hopelessly before them while they smoked, were derelicts like himself.

Once assured of his immunity, Frank began his letter. He wrote just as he thought and felt and saw, with a mind tinged by the dark hues of his sufferings.

He told her of all his love for her. He told her of the aching heart which this definite parting left him with, and, in the same breath almost, he told her that he regarded it as his sacred duty to shield her from contamination with a disgrace such as his.

It was a headlong sort of letter. He wrote as he thought and felt, and scarcely paused for a word or phrase. The gist of it was a yearning for a sort of sublime socialism. He could

not longer bear the thought of self-seeking. He had seen so much of the disastrous results of it that he felt and knew that the whole process of it was utterly wrong. The prisons were filled with its results.

All the old ambitions, he told her, had been rooted out of him forever. For twelve months he had groped amid the cobwebs of life and sought among the darkened corners. That which he had discovered there had plainly shown him that, for him, past and future ambitions were divided by a gulf that could never be bridged again. In future his life would be cast on the side of the helpless and struggling, on the side of the oppressed, and those who were less endowed for the battle of life.

Brotherhood and equality! That was to be the key-note of his future. Henceforth all his power, all his heart should be flung into the only cause that could make the world endurable.

So he wrote to this girl of more than common wisdom, and he told himself she would understand. He told himself that, though their lives could never come together again, at least he would possess her sympathy.

That night he slept the fitful sleep of a man unused to his surroundings, but he was sufficiently refreshed when the hour appointed for arising in such places arrived. He turned out quite ready to face all that the day might bring forth.

Ten cents was all he allowed himself for his breakfast. He required only sufficient to sustain life, nor did he obtain more for the money. Then he made his way to the railroad station. The train for Toronto left just before noon, so he purchased a newspaper and sat down in the waiting-hall. He intended to pass the time scanning the advertisements, that he might learn the best means of obtaining employment when he arrived at his destination.

The train was "on time." The car he selected was fairly empty. He took his place in the rear seat of the coach, feeling that it was preferable to have no inquisitive eyes behind him.

At the first important town at which the train stopped several passengers boarded the car. Among them was a man with closely trimmed iron-gray hair and quick, searching eyes that closely scanned the faces of each person in the car. He took a corner seat just across the aisle of the car and on the level immediately in front of Frank. He sat turned, so that the whole view of the car came within his focus. Frank's cropped head came under his observation.

Frank felt that this was so, although he was studiously intent upon his paper; and, as the fixed contemplation remained, he chafed under it. For some time he endured it. The stranger's interest became riveted.

Frank determined to put an end to it by the simple process of staring the man out of countenance. To this end he looked up sharply. The man made no attempt to withdraw his gaze, and Frank found himself looking into a clean-shaven, keen, determined face, lit by a pair of hard, satirical eyes.

He arose and crossed the aisle. Leaning across the back of the stranger's seat, he voiced his annoyance deliberately and coldly.

"It seems to me you'll probably know me when you see me again," he said with angry sarcasm.

The stranger smiled amiably.

"Just depends when I meet you," he retorted with a meaning glance at the close-cropped hair.

A sudden anger lit the boy's eyes at the taunt and a protest leaped to his lips. But the stranger anticipated him.

"Say," he drawled, "sit right down—here. I wasn't meaning offense. What got me looking was you're so like—an old friend of mine. You brought the other on yourself. Won't you sit—right down?"

The stranger's manner was so disarmingly cordial that Frank's heat began to die down.

"Say, it's the queerest thing. Guess you're 'bout twenty or so. Just about his age. You're the dead image of—my friend, when he was your age. Going up Toronto way?"

Frank nodded. He somehow felt he could do no less, without returning in cold silence to his seat.

The keen-eyed stranger recognized his adantage in obtaining the admission.

"Best sit," he said, with a pleasant smile. "It's quite a long piece to Toronto. I'd a heap like to yarn with you."

The stranger was altogether too much for the simplicity of the other. Besides, there was nothing but amiability in his manner. He allowed himself to be persuaded and half reluctantly dropped into the seat.

"That's friendly," commented the stranger, with a sharp, sidelong glance at Frank's strong profile. "There's just one thing I got set against this country. It's a long ways between cities. Maybe you don't get that across in England."

"I've never been in England," Frank admitted.

"Ah! Maybe States?"

Frank nodded. And the man laughed.

"The land of—freedom, graft, and finance."

"Yes, it's an odd mixture," agreed Frank. "It's also a land of slavery. Three parts of the people are held in bondage to the other fourth, who represent capital."

The stranger stirred and settled himself. He gazed keenly into his companion's face.

"Guess you were one of the 'three parts,' and found the fourth—oppressive."

Frank shifted his position uneasily. Then, with a sudden curious abandonment, he said:

"I don't know what makes me talk to you—a stranger. You're the first man who has wanted to speak to me since—I came out of Alston penitentiary. I was sentenced wrongfully to five years, and now, at the end of one of them, they've found out my innocence and given me a free pardon—for not being guilty."

"A free pardon?" The stranger's eyes were reading his companion through and through.

"Yes, a free pardon for an offense I never committed," Frank went on with bitter indignation. "The whole thing was worked. I mean my trial, by a man of—well, one of the millionaire class—one of the other 'fourth.'"

The stranger nodded sympathetically.

"Frank Burton's my name."

"I see." The stranger was studying the clean cut of the ingenuous face beside him.

Frank was staring introspectively down the aisle of the car.

"Have you ever been inside a prison," he asked.

The stranger shook his head.

"I've seen 'em—from the outside."

Frank looked disappointed.

"It's a pity," he said. "You see, you won't understand just how I see things. Do you know, the prisons are just full to overflowing with folks who'd be free to-day—if it weren't for the existence of that other 'fourth'? I'm just learning that one of the greatest causes of all crime is that, under present conditions, there isn't enough to go round."

The stranger's smile had become more encouraging.

"And the cure for it is—socialism, eh?"

Frank started. Then he nodded.

"I suppose that's what folks would call it. I call it brotherhood and equality."

"Go a step further," said the other. "It's that 'fourth' we are talking about, who get rich and live on the efforts of the worker whom they sweat and crush into the very ground over which their automobiles roll. Put it in plain words, man. It is the worker, the poor wretch that just manages to

scrape existence by grinding toil, who feeds the rich and makes possible the degrading luxury of their lives."

At that moment a waiter from the dining-car entered the coach.

"First call for dinner! First call for dinner!"

The stranger fumbled in his waistcoat pockets, and, as the waiter passed, he produced his card and held it out toward his companion.

"Say," he observed, lapsing once more into his more genial manner. "Guess you'll be yearning for a billet when you get along to Toronto. Just keep that by you, and when you're needing one, come and look me up. We're always needing recruits for our work. I'll take it kindly if you'll eat with me right now."

Frank took the card and read the name on it—

MR. AUSTIN LEYBURN

2012 Mordaunt Avenue, Toronto, Ont.

President of the Agricultural Helpers' Society of Canada
Gen. Sec. Bonded Railroaders
Asst. Gen. Secretary Associated Freighters' Combine

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 MUTINEER

By Jane Burr

THE *me* that all the world may see
Is stiff *conventionality!*
But hid behind that frozen glance
A million little devils dance!

The ones that scale the darkling hills,
The ones that ford the ruffled rills,
The ones that shout aloud and sing,
The ones that ride the eagle's wing!

The ones that love, the ones that hate,
The ones that slyly wink at fate,
The ones that sneer at social rule,
But shun the martyr as a fool!

Pray hold your tongue and courtesy!
It leaves you beautifully free;
For if you openly deride,
Then tell me, fool, where shall you hide?

The Sealed Valley

by Hulbert Footner

Author of "Jack Chanty."

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

NAHNYA, a beautiful half-breed Indian girl, persuades Ralph Cowdray, an impressionable young doctor in a frontier town of the Canadian Northwest, to make a three hundred mile journey to break and reset her mother's crudely set arm. They travel first on a primitive steamboat. Nahnya's charms attract attention from the rough men on the boat, especially Joe Mixer, with whom Ralph almost comes to blows in consequence. After the operation, Ralph follows Nahnya's brother, Charlie, through a hole in a mountain into a sealed valley—green, beautiful, rich with gold. Nahnya and Ralph confess their mutual love; she insists they can never marry and Ralph is forced to leave the valley, but vowing that he will return. He is seen converting into cash the gold-dust which Nahnya has given him for his medical services, by a little sneak named Stack. He is pursued by Joe Mixer, Stack, and a half-breed Philippe. After playing hide and seek over river and lake, he sets his enemies on a false scent. Going down a rapids, his cockle capsizes. He reaches shore with a dislocated shoulder.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Two Girls.

A TRAVELER might have descended through the Spirit River pass half a dozen times without suspecting the vicinity of any fellow creatures in the hundred miles of mountains. Nevertheless there was a white man's camp at the foot of Mount Milburn.

Milburn is the hoary-headed monarch that stands guard on the right-hand side of the gateway to the Rockies. It rises sheer from the river to a height of more than six thousand feet.

In the country it is otherwise called the Mountain of Gold, because it has long been known that one of the buttresses of its base is entirely composed of a metal-bearing quartz.

The few people of the country knew, of course, that old Jim Sholto had established himself here with his three children for the purpose of smelting the ore in a small way, but Jim had built his shacks quarter of a mile back from the river to avoid

This story began in the All-Story Cavalier Weekly for August 29.

the inconvenient observation of the chance traveler.

Jim and his two sons excavated the ore and burned it in half a dozen little furnaces of porcelain and brick, the materials for which they had brought in with immense difficulty.

The venture was not highly regarded in the country. The expense of bringing in supplies was too great. They worked like beavers, it was said, for a net return no greater than day-laborers' wages. Such unremitting industry accused the easy-going ways of the north.

On a brilliant afternoon in July, Kitty Sholto was redding up the kitchen in one of the two shacks.

There was a cloud on her charming face. She slapped the enameled-ware plates on the shelf with a malicious satisfaction in the clatter, and cast the dish-towels over the line as if they had individually offended her.

Kitty was twenty years old.

In her face were combined elements of gentleness and piquancy, a rare association and provoking to the other sex. The piquancy was due to her narrow eyes, green-gray in color.

Green in eyes is thought of in connection with feline qualities. There was nothing of that sort about Kitty. All the rest was gentleness.

She had a small, straight nose and an adorable mouth that turned up at the corners. Her hair, darkest brown in color, was of the crinkly sort that reaches out tendrils.

She had a soft voice, with an odd, hushed thrill in it that was all her own, and a soft and ready laugh. She was not at all the kind of girl to be given to ill-humor.

Sweeping the crumbs over the door-sill, she stood broom in hand leaning against the jamb. In one swift cast around she took in the whole scene, the exquisite, limpid sky, the polished malachite of the deciduous foliage, the rich bottom-green of the pines, the brook whipping itself white on the stones.

She took it all in, and the line between her dark eyebrows deepened as if the loveliness of nature were an added affront.

Down the trail from the excavations the four ponies came plodding, each laden with a double wooden bucket of ore. Bill, the younger of Kitty's two brothers, walked behind, whistling vociferously, and tickling the rearmost beast with a switch.

Bill was a tall, strong youth of twenty-two, a black Scotchman with a gleaming smile.

Dumping the contents of the buckets on the little mountain of ore before the other shack, with a flick of his switch he sent the ponies trotting back one by one for another load.

Bill, pausing to fill his pipe, grinned amiably at his sister. Kitty's brothers adored her, and teased her remorselessly. "Hello, sis!" he said. 'What's biting you?"

"Nothing!" she said quickly.

"You look as if the cat was dead and the milk turned," he said in the humorous style that brothers affect.

"There is no cat, and I haven't tasted milk in a year and a half," said Kitty sharply.

"Take example from me!" sang Bill. "Dog-tooth Bill, the sunshine of Milburn Gulch!"

"That's all very well!" said Kitty bitterly. "Who wouldn't be gay in your shoes. You're going away tomorrow. You're going to mix with people; to see something besides trees; to have some fun! What have I got to look forward to?"

"Cheer up, sis!" said Bill with jocular solicitude. "What can we do about it? The little iron chest has to be carried out. It's getting too heavy to be left lying around. And there's next year's grub to be brought in."

"Certainly, I know you're obliged to go," said Kitty.

"If you could go in my place you'd be welcome," said Dick. "But it's too hard a trip both out and in again. You and Dick couldn't do it alone."

"I know it," said Kitty stiffly. "You don't have to explain."

"And we can't take you with us, because the old man can't keep the plant going and cook his own grub."

"I wouldn't think of leaving him alone," said Kitty indignantly.

Bill began to grin again.

"Cheer up, the worst is yet to come!" he cried. "We'll be back in six weeks with a scow full of good things. What'll I bring her from town for a present? A silk dress?"

"A lot of good a silk dress would do me!" Kitty said scornfully. "Who do I ever see from one month to another?"

"Ah, there we have her trouble!" cried Bill. He began to sing and to caper absurdly:

"Kitty is mad and I am glad,
For I know how to please her;
A bottle of wine to make her shine
And a nice young man to squeeze her!"

"You're horrid!" cried Kitty, frowning and blushing.

"Give me the specifications," Bill went on with an air of serious gravity. "Blond, brunette, or albino? Heavy, welter, or light weight? Kind of disposition you prefer, and amount of purse to be put up before you enter the ring? I'll bring the candidate back with me if I have to sandbag him!"

Kitty retired into the house, slamming the door. Bill with a whoop started up the trail after his horses.

When the cabin was put to rights there was nothing more that Kitty was obliged to do until it was time to start the supper. On such occasions she was accustomed to help her father in the "works," as they called the other shack; but the furnaces had been cold for a week now, while all hands joined to get out enough ore to keep them fed while the boys were away.

There was plenty of work that Kitty might have done, but she was in a mood to dream and to nourish her grievances.

She might have gone up to the excavation to help, but she dreaded male raillery. She finally turned in the other direction and followed the path down to the river.

It ended in a little glade that had been a camping-place since time out of mind. In the middle of the place was a fire-hole, centuries old, maybe. Upright posts were driven on either side, with a bar across, and wooden hooks of assorted sizes waiting for the bails of the next traveler's pots.

In front of Kitty as she stood beside the fireplace, the river stretched its smooth jade-green flood across to the base of the mountain opposite, and at her left hand the limpid waters of the creek mingled with the thicker current.

Below the camping-place stretched a bank of fine, yellow sand precipitated by the eddies in times of high water. Partly drawn up on the sand was a dugout.

The Sholtos kept their two boats cached in the creek, but this one had been got out in preparation for the journey next day. It was the happy-go-lucky Bill who had left it where it was without tying it, forgetful of the sudden rises of the river in hot weather.

Kitty got in the dugout and sat down in the stern, where she might trail her hands in the water while she thought things out and dreamed her dreams.

All unwittingly Bill had discovered to her the very source of her discontent, and she was disturbed and ashamed. It was true that she wanted a young man! Here she was twenty years old; it was jocularly granted by her brothers that she was not exactly a fright; yet she had never had a young man.

What was worse there was no young man, at least of her own color, within hundreds of miles, and she was doomed to her present imprisonment for at least another year.

Twenty-two loomed ahead like old

age itself; "What chance will I have then?" she thought dejectedly. Behind this was the hot-cheeked, nagging thought: what business had a nice girl to be desiring a young man anyway?

But after a while the lovely afternoon began to have its way with her, and the disquieting thoughts melted by imperceptible degrees into deceitful, charming day-dreams.

She was lying in the bottom of the boat with her arm on the gunwale, and her head on her arm. Her eyes were bent up-stream as far as she could see.

"He will come down the river," she dreamed. "Perhaps he is just around the bend at this moment. I should not be surprised.

"But if he should come when I am not here, and be carried past! That is not possible! If he is the right one some power will lead him directly to me! What is he like? Tall and slender, with round, strong arms, and a wonderful light in his eyes. He will not be surprised to see me, either. He will say: 'I have found you!' And I will say quite simply: 'I have been waiting for you,' and everything will be understood."

Following the usual course of day-dreams, Kitty little by little lost the direction of this beautiful story, and picture began to succeed picture without any help from her.

She found herself climbing the higher slopes of Mount Milburn hand in hand with the youth whose face was hidden from her; up into the intoxicating air of the summits. Then presto! without so much of an effort as the wink of an eyelid they were transported to the busy streets of town, and looked into the bewildering shop-windows without any surprise at all.

Then they walked between endless rows of silk dresses hung on hooks, and all the dresses were hers; but she couldn't decide which one she liked the best, and was much distressed.

And he said: "Don't worry; I have a paper boat to sail down Milburn Creek in." And she answered: "We'll never get up again," without caring in the least. And then they danced to delicious music that issued from a row of trees like the pipes of an organ.

With a long sigh Kitty stretched herself luxuriously in the bottom of the dugout and ceased to dream.

If any young man had come along then and had seen her thus, her head on her folded arm, her lashes on her cheeks and a dream-smile tilting the corners of her mouth, it is a safe guess he would never have been the same again afterward.

She awakened as quietly as she had fallen asleep, and lay for a while gazing up between the sides of the dugout at the delicate clear sky, which had not changed while she slept.

Gradually she became aware of missing something; it was the turbulent voice of Milburn Creek, never stilled in her ears at home. At the same time the dugout rocked gently with her, filling her with an unexplained fear. She quickly sat up.

The heart in her breast turned cold.

She was adrift in midstream. Mount Milburn had disappeared, and the even more familiar limestone face of Stanhope, opposite their camp. Strange mountain shapes surrounded her, and unfamiliar shores.

Her eyes darted up and down the dugout; there was no paddle; nothing! The swirling green eddies smiled at her horribly, like things biding their time. Blank, hideous terror descended on her, scattering her faculties.

There was worse in store.

Sweeping around a bend she saw far down the river the white horses leaping in the sunshine. She knew the place, the Grumbler rapids; up and down river they bore a sinister reputation.

She stared at the place, fascinated with horror.

The river so smiling, sunny, and beautiful, she could not believe that there was the end of all, the very whitecaps below seemed to be leaping in play. And she herself, twenty years old, and full of the zest of living—it was not possible! But the ever-increasing voice of the place warned her, there waited death, sure and dreadful.

And nothing might stop her deliberate progress between the green shores. She must sit with her hands in her lap and watch it coming step by step.

Kitty's very softness and gentleness shielded her. She could not take in so much horror. Her eyes widened; she struggled for her breath and collapsed in the bottom of the dugout.

When consciousness and sight returned she found a strange, dark face bending over her.

She was lying on firm ground beside the river. The roar of the rapids filled the air. Seeing Kitty's eyes open, and the light of reason return, the face broke into a beautiful and kind smile. Kitty, without understanding clearly, was reassured.

It was a girl not much older than herself.

"You all right now," the girl said.

"What happened?" asked Kitty faintly.

"You near get in the rapids."

The recollection of her terror rushed back over her, almost drowning Kitty's senses again.

"You all right!" the girl repeated in a cheery, matter-of-fact tone that was just what Kitty needed. "I was working on the shore," she went on, "and I see a canoe come floating down. I think it is foolish to let a good boat get broke on the rocks, so I get my boat and paddle for it, but there isn't much time. I come to it and I look in. Wah! there is you!"

"Oh, it was horrible! horrible!" murmured Kitty, shaken by strong shudders.

"Forget it," said the girl. "You all right now."

"How did you get me ashore?" Kitty asked.

"It was not much," the girl said with a shrug. "I was too near the rapids to save both boats, so I jump in yours and let mine go down. It was pretty hard paddling," she went on, smiling; "we were on the wrong side for the deep water. Long time we jus' stand still out there, and not go up or down. Then we come in slow, slow. There is a tree fallen down beside the water, and I catch hold jus' in time."

"You have saved my life!" murmured Kitty.

"Cut it out!" said the dark girl gruffly. "It was worth it for the boat alone."

"But you lost your boat," said Kitty.

The other shook her head. "It is stuck on the rocks down there," she said. "I will get it after."

Strength and self-command came back to Kitty, and she sat up. The two girls measured each other with glances of shy, strong curiosity. Each was a surprising discovery to the other.

"You are Kitty Sholto," said the dark girl.

"How did you know that?" exclaimed Kitty, opening her eyes.

"There is no other white girl in the country."

"I don't know you," said Kitty.

The other shrugged and smiled a little. "There are plenty red girls," she said. "I am Annie Crossfox."

"Where do you live?"

Nahnya pointed vaguely downstream. "My people are the Sapi Indians," she said.

"But that is way down by the cañon," said Kitty. "Do you travel so far by yourself?"

"I like travel by myself," Nahnya said deprecatingly. "I hunt and I fish. People think I am crazy. They say it is like a man!"

Each thought the other a wonderful creature.

Nahnya marveled at the color of Kitty's eyes, green-gray like the Spirit River itself, and her cheeks like snow—snow with the light of the setting sun upon it. Her delicacy and gentleness seemed like the qualities of a superior creature.

Kitty for her part was no less admiring of Nahnya's strength and courage.

The gentle Kitty, like most girls, had often wished that she had been born in one of her brother's places. To be able to go where one pleased like a man! this stirred her imagination. Each of these lonely girls was hungry for a woman friend; therein lay the explanation of their kind and wistful looks upon each other.

Kitty was soon quite herself again. Only at intervals did the recollection of her terror cause her to catch her breath and send the color flying from her cheeks. A lesser fear succeeded.

"How will I get home!" she said. "Dad and the boys! They will be frantic, poor things!"

"Have they another boat?" asked Nahnya.

Kitty nodded.

"Then they will come look for you soon," said Nahnya calmly. "It is all right."

Kitty was much reassured.

By degrees the two girls felt their way toward intimate speech.

"I am so surprise I find a white girl in this country," Nahnya said in her quaint, soft mission English. "When I look in your boat I am thinking nothing at all. And there you are! I am so surprise almost we both go in the rapids!"

Kitty explained how she had been carried off.

"Yes, all day the water rise," said Nahnya.

"If you hadn't been there!" said Kitty, and all her terrors returned.

"We must eat," said Nahnya energetically. "I have tea and bread and meat across the river. We must track for half a mile before I can cross. You have only a short line on your boat. I will track, and you push out with a pole."

Nahnya went ahead with the end of the line, while Kitty, according to instructions, walked abreast of the dugout and kept it off shore, and steered it around obstructions with her pole."

Kitty had never worked harder. Nahnya thought she was sparing her, but Kitty had to struggle desperately over the stones and the tree-trunks and around the edge of cut-banks in order to keep up. The dugout acted like a thing inspired by personal malice against them.

Kitty insisted that it went out of its way to find stones to stick on, and if she fell so much as a yard behind it instantly drove its nose into the bank. Whenever it was necessary Nahnya waded unconcernedly into the icy water, and Kitty, not to be outdone, followed suit, shivering.

When they finally arrived opposite the spot whence Nahnya had first set out to Kitty's aid—Kitty distinguished a wide, flat rock and a little stream that emptied beside it—Nahnya told off the white girl to make a fire while she went for the supplies.

Kitty enviously watched her assured handling of the canoe. Heading up-stream enough to equalize the pull of the current, Nahnya crossed the river as straight as a ruled line, and soon was back with all they needed.

Hanging their stockings and moccasins to dry, they extended their pink and white and pink and brown toes side by side to the fire, and ate their supper.

Meanwhile they were progressing in friendship by long leaps. With a girl, and moreover a girl so gentle as Kitty, Nahnya did not feel obliged to wall up her breast, and the natural warmth of her nature had way.

Lengthy girl confidences were exchanged.

"I never talk to a white girl like this," Nahnya said shyly. "Though I have live among white people, and watch the girls, and think about them much."

"What did you think about white girls?" Kitty asked with her charming smile.

"Always I am thinking how are they different from me," said Nahnya.

"Different?" echoed Kitty. "You are not really different from me."

"I am half white," said Nahnya. "Inside I feel the same as white people. But white people treat me different from them."

"I don't understand," said Kitty.

"When I went to the mission school," said Nahnya, "the sisters teach us: 'Think no evil, and evil will pass you by.'"

"That is true," said Kitty.

Nahnya sadly shook her head. "It is true for you," she said; "not for me. When I went among the white people I thought no evil, but evil wrap me so close as a blanket over my head."

"I—I do not understand," faltered Kitty.

"Why should you?" said Nahnya. "Nobody is bad to you. Only to me. So always I am wondering what is different in me. I do not understand it, but I know it."

"Do you—do you mean men?" asked the startled Kitty.

Nahnya was silent.

"But all men are not bad," said Kitty, thinking of her honest, jolly brothers.

"Not all men," admitted Nahnya. "Once I know a white man. At first he was crazy. But he change. He look at me cleanly and speak honest. But always I am thinking this different thing is in me, and I send him away. And always I think what is this different thing in me?"

Kitty, looking at her with troubled eyes, made no reply.

"Now I have scare you!" said Nahnya remorsefully. "You think I mus' be bad, because others think I am so!"

"No!" said Kitty, "it is my own ignorance that I am scared of. I don't know anything. I don't know what to say."

"Say not'ing!" cried Nahnya, bending a quick look of contrite affection on her. "Me, I talk too much! Always I want talk to some one who is like me, and I am near crazy with talk that I cannot speak.

"My people, they are good people, but they do not know me. My mot'er not know me. I am strange to her. She is scare of me.

"Always I think if I could be friends with a white woman we could talk. And to-day the river bring you to me, so I think it is like magic! And my tongue, she shoot the rapids of talk! I am sorry I scare you!"

"You don't scare me a bit!" protested Kitty. "I like to have you talk to me. I'm talking to you, too. Tell me about the white man," she said shyly, "the one you liked."

Nahnya was startled. For an instant the old walled look darkened her face.

"I not say I like any white man," she said quickly. "I not want any man."

Kitty hung her head a little. "That's what we say," she murmured with a burst of shy candor; "but how true is it?"

The dark fled out of Nahnya's face. She turned a pair of wondrously soft eyes on Kitty. "You are lonely up here!" she said. "I know what lonely is!"

Kitty's eyes grew large and bright with tears. She nodded.

"I wanted a friend, too," she said very low. "Some one to talk to, like you. The boys are good to me, but they treat me like a baby. I wanted a woman friend. I haven't talked to a woman in a year and a half!"

Nahnya sprang to her knees, and unconsciously clasping her hands to her breast, leaned toward Kitty. "I

will be your friend—always!" she said with trembling eagerness. "If you want me!" she added with wistful humility.

Kitty's answer was to fling her arms around Nahnya's neck.

Nahnya recoiled in a kind of terror. "You—you kissed me!" she faltered. "Me!"

"I'll do it again!" cried Kitty. "And again! And again! I think you are just sweet!"

With an odd little cry the dark girl hid her face on Kitty's shoulder and clung to her, and broke into a silent, shaken weeping. Broken whispers of confession reached the white woman's ear.

"I never have a friend— Always inside of me I am alone. I think I am marked out to be alone— My heart hurt me like any woman's heart— But always I mus' make out I don't care about anything!"

An hour later they heard a hail from far up the river. Kitty leaped up in great excitement. Nahnya answered the hail. She had the river-man's trick of sendng the voice to a distance.

By and by they came flying around the bend, father and sons paddling like men possessed, and momentarily raising hoarse, anxious cries. Nahnya tore off a branch of leaves and, putting it into Kitty's hands, urged her down to the beach to wave it.

At the sight of her safe on dry land the three men sent up tremendous shouts of joy and relief. Nahnya retired up on the bank.

They landed, and Kitty was instantly locked in her father's arms. Dick collapsed in the boat, while Bill's legs caved under him on the beach. Both boys wept unashamed.

"We heard the rapids," Bill blubbered. "We thought we were just too late!"

They quickly recovered.

Kitty had presently to submit to their bear-hugs, and again to her father's embraces. All four talked at once, and foolishly laughed. Kitty was abashed by their transports. Never had she seen her men so stirred.

Afterward questions began to fly.

"How did you drift off without knowing it?"

"Why didn't you scramble ashore and let the boat go?"

"How did you get ashore here without a paddle or anything?"

"Who is with you?"

"Why, she's gone!" cried Bill suddenly.

It was true.

They looked around in vain. During the excitement of the men's landing the dark girl had stolen unobserved to the other dugout. It lay a little down-stream, and partly screened by some bushes.

Putting off and keeping close to the shore, she was soon lost to their sight.

Kitty's face fell like a child's. "Without a word of good-by!" she said.

"She's taken our best boat," said Jim Sholto, frowning.

"She lost her own in the rapids saving me," said Kitty with quick indignation.

Jim hastened to mollify her. "That's all right," he said. "But to steal away like this!"

"It's just like them," said Dick; "always mysterious."

"You're not very grateful," said Kitty at the point of tears. "I tell you she saved my life."

"You haven't told us anything yet," said her father. "Who is she?"

"Annie Crossfox."

"I had a look at her," said Bill. "She's mighty good-looking. Don't see why she couldn't wait to receive our thanks."

Kitty, looking at him sharply, saw the untoward eager light in his dark eyes and became suddenly thoughtful. A reason for Nahnya's abrupt departure occurred to her.

"She will bring the boat back to

our camp," she said quietly. "Just as soon as she can get her own boat. She promised me."

"But Dick and I will be gone then," grumbled Bill. "If we've got such a good-looking neighbor I want—"

Kitty interrupted him. "She saved my life," she repeated with a direct look. "She is my friend."

"What of it?" said Bill, beginning a great parade of innocence. He caught his little sister's eye and saw something new there—knowledge. He had the grace to drop his own gaze and blush a little.

Bill was an honest youth.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Granted Prayer.

KITTY was ironing clothes in the kitchen of the living shack. She and her father had been alone in camp for four days. It had rained in the interim and the greens of Milburn gulch were freshly polished and gilded.

Inside the shack the cherry-colored embers glowed on the grate, and a blue gingham dress was falling into crisp and immaculate folds as it was turned on the ironing-board. The door stood open and a single big fly buzzed in and out over the sill, as if he couldn't make up his mind whether he preferred sunshine or shadow.

While Kitty propelled the iron she thought a girl's thoughts, which alight on a subject as delicately as butterflies and as lightly sheer away. Since she had beheld the eager light in Bill's eyes at the sight of the dark girl a fluttering disquiet winged in Kitty's mind. She was thinking of men and women now.

"Annie knows much more"—thus it ran in her head. "I wish she would tell me. I ought to know. But why do I want to know what is ugly?

"But it's neither ugly nor beautiful; it's mixed. Men are not angels. That's only silly dreaming that leaves you flat. I wouldn't want a man to be too good, really. Just a spice of danger and uncertainty."

Kitty blushed and looked around her guiltily, as if this dreadful thought might have been overheard. She applied herself to her ironing with prim lips.

"I am a fool!" she thought. "Annie is wise. I wish she would come."

Kitty's thoughts were broken in upon by the sound of a footstep outside the shack. Something heavy and unfamiliar in the fall of it caused her to call out sharply: "Is that you, dad?"

There was no answer.

She started around the ironing-board to investigate. At the same moment the doorway was darkened by the figure of a strange man—a piteous, ghastly, unkempt travesty of manhood.

For a moment he wavered there, then pitched headlong to Kitty's feet. One arm reached toward her as in supplication; the other was grotesquely doubled under him.

Kitty screamed and stood rooted to the spot.

The man lay without moving. He had uttered no sound. Jim Sholto came running from the works with a blanched face. He all but fell over the body and stood like his daughter, turned into stone with astonishment.

His admirable composure quickly asserted itself. He dropped to his knees.

"Help me to turn him over, lass," he said quietly.

The face that was revealed, with its sunken, bearded cheeks and painfully drawn lips, seemed aged to Kitty. The eyes were closed. Jim lowered his head to listen at the man's breast.

"He lives," he said succinctly. "Dislocated shoulder—starvation. Give me your sharpest knife to cut away this sleeve. Get a pillow for his head. Put water on the stove."

Kitty flew to obey the various orders.

"I'll put his shoulder in before he comes to," Jim went on grimly. "It is more merciful. It's a nasty job—

after a week or more untended. Can you stand it?"

Kitty nodded.

"Then hold him as I bid you."

Jim Sholto at fifty was still more powerful than either of his sons. He needed all his strength for the cruel job in hand. The swollen, feverish flesh was dreadful to see.

Kitty closed her eyes and gritted her teeth and held on. Deep, soft groans broke from the unconscious men as Jim worked over him. Finally, with a dull click as of colliding billiard-balls, it was done. Jim stood up and wiped his face. Now that the most urgent service had been rendered, curiosity began to have way.

"Did you see him come?" he asked.

Kitty shook her head.

"H-m!" said Jim. "With all this vast empty land to choose from, he stumbles on us. Look, his moccasins are worn clean through!"

"What happened to him?" said Kitty.

"Who knows?" said Jim. "Maybe just the folly of an ignorant man traveling alone. Maybe there's something on him to give us a clue."

Jim knelt again.

His searching fingers came in contact with a little cloth packet sewed to the inside of the man's shirt. Cutting the stitches with the point of his knife, he unwrapped it and revealed inside a final wrapping of soft cotton, a delicate platinum chain with a great, gleaming emerald hanging from it. Father and daughter looked at each other in strong amazement.

"There's some strange tale behind this," said Jim. "Put it in a safe place."

The stranger's eyelids flickered and a slight sound issued from his lips.

"We must lay him on your bed," said Jim. "This is your job from now. Is there any condensed milk left?"

"I have saved a can," said Kitty.

"Dilute it and warm it, and feed him bread soaked in it when he is able to swallow. Keep hot cloths around his shoulder. Like he will have fever. Give him gelseminum and aconite. You know the doses."

"I know," said Kitty.

A new era began for her from that moment. In the presence of this urgent reality her vague discontents were dissipated like morning mists.

Kitty had a passion for mothering which had never been satisfied, for they all treated her like a child, and none of them had ever been sick. At first the stricken man — that strange visitant from nowhere!—was no more than an object for her to wreak her passionate pity upon.

Only by degrees did he come to have an individuality for her.

It commenced at the moment when she made the surprising discovery that he was young. She learned that from the fresh, vibrant quality of his voice. He was delirious.

All that night and the next day and the night that followed he tossed and murmured in his fever. But it could be seen that he was growing better. Kitty was sleepless and happy.

At first his speech was formless and incoherent. Later he fixed Kitty with his big bright eyes, and spoke with an unnatural distinctness and appearance of sanity.

She listened as one listens to a romance, interested and thrilled, but unsuspicious of any real foundation to the tale. It was too much like a phantasy of the imagination, all his talk of a beautiful valley hidden within the mountains, that you entered through a cave; and of a brave and lovely woman who ruled the place that he called Nahnya.

The name suggested nothing to Kitty.

"He is a poet," she thought with a touch of awe. In her simplicity she wrote it all down during the hours of the night, so that she might be able to tell him later.

On the second morning, Kitty, dozing on a chair beside the bed, was

startled into complete wakefulness by hearing him say in a weak, natural voice:

"You are real! I thought I had dreamed you!"

"You're better!" cried Kitty, overjoyed.

"Is it still up north?" he said wonderingly. "I never expected to see a white girl!"

"There's none but me," said Kitty.

"How did I come here?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Kitty. "You just tumbled in the door."

He told her of his accident.

"The Stanley Rapids!" said Kitty. "That is only ten miles up the river. You must have been many days making it!"

"Walking in circles, I suppose," he said. "I started all right, keeping to the shore. But the pain was so bad, I suppose, I got light-headed. I remember stumbling through the woods with all kinds of things going through my head."

"You mustn't talk any more," said Kitty commandingly.

"All right," he said, smiling. "Don't go away."

Nourishment and good care worked wonders with the patient. He insisted on getting up next day. Catching sight of his face in a mirror, he cried out in horror and demanded a razor.

Kitty left him alone to make himself presentable, while she helped her father in the works.

Returning at length, she found him sitting in the kitchen metamorphosed. His thick dark hair was brushed and gleaming; he smiled at her with a face as smooth and bland as a boy's.

Wonderful are the changes wrought in men's faces by a razor! Kitty, remembering how he had looked when her father turned him over, could scarcely believe her eyes.

There was likewise a changed quality in his smile.

Kitty read in it that he found her good to look at. She was much taken aback by the discovery. In a twinkling, it seemed to her, their positions had been reversed.

He was no longer her sick child, but a man—a possible master.

Her heart began to beat fast. To hide her confusion she turned and rumaged on the kitchen shelves. Even with her back turned, she felt as if his careless, smiling eyes were laying bare her very soul. She could not tell whether it was painful or sweet to be exposed to him.

Of course she was not as open as she fancied herself to be. Ralph guessed nothing. Presently she turned with a composed face, and without comment brought him the little packet they had discovered on his body on that memorable day.

He saw the emerald lying on her outstretched hand without offering to take it. An expression of pain crossed his face and he averted his head.

"Please keep it for me," he said. "I don't want to be obliged to think of things yet."

A little jealous stab of the unknown pricked Kitty's breast. She put the bauble away in her room.

Coming back, she said with a brisk attempt to reassert a nurse's authority: "You may go out and sit in the sun for an hour."

It only made him smile now—covering her with confusion again. "Yes, ma'am," he said with mock humility. "If you'll come, too."

"I have my work to do," said Kitty rebukingly.

He was incorrigible. "Please, I can't walk all that way without help," he said plaintively.

She laughed and helped him outside; lingered beside the bench—and finally sat down on the other end of it. Poor, inexperienced Kitty had no armor for her soft breast. They chattered and laughed, and the hours flew on wings.

Ralph told her no more of his story than his name and profession.

She, seeing that it distressed him to rake up the past, was happy to avoid

it. For the same reason she forbore saying anything as yet about the wonderful story he had told in his delirium.

She likewise in private made her father agree not to ask their visitor any questions until he was more vigorous.

Ralph's frame of mind was natural to one recovering from a sudden, serious illness. He instinctively felt the necessity of maintaining a quiet mind while the strength stole deliciously back through his veins.

Away back he apprehended a burden waiting to be shouldered when he was strong enough, but at present he would have none of it. He was no more than a bit of reanimated clay gratefully absorbing the sunshine.

At no time was vanity a great factor in his make-up, and in his present purgated state it was non-existent. It honestly never occurred to him that their jolly talk and laughter and the exchange of happy glances might be working irremediable damage in the breast of the dreamy young girl beside him.

Ralph, being sufficiently recovered, was banished to the men's bunks outside, and Kitty repossessed herself of her own room. That night in the secure and comfortable darkness her defenses fell away from her. She pressed her lips to the pillow that had supported his dear head throughout his illness and moistened it with her tears.

"Little did I guess when he came tumbling through the doorway—" she thought — and left the thought unfinished on a swelling breast. "It is like an answer to a prayer I didn't dare make," she whispered to herself. When doubts and jealousies of the mystery that enshrouded him obtruded on her she thrust them away.

"It must be all right," she insisted. "His feet were led to our door!"

The next day passed in much the same fashion. Ralph insisted on helping Kitty with the housework, much to her amused scorn. Ralph took an inexhaustible delight in her naive simplicity.

She loved to have him chaff her.

He seemed to her the cleverest, kindest, most lovable of superior creatures. Further than that, the mystery of his manliness thrilled her. In his eyes there lurked a strange, sly promise of rapture.

She called it "wickedness" in her innocence and was sweetly troubled. "What shall I do if he tries to kiss me?" she thought in a most delicious panic.

As the day passed and he made no move to do so a faint chagrin made itself felt, which she refused to recognize.

As if moved by a common impulse they kept their conversational shallop floating in the safe shallows. Reminiscences of childhood afforded them much humorous matter. Ralph did most of the talking.

"Once when I was a kid," he said, "they dug up the street in front of our house for a drain, and ran into an Indian burial ground. My chum and I played ninepins on the sidewalk with the skulls, and the constable arrested us. What a fuss there was!"

"I should say so!" said Kitty, simulating a virtuous indignation. "Little savages!"

"Why?" said Ralph teasingly. "Old bones are all right. Don't you like their nice, earthy smell?"

"Horrible!" said Kitty.

"Did you ever see 'Hamlet'?" asked Ralph. He apostrophized a teacup in his extended hand. "'Alas, poor *Yorick!* I knew him well, *Horatio!* He was a fellow of infinite jest!'".

Ralph acted out the speech for her with improvisations.

Kitty was obliged to sit down suddenly, and to hold her sides. Kitty was one of those shy, admiring, easily shocked, and easily moved to laughter girls that inspire a man to the highest flights of audacious wit.

"Speaking of bones," Ralph went on; "when I was a student at McGill, my roommate and I saved up enough to buy a whole skeleton all properly articulated. It was a peach! We kept it in the closet hanging from a clothes-hook."

"Mercy!" said Kitty with a delicious shudder.

"The landlady had a daughter who had a beau, and the two of them used to make us fellows tired with their goings-on. They'd stand for half an hour at the foot of the stairs saying good night. Yes, it sounded like a cow drawing its foot out of a boggy place!"

"Aren't you awful!" said Kitty, blushing.

"We decided that something must be done," Ralph went on. "I got some phosphorus paint, and we painted the skeleton all over and fastened a long line to the hook in his skull that was used to hang him up by.

"And that night, when the pair of them came out in the hall down-stairs, and turned down the light, we crept out on the upper landing and leaned over the rail and let Mr. Bones go walking slowly, step by step, down the stairs. He was a lovely blue color; every bone stood out!"

"You might have killed them with fright!" said Kitty.

"No such luck!" said Ralph. "They didn't hear him coming until he was half-way down. Then I rattled him a little. Geehosophat! You never heard such an awful screech in your life!

"Both of them! They made for the front door, and rattled it like mad, and couldn't get it open. I laughed so hard the string slipped out of my hand and Mr. Bones went down the rest of the stairs, sitting up just like a person—rattle, clatter, smash! Oh, my! Oh, my!"

"I don't think it was funny at all!" said Kitty. But she laughed, and her eyes confessed her admiration of his dreadful boldness.

"Next day we moved," said Ralph solemnly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Triangle.

ON the following day, the fifth of Ralph's stay in Milburn Gulch, he was strong enough to walk about more freely.

Jim Sholto took him up the trail to show him the excavations. Jim was secretly hoping that in Ralph he would find a workman to take the place of one of the absent boys.

Being past the period of heart troubles himself, the danger of introducing a strange and not uncomely young man into his family Eden had not suggested itself to him.

While they were away, Kitty worked about the cabin in a spasmodic way widely differing from her usual deft serenity. She would come to a stand staring before her mistily, a little smile wreathing the corners of her lips; rousing herself with a start.

She would fly about for awhile as if her life depended on getting done, only to fall into another dream. Absently picking things up, she dropped them in fresh places, and presently started hunting for them again.

Snatches of impromptu song welled up from her breast, higher and higher until her voice trembled and broke. She continually ran to the mirror, by turns anxious, critical, scornful, blushing, reassured by what she saw there.

Every three minutes she went to the door and looked up the trail to see if he were coming back.

On one of these journeys she heard her name softly called behind her. Whirling about she beheld approaching by the trail from the river a graceful figure clad in buckskin skirt and blue flannel, her beautiful, dark face composed and smiling, her black hair braided and wound about her up-held head.

In short, it was her friend and preserver, holding out her hands, and smiling at Kitty wistfully and deprecatingly, just as she had seen her last.

Kitty shrieked with pleasure, and flinging her arms about her friend, dragged her into the cabin and forced her into a chair.

"Annie! Annie! Annie!" she cried, dropping on her knees beside her. "How sweet of you to come! I wanted to see you so badly! You must stay a week!"

Nahnya shook her head, smiling.

"I just brought the dugout back," she said in her soft full voice that made a pleasant harmony with Kitty's excited accents. "And I brought fresh meat—mountain goat."

"Did you get your own boat all right?" Kitty demanded to know.

"It was only a little broke," said Nahnya. "I fix it easy."

"How could you bring two boats up against the current?" asked Kitty.

"I only bring yours," Nahnya answered. "Mine is down the river on this side where I can get it."

"How will you get it?"

"I will walk along the shore," said Nahnya. "It is not hard walking."

"Now I've got you, I'm not going to let you go in a hurry!" cried Kitty, clinging to her.

"But you're all busy here," objected Nahnya. "The men—"

"My brothers have gone outside," said Kitty. "There is only my father and—and a stranger."

"A stranger?" said Nahnya.

Kitty was not going to blurt out her secret. Her friend's mind must be prepared by delicate stages for its reception. "We have a white man stopping with us," she said very offhand.

Nahnya was not blind to the self-conscious air and the blush. Her arm tightened affectionately about Kitty.

"Why did you run away from us like you did?" asked Kitty hastily, to create a diversion.

Nahnya shrugged. "I was afraid they thank me, and make a fuss," she said uneasily. "I feel like a fool then."

"You silly dear!" cried Kitty, embracing her afresh.

There was a new demonstrativeness in Kitty, a breathless ardor that in itself was enough to tell the other woman something had happened since their parting.

"So you have a visitor," she said teasingly. "I think he is young, yes?"

Kitty tucked in an end of Nahnya's braid that was escaping. "Fairly young," she said.

"You are not so much lonely now I think," murmured Nahnya.

Kitty jumped up. "You must be hungry!" she cried. "I'm forgetting my duties!"

"Not an hour ago I ate," said Nahnya. "I am not hungry."

Kitty developed a great flow of small talk, about the weather, about her brothers, about everything except what was in both their minds. Nahnya let her run on.

Under her friend's quiet, kind smile Kitty broke down at last, and running to her, dropped beside her again and hid her hot face on the dark girl's shoulder.

"Oh, Annie!" she breathed on a trembling, rising inflection.

"Tell me," whispered Nahnya.

"Oh, Annie! It's so strange! I can't! I didn't want to tell you anything. I wanted you to see him and—and to guess! I have lost myself completely!

"I am turned inside out! It came so suddenly. I never guessed anything like this! Oh, Annie! He's so strong, so kind, so mysterious, so clever, so dangerous! I am terrified of him. I am wretched when he is out of my sight for a minute!"

Nahnya's face became grave. "Has he said anything?" she whispered.

"Not yet."

"Oh, Kitty dear!" murmured Nahnya. "Be careful! Men—"

"He's true!" said Kitty hotly. "That I can see in his eyes!"

"You know who he is?" asked Nahnya anxiously. "Where he come from? All about him?"

"No!" faltered Kitty. "He's honest!" she cried. "My instinct tells me so. He's good to me. He's careful of me. He doesn't make love to me! Oh, Annie!" she went on tremulously.

"I've been living in a dream the last few days! All the time he teases me, and I love it, because I know he is kind! All the time we laugh, and the hours go by like minutes!"

Once the opening was found Kitty was not to be stopped from pouring out the whole of her simple heart to her friend. Nahnya held her close and listened, and her dark head drooped.

Kitty, raising her face at last, was arrested by Nahnya's brooding look upon her. Kitty had never seen eyes so kind and so sad. Their look was as deep as the sea.

"Annie!" she said sharply. "What's the matter? Aren't you glad?"

Nahnya pressed the girl convulsively. "I am glad," she murmured, bestirring herself. "I love you. I am glad if you are happy."

"You were not looking glad," said Kitty.

"It is foolishness," said Nahnya. "Only—I think of me. I am young. I want be happy, too!"

"You will be!" cried Kitty.

Nahnya smiled — with those eyes. "It will never, never come to me!" she murmured.

"Why not?" Kitty demanded to know.

Nahnya laughed away the brooding look. "Foolish!" she cried. "I am jus' jealous! Tell me more! How did he come here!"

Kitty, like every lover, was a little selfish in her happiness. She allowed herself to be reassured by Nahnya's laughter.

"He was traveling down the river all alone," she went on eagerly, and he lost his boat and everything he had in the Stanley rapids, and dislocated his shoulder besides. The pain of it drove him out of his wits.

"For days he wandered in the bush. Providence directed his footsteps to us, dad says. He pitched headfirst through the doorway there while I was working. Never in my life was I so frightened!"

Nahnya had succeeded in putting her own sadness out of mind. "You have not tell me what he look like," she said, warm with sympathy.

"He'll be here directly," said Kitty, blushing. "You shall see for yourself."

Springing up, Kitty ran to the door to look up the trail. He was not yet in sight. As she turned back into the room Nahnya asked:

"What is his name?"

"Ralph Cowdry," said Kitty shyly.

There was silence in the cabin. The brook outside seemed suddenly to increase its brawling.

Kitty, in her shyness, turned away her head when she spoke the name, therefore she did not see how Nahnya took it. Kitty waited for Nahnya to speak. The silence became like a weight on them both.

"Don't you think it's a pretty name?" murmured Kitty.

There was no answer.

Kitty looked at her friend in surprise. Nahnya had not moved. She still sat quiet in the chair, her hands loose in her lap. But her head had fallen forward on her breast.

The oblique glimpse that Kitty caught of her cheeks caused her to run to her friend and fling an arm around her, and force her head up with the other hand, that she might see into her face. Nahnya kept her eyes obstinately veiled, but she could not disguise the shocking grayness that had crept into her curved cheeks.

"Annie! What's the matter!" she

cried in distress. "You're sick! Why didn't you tell me? Come lie on my bed. Oh, how selfish I have been!"

Nahnya got up, steadying herself on the back of the chair. Her eyes were blank and piteous. "I am not sick," she said, measuring her words syllable by syllable. "I am all right. I will go now."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" cried Kitty indignantly. "In such a state! Come lie down, and let me take care of you!"

Nahnya stolidly resisted Kitty's effort to urge her toward the bedroom. Her measured voice began to shake in spite of her will. "You must let me go," she said.

"What nonsense!" cried Kitty, clinging to her.

Nahnya's voice came sharp and urgent. "You must let me go or it will be bad for all of us!"

Kitty fell back a step. "Bad for all of us!" she echoed in innocent perplexity. "What do you mean?"

Nahnya passed the limit of endurance. Her hands went suddenly to her head. A low, wild cry broke from her.

"I am a cursed woman!" she cried. "Always I know it! Where I go I bring sorrow and evil. There is no place for me! There is nothing! All I ask for was a friend."

Kitty thought she was out of her senses.

"There, it's all right!" she said, soothing her. "You have me! You will always have me! I'm so glad you came here. I will take care of you and make you well again!"

Nahnya made believe to submit to her caresses. "I am cold," she murmured with a sly glance. "Get me a coat, a shawl."

Kitty flew into the bedroom. No sooner had she passed the doorway than Nahnya softly glided toward the outer door. She was too late.

Before she reached it it was filled with the bulk of a man. She fell back into the darkest corner with a gasp. Kitty returned out of the bedroom.

"Ralph!" cried Kitty gladly.

Ralph coming out of the sunlight did not immediately recognize Nahnya in her corner. He distinguished two figures.

"Hello! Who's here?" he said.

Kitty ran to Nahnya and wrapped a shawl about her shoulders. "It's Annie Crossfox," she said, full of concern. "She's sick, and I—"

"Annie Crossfox!" cried Ralph in a great voice.

He sprang toward her. Kitty fell back in astonishment. Nahnya shrank from him and covered her face with her hands. Seizing her wrists, he pulled her hands down.

She betrayed her white blood in her changing color. Her face crimsoned—and turned deathly pale. Her hands in Ralph's hands trembled like aspen leaves. There was a silence in the cabin.

Ralph stood devouring her with his eyes.

It seemed to him as if that which was walled up within him had suddenly burst. He was flooded with the sense of the identity he had lost in his illness.

It was as if himself came back to him. And all of it was his love for Nahnya. It filled him. It was like something new, and infinitely sweeter and stronger than before.

He murmured her name over and again. "Thank God! I've found you!" he said. "I'll never let you go now!"

Even while he was looking at her Nahnya contrived to conquer the surprise which had betrayed her weakness. Her face turned hard and her hands ceased to tremble.

Snatching her hands out of his, she darted to the door. Ralph was nearer. He reached it first, closed it, and put his back against it.

"No you don't!" he cried triumphantly. "You won't escape me again!

You love me, and I'll never let you go!"

Nahnya darted an unfathomable look at Kitty. "How dare you!" she said to Ralph in a suffocating voice. "Before her! After what happen between you!"

Ralph recollected Kitty for the first time, and looked at her in honest surprise. "Between us!" he said. "There's nothing between us!"

There was another silence. Ralph looked from one to another of the girls in frowning perplexity. At last an explanation occurred to him.

"Are you jealous?" he cried to Nahnya.

She started angrily.

"Kitty took me in!" said Ralph eagerly. "She nursed me like an angel. I'll be grateful to her all my life. We're friends. There's nothing else—I swear to you! Oh, this is horrible! Kitty, tell her there was nothing between us!"

"I do not care!" said Nahnya quickly.

"Tell her!" insisted Ralph.

Kitty stood with a stiff back and head held high.

Her soft, pretty face was distorted and ashen with pain; the tender lips averted from her clenched teeth, the green-gray eyes narrowed and glittering. How could she help but feel betrayed on either hand?

She laughed.

"So that is your white man," she said to Nahnya, quite coolly she thought. It had a sharp and hateful ring. "And that is your Nahnya," she said, turning to Ralph. "I congratulate you both!"

Her voice failed her.

To see the gentle Kitty fighting to save her pride was infinitely more piteous than if she had broken down. Nahnya turned away her head; at the sound of Kitty's voice she shuddered. Ralph gazed at Kitty in incredulous amazement.

He possessed no key to her behavior.

Kitty got her breath, and went on to Nahnya clearly: "Of course there was nothing between us! I only did what one would do for anybody."

Once more the silence fell on them. They stood each on his point of the triangle, each struggling with emotions that foundered speech. Once Nahnya looked imploringly at Kitty; out of the wreck she longed to save her friend.

Kitty's eyes merely glittered, and Nahnya's face turned into a stone again. Ralph began to suspect the true state of affairs, and dismay widened his eyes.

It was Kitty who broke the silence. "I have something for you," she said to Nahnya, moving toward her own room.

She was gone but a second. Nahnya and Ralph did not look at each other. Returning, Kitty extended her hand to Nahnya with the necklace lying upon the palm.

"He brought it to you."

She made to drop it into Nahnya's hand, but the dark girl quickly put her hands behind her. The royal bauble dropped to the floor. It glittered there, disregarded by all three.

"Oh, Kitty!" murmured Ralph, confused and remorseful, still amazed. "I never thought of this—I never thought—"

"Never thought of what?" asked Kitty quickly.

"That you—that I! You're so good and gentle! Oh, it's horrible!"

A spasm passed over Kitty's face. Everything that was said made matters worse. "You're talking nonsense," she said quickly. "There's nothing the matter with me!"

"What are we to do?" muttered Ralph helplessly.

Nahnya's voice was harsh and hard. "Do you think every woman is in love with you?" she cried. "You are nothing to me! I tell you that before. I tell you that now! Keep away from me! I not want to see you again!"

Ralph's eyes flamed up; he instantly forgot Kitty. "We'll see about that!" he cried. "You're mine! I'll never give you up!"

He moved toward Nahnya. Turning, she darted into Kitty's room, slamming the door behind her. By the time Ralph got it open she was out through the window, carrying the mosquito netting with her. It seemed a miracle that the tiny sash could have passed her body. It was out of the question for Ralph.

He dashed back to the front door and, flinging it open, ran around the house to intercept her.

Left alone in the cabin, Kitty walked with a curious quietness to the table under the front window. She dipped a cup into the pail of water that stood there and conveyed it to her lips, spilling much of the water on the floor and on herself without noticing it.

She returned with the air of a sleep-walker, still carrying the cup, and picked up the emerald, and put it away in a corner of the shelves.

With the same uncanny self-possession she seated herself in a chair near by. She sighed, and fell a little forward and sidewise against the wall. Her hand fell limply to her side and, the cup slipping from it, was broken on the floor.

Thus her father found her when he came in.

CHAPTER XIX.

New Actors on the Scene.

WHEN Ralph got around the house Nahnya was nowhere to be seen. He was not enough of a woodsman to find her tracks in the dead leaves and the pine-needles.

The river was her natural means of escape; cutting back to the trail, he ran to the point.

There was no sign of her. Drawn up on the beach and tied to a branch he saw the dugout she had brought. There were no tracks in the sand to show she had returned, nor any impression of another boat having been pushed off.

Ralph rushed up and down the shore looking for her or for her tracks.

"She must go by the river," he told himself; "the forest is impenetrable."

With every minute his heart sank; he knew he was no match for Nahnya in the wilderness.

Making a longer sally downstream, he finally found her tracks where she had leaped over the bank and had set off down the beach.

He followed after with renewed hope. After running a quarter of a mile he suddenly pulled himself up. "I'll never catch her this way," he thought. "She must have a boat down here to cross. She'll only leave me stranded on the shore. She's got to go home. I must follow her there by water."

He made his way back to the point and thence to the work-shack, where he borrowed an ax and an auger, without meeting any one.

Returning to the mouth of the creek he searched until he found a great, dry trunk, that had been thrown high by a freshet. He set to work to chop it into four lengths to make a raft.

His right arm was still far from fit to swing an ax, but an indomitable resolution kept him at work. Progress was slow; the minutes escaped him maddeningly.

"Never mind," he told himself. "I'll go straight to the Bowl of the Mountains. She does not know that I can find my way there!"

By and by Jim Sholto pushed his way through the bushes and, descending the bank, sat down on a boulder.

Ralph, with a glance, went on with his work. Jim made a business of searching for a suitable twig at his feet. He started to peel it, pursing up his lips in a noiseless whistle.

Downright Jim had no talent for

dissimulation; perturbation, dismay, and anger were plainly visible struggling with his elaborate unconcern. He was keeping a tight hold on himself.

"So you're going to leave us," he said very offhand.

"I must," muttered Ralph.

"I should 'a' thought you'd had your lesson against traveling alone. You ain't in no shape to swing an ax or drive a paddle!"

"Can't help it," said Ralph.

"What'll you do for food, gun, blankets, to keep life in you?"

"I suppose you will sell me what I need. I have money."

"Money's of no use to me here," said Jim grimly.

"Then I won't trouble you," said Ralph quickly.

Jim showed a certain compunction. "It ain't a question of money when you're short of necessities yourself," he explained.

"Then the sooner you are quit of me the better," said Ralph.

"You could stay here a while and work out your keep," said Jim craftily.

Ralph merely shook his head. They were silent, Jim meanwhile transparently debating with himself how to open the subject again.

"Look here!" he said testily. "I can't talk to you while you're swinging the ax! Are you in such a rush you can't stop for five minutes?"

Ralph put down his ax with none too good a grace and sat down on another stone beside the creek's bed. His face showed a sullenness that promised badly for the results of their talk.

Ralph had conceived a great liking for the bluff and simple Jim, but the situation was hopeless, and since he could not mend it he saw nothing but to brazen it out.

To protest his regrets he felt would be insincere, if not positively insulting to the Scotchman.

Jim was humbling himself for Kitty's sake. He knew that the situation was too much for him, but he was obligated to try to mend it because there was no one else to help her.

"I took a fancy to you when you come," he said clumsily. "I can't see you go to make a fool of yourself, and keep my mouth shut."

Ralph's nostrils dilated ominously.

"I might as well be working," he said shortly. "This does no good."

"Wait!" said Jim, with what was in him rare patience. "You're inexperienced. Any man that knows this country knows the fatal results of any connection between red and white."

Ralph rose abruptly. "That's enough!" he said, tight-lipped. "You have no call to interfere in my private affairs!"

Jim suddenly exploded.

"No call!" he shouted. "You talk like a fool! You're insane! I have a right to lock you up until you come to your senses!"

"Better not try it on," said Ralph.

"Insanity's the kindest name to put to it!" stormed Jim. "There are uglier words—coming here like you did, and making up to my little daughter and beguiling her with your city-bred tongue, and then to run off after—"

"It's a lie!" cried Ralph. "I was coming after the other girl when I had my accident. And I never made love to Kitty, neither by word, nor look, nor touch! Ask her!"

"Ah, you'd hide behind her now," sneered Jim. "She has her pride!"

Roused to a blind fury by the unjust taunt, Ralph reached for his ax—but he could not fight Kitty's father. His arms dropped to his sides.

"Oh, for God's sake let me go and forget me!" he cried brokenly.

"Ye came to her sick and starving!" cried Jim accusingly; "she took ye in and fed ye, and nursed ye back to life again! What does she get for it? I found her— Oh, it drives me mad to think on! I could kill ye from

that would only break her heart. Ye miserable Jack-a-dandy! What she can see in ye beats me!"

"What can I do?" cried Ralph despairingly. "It's not my fault! Tell me what to do and I'll do it!"

"Stay here," said Jim. "Give up this insane chase and make good here."

Ralph shrugged helplessly. It's impossible," he said sullenly. "I'd be no good to Kitty if my heart was down the river."

"Your heart!" echoed Jim disgustedly. He raised his clenched fists. "Grant me patience!"

He was interrupted by the sound of Kitty's voice calling him. In the hollow where Ralph was building his raft they were invisible both from the trail and from the camping-place on the point. Jim answered the hail sulkily.

Presently Kitty, white-faced and wide-eyed, came pushing through the bushes.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded to know of her father.

Thus to be addressed by one of his children brought the skies tumbling about the old-fashioned father's head. He gaped at her stupidly. "That's a nice way to speak to me!" he cried, puffing out his cheeks.

It had no effect on her now. The gentle Kitty was transformed. "I believe you were trying to persuade him to stay here!" she cried with flashing eyes.

"Well—well," stammered Jim, thoroughly confounded. "I was doing it for your sake!"

A little cry of helpless anger escaped her. "How can you shame me so!" she murmured.

"Shame you?" said poor Jim. "If you want a thing you've got to fight for it, ain't you?"

"I don't want him!" she cried. "Let him go! The sooner he goes the better I'll be pleased! Understand, both of you, he is repulsive to me! I never want to see him again as long as I live!"

It was the third time that day that Ralph had been denounced. He was only human. His self-love was wounded.

"What's the matter with you all?" he cried. "I'm neither a leper nor a crook! Why should I be blamed for what nobody could help?"

"Come back to the house," said Kitty imperiously to her father.

Jim followed her as if he had been whipped. "God save the wumman!" he muttered. "Blest if I know what she wants!"

Ralph returned to his work with a savage zest, and wholly unmindful of the pain in his shoulder.

It was an impossible situation; there was nothing he could do; therefore no use thinking about it. The only thing was to get away as soon as he could. He bored holes in the ends of his four logs, and cutting two crosspieces, bored them and fastened the whole frame together with stout wooden pegs.

By the time it was done the afternoon was far advanced. He floated his craft out into the river and, pulling it up on the sand, took the auger and the ax back to the work-shack.

Jim Sholto, busy with the furnaces, turned a grim, hard face.

"Will you sell me food and a gun and a blanket?" asked Ralph stiffly.

"It's waiting for you in the kitchen," was the harsh answer. "No dog shall starve through me."

Ralph swallowed the affront. The two men went to the kitchen. The stuff was lying on the table: gun, ammunition-belt, double blanket, and packet of food. Kitty was not visible.

"Pay me what you like," said Jim carelessly.

"It's worth fifty dollars," Ralph said, counting out the money.

"Here's something else that belongs to you," said Jim, holding out the necklace with a sneer.

Ralph pocketed it without comment. Gathering the slender outfit in his arms, he left the shack. There were no good-bys.

Everything was now clear for his departure, and as he set foot on the trail to the river he breathed more freely. He bitterly regretted what had happened; but, since he could not mend it, there was relief in putting it behind him.

Down the river was Nahnya!

Half-way to the camping-place he stopped and stood fast to listen with a horrible sinking of the heart. He thought he heard men's voices ahead of him. He thought he recognized the voices.

He heard them again, and could no longer doubt.

The worst had happened. He paused, frantically debating what to do. His way was cut off in front; they were already in possession of the raft that had caused him such pains to make.

Behind him was the grim and angry father—no help there! While Ralph hung in agonized indecision Joe Mixer hove in sight in the trail ahead and, seeing him, set up a loud shout.

Ralph cast the blanket and the bag of food from him and, hanging on to the rifle and ammunition, darted into the woods. Joe Mixer, shouting the news over his shoulder, came plunging after him.

The other three men caught up Joe's cries and crashed into the underbrush. The surprised forest rang like the halls of bedlam with shouts and crashes on every hand.

Ralph pressed his elbows against his ribs and ran, breathing deep for endurance.

He headed east into the thickest of the woods, meaning to strike back to the river if he could distance them a little. He judged from the sounds that they had spread out fanwise behind him. None of them caught sight of him again. He ran with despair in his heart, for there was no escape ahead.

Suppose he did outdistance them, there was no place to run to and nothing to do. He could not build another raft with his bare hands.

The sounds behind him suddenly fell away a little, and Ralph turned sharply to the left. Breaking out of the woods, he scrambled down the bank almost in the same spot where he had found Nahnya's tracks earlier.

At the bottom he came face to face with Philippe Boisvert, crouching in wait behind a boulder.

Ralph almost collided with him. Before he could lift his arms, he was locked in the half-breed's sinewy embrace. He struggled with the strength of despair without being able to break it.

Meanwhile Philippe shouted vociferously. Joe Mixer leaped down the bank and fell on Ralph from behind. Crusoe Campbell and Stack appeared, each ready to lend a hand. It was useless for Ralph to struggle further.

"Tie his hands!" shouted Joe.

It was done with the thongs from the half-breed's moccasins. Ralph was half led, half dragged along the beach, back to the camping-place. Whenever he stumbled Joe with foul oaths struck him in the face with his fist.

Joe was not susceptible to any sentiments of generosity toward a helpless enemy. Crusoe Campbell guffawed and Stack snickered. Ralph set his teeth and held his tongue. A cold hate distilled itself drop by drop in his heart.

Jim Sholto, attracted by the noise of the chase, was at the camping-place when they got there.

Seeing Ralph's plight, he grimly smiled. Ralph was stood back against a tree, and a stout line wound about his body and knotted behind the trunk.

Meanwhile Joe Mixer blustered up to shake hands with Jim. "You know me," he cried; "Mixer, of Gisborne Portage. These three gentlemen are friends of mine. From your smile I take it you've had a sample of this young crook's quality."

Jim was not at all charmed by Joe's effusiveness, but he was enraged against Ralph more. "I know nothing to his good," he said grimly.

"Let me tell you what he did to us,"

said Joe. "Landed below our camp in the night, when we was all asleep, and set our boat adrift. We might have starved in the woods for him!"

Ralph disdained to answer this impudent charge.

"Where was this?" asked Jim.

"Thirty mile above the Grand Forks."

"You've been a long time coming down."

"We had a little business up the Stanley," said Joe.

Ralph had at least the satisfaction of learning that he had made them sweat for ten days.

"How did he come here?" asked Joe.

"Sick and starving," said Jim bitterly. "Said he lost his boat in the Stanley Rapids."

"If he did, it's God's justice!" said Joe piously.

Ralph smiled peculiarly.

"What funny business has he been up to around your camp?" asked Joe.

"That's my affair," said Jim grimly. "I will deal with him as I see fit."

Joe looked at him with an ugly glitter and decided to swallow the rebuke.

"Sure!" he said easily. "He's got a partner," he went on—"a good-looking Indian wench who calls herself Annie Crossfox. Has she been around here?"

Ralph roused himself sharply.

"Sholto, think how you answer!" he cried. "You and I have our differences, but you're an honest man! You've got nothing to do with this vermin! Look in their faces; it's written plain enough there. They can't look in a man's eyes, the mean and cowardly—"

Joe Mixer turned purple, and springing toward Ralph struck him violently across the mouth with the back of his hand. "Shut your head!" he cried with an oath.

Ralph wiped the blood from his lips on his shoulder. "Mean and cowardly blackguards, without decency or manliness!" he cried defiantly.

Joe made to strike him again, but big Jim held his arm. "The man is bound," he said laconically.

"Then let him keep a clean tongue in his head," muttered Joe, turning away.

"For God's sake, think it over before you join in with them!" Ralph begged of Jim.

"I see no reason why I should not answer a civil question," said Jim judicially.

Jim thought he was being fair and disinterested, while he was being swayed by his feelings no less than an angry woman. "If the girl is straight she has nothing to fear from anybody. She was here this morning."

"Aha!" cried Joe delightedly.

Ralph groaned. "You'll be sorry for this!" he muttered.

"Where does she hang out?" Joe asked eagerly.

"I don't know," said Jim. "She went down the river."

"We'll get her!" cried Joe.

"What do you want with her," asked Jim curiously, "and him there?"

Joe looked disconcerted. His thick wits had no answer ready.

Stack spoke up. "Robbery," he said smoothly. "They broke into Mr. Mixer's store. There are no police in the country, so we have to bring them to justice ourselves."

"It's a lie!" cried Ralph scornfully. "That little lickspittle confessed to me that he had trailed me all the way from the coast, because he thought I'd made a strike here in the country!"

Stack's eyes bolted; his little body writhed, and a curious, painful smile distorted his ashen face.

Jim shrugged and turned away. "It's nothing to me," he said. "Fight it out among yourselves."

As soon as Jim was safely out of hearing Joe turned to Ralph with an evil smile.

"Now I've got you where I want you!" he said triumphantly. He drew a significant line across his throat. "I

can string you up to the tree over your head if I want, and go scot free for it!

"Setting a traveler's boat adrift is worse than murder up here! And I got three witnesses to swear to it. No jury in this country would convict. They'd thank me for strangling a coyote!"

Ralph proudly held his tongue.

His air of unconcern infuriated the ex-butcher. "Damn you! I'll lower your proud stomach!" he cried. "I'll give the night to it! I've been saving up for this! Before morning you'll be crawling and whining for mercy!"

A blow accompanied this. Ralph instinctively jerked away his head and it fell on his sore shoulder. As a result of his exertions with the ax, it was now puffed up, throbbing, and exquisitely painful. When Joe Mixer's fist descended on it, Ralph caught his breath with the pain of it.

Joe chuckled. "So that's the sore place, eh?"

He struck him again. Ralph took it with set teeth.

"Are you going to tell me where the girl is hidden, and the gold?" asked Joe.

Ralph kept silent.

"Answer me!" shouted Joe.

"That's a fool's question!" said Ralph.

Joe dug his knuckles into Ralph's shoulder and, leaning the weight of his body on his arm, kneaded the throbbing place. Ralph had never conceived of pain like this.

It turned him sick; cold perspiration sprang out all over him. He felt consciousness beginning to slip. He bit his lip to keep from betraying any sound.

The other men began to remonstrate.

"You'll do for him," said Stack, "and we won't learn anything."

Joe left off with a shrug.

"I have all night," he said; "but the next thing I do to him will make him tell!"

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.

MAYBE

By Winifred Welles

SOMEWHERE out in the sunshine
There's a lad who waits for me,
And he's tender and wise with glad, young eyes,
Whoever that lad may be.

Perhaps we never may meet,
And each go our ways alone,
But heart speaks to heart, though we're worlds apart,
For he's meant to be my own.

Sometimes I think him a dream,
Sometimes I think that he's true;
I'll find him one day in some strange, sweet way—
Who knows but it may be you?

A Curious Courtship

by W. T. Nichols

CHAPTER I.

Tenney's Dilemma.

IDLY and with a degree of amusement Tenney watched the bustling crowd on ship and pier. There was such a deal of hurrying and scurrying up and down the gangways, and so little apparent definite accomplishment of anything.

He wondered, mildly, what it was all about. Probably half a dozen boats were docking that fine morning along the river front, and very likely the scene he observed was being repeated at half a dozen piers, with lines of people streaming ashore, and other lines streaming aboard much like ants rushing in and out of an ant-hill.

Still, there was a difference: the ants knew precisely what they were about.

Tenney, eying his companions on the voyage and the assembly on the pier, shrugged his shoulders. After all it was their affair, not his. Wild hunts for luggage didn't concern him; his own modest suit-cases were at his feet, awaiting an inspector's attention. He hadn't forgotten his gloves or his raincoat.

There was nobody to meet him, and he had neither pressing engagement to fill nor outgoing train to catch.

In his way Tenney was a philosopher, but his was a philosophy with certain limitations. He could find entertainment, for example, in the fuss and flurry of old Kestron, his cabin mate, but he felt a touch of envy when a blooming daughter swooped down upon the old fellow with joyous cries and embracing arms.

Possibly the envy increased, as turning from the scene of reunion, his gaze fell upon a young woman, who, it suddenly occurred to him, might be well worth crossing an ocean to meet.

She was not a tall girl, but carried herself with an erectness which made amends for any missing inches. Her face attracted him peculiarly; clear skinned, broad of forehead, delicately molded of feature.

The mouth, he thought, could smile delightfully, though now the straight line of the lips helped to bear out the hint of anxiety in the brown eyes and the little line between the fine brows. Manifestly, the girl was in search of somebody.

He saw her move from one group to another; he noted her halt and question a hurrying steward. The man cast a glance about him, spoke briefly and nodded in what seemed to Tenney to be his own direction.

The girl turned quickly.

Her eyes met Tenney's. In them he thought he read a conflict of emo-

tions, uncertainty, hope, fear. She moved toward him, advancing steadily yet with a curious effect of an exertion of will power. She was like a soldier, young and untried, marching to battle with discipline conquering an inclination to run away.

Sympathy stirred Tenney. She meant to speak to him, and for some unknown reason—he was not a terrifying person, as he was well aware—she dreaded the task. Impulsively he stepped forward.

"Mr. Tenney?" Her voice was low, pleasant to the ear, despite its note of something closely akin to apprehension.

The young man bowed. "Yes; I'm Mr. Tenney," he said.

"The one whose name is on the passenger list?"

"Undoubtedly. I came over on the Palatia."

"Hubert Tenney?"

He smiled, and shook his head. "Herbert, not Hubert. But there was no other Tenney on the boat."

"Oh!" She spoke with a swift indrawing of breath that made the word almost a cry. "But the list said Hubert—it was so in all the papers!"

"The papers?" Tenney repeated.

Intent as he was upon the girl, he was vaguely conscious that a stout, elderly woman had separated herself from the crowd in the background, and was waddling toward them, her countenance beaming and her bonnet very much awry. Perhaps something in his face warned the girl of the impending interruption, for suddenly she glanced over her shoulder and caught sight of the nearing figure.

In an instant more Tenney was treated to the surprise of his life. The girl's arms were about his neck; her cheek was pressed close to his. Her lips touched his ear.

"Help me out! I beg you, pretend you know me! Pretend, pretend!"

Tenney, prisoner in that swift embrace, but in no haste to be free, caught the whispered entreaty, and dutifully strove to play his part. He slipped an arm about her waist, and drew her closer.

"At your command," he told her. "I'll pretend—oh, yes; I'll do anything!"

"You've known me—oh, for ages and ages! We've been engaged—we're engaged now."

Now, Tenney was not wholly an unsophisticated youth, nor was he ignorant of the wiles and stratagems of designing Sirens, lying in wait for the rash and prosperous. Yet here he did not hesitate. The girl was no swindler.

Whatever her plan, there was no treachery, even if there were trouble, in those dark eyes into which he had looked; there was wondrous allurement in the touch of that smooth cheek.

"I'll stand by you," he said. "Only you must tell me—"

But she had slipped from his arm, and was facing the stout woman, who now was close upon them.

"This is Hubert, Mrs. Dunton," she said simply.

"Hubert—at last!"

The elderly woman spoke with an ecstatic gasp, and rolled her eyes amazingly. Then she extended her arms widely, precipitated herself upon the young man, clasped him to her capacious bosom, and kissed him with a resounding smack.

This done, she released him, stepped back and wiped away tears—joyful tears—which welled to her eyes.

"It's been weary waiting, Hubert—you won't mind if I call you that, will you? And weary for poor, dear Margaret, I mean, of course—I didn't grudge—that is, I was perfectly delighted to have her with me. And there were so many disappointments, you know, and you were delayed so often, and it was so dreadful for her, the patient darling! But all that's over now, and you've come back at last, haven't you, Hubert?"

"Yes; I've come back," Tenney said cheerfully.

Whatever might be this play, in which he had been called to take part, it involved no sinister designs upon his liberty or pocket-book. Nobody could associate Mrs. Dunton with a plot.

Fair, fat, fifty and some years over; good-natured, credulous, weak—she was of a type he had no trouble in recognizing; a good woman, the salt of a wicked earth. She smiled, expansively if mistily.

"I knew he wouldn't mind, Margaret, and I just had to kiss him. Why, it was like meeting an old friend. You've shown me so many of his letters, you know, and such delightful letters they were, too! Ah, you're a charming correspondent, Hubert!"

Tenney coughed deprecatingly; murmured something a bit incoherent about the pleasure of letter-writing when one's heart was in the work, and out of the corner of his eye sought guidance from the girl. How far might he venture in this matter of his supposititious correspondence without hazarding the success of the game she was playing?

She slipped a hand through his arm with a pretty manner of proprietorship. "Spare his blushes, Mrs. Dunton!" she said lightly. "Anyway, why should we talk about letters, when we have their gifted author with us? It's like paying attention to the shadow when we have the substance before us."

Mrs. Dunton surveyed the pair with frank approval. "Well, you do look as if you were just made for each other. I'm afraid I wouldn't have known Hubert from his picture, but—"

"Oh, but he wore a mustache when it was taken," the girl put in.

Mrs. Dunton nodded.

"So he did, Margaret—anyway, there's a mustache in the picture. Still, you never can tell about the likeness. Seems to me, sometimes, photographs are like statistics—there's nothing quite so misleading. But now, dear, I'm going to ask you to excuse me for a moment. You'll want to have Hubert to yourself, and I can see him when he comes out to Templevale."

"But you'll lunch with me—with us," Tenney interposed.

"With the greatest pleasure!" the lady answered heartily. The pressure of the hand on his arm increased sharply, and the girl spoke with a fine air of decision.

"We'll go to Lavelli's. He can join us there, Mrs. Dunton. Yes; that will be quite the best arrangement. You see, Hubert"—for an instant she looked up at him meaningly—"you see, Mrs. Dunton and I have things to do—oh, most imperative things. And, as we are to meet again so soon, you won't think it utterly atrocious of us to run away for a little."

"But that's sheer cruelty!" the young man protested. Mrs. Dunton, however, was already turning away, with the docile obedience of one accustomed to yield to a stronger will.

"It's understood, then?" she said in parting. "At Lavelli's—at one o'clock, shall we say?

"And now I'll run along. You two certainly deserve a few minutes to yourselves after all these years of weary separation and waiting!"

Then, beaming benevolently, the elderly woman left them. The girl's hand dropped from Tenney's arm.

"If it will not inconvenience you," she said evenly, "I should like to remain here for a little. It will help to perfect the—the illusion."

"Whose victims include myself," Tenney suggested.

The line he had noted before showed again between her brows. "It was necessary—absolutely necessary—that I should meet a Hubert Tenney—"

"Herbert," he corrected.

"The published lists said Hubert, and it was Hubert I sought."

A sense of discontent filled Tenney. "I tried my best to be Hubert," he said. "And it wasn't my fault, you know, if the name was printed incorrectly. I didn't know, though, it was customary to put the lists in the newspapers."

"Perhaps it isn't. The Palatia was late, and there were rumors she'd met with an accident. Friends of the passengers began to worry, and the agents gave out the lists."

"I see. We were a couple of days overdue—trouble with the port engine, they said. But there was the wireless."

"It didn't help—for a time, at any rate."

Tenney considered briefly. "May I infer, then, that but for the publication, you would not have met the Palatia—and me?"

"The inference is correct."

"Then," quoth the young man genially, "I bless that balky port engine."

"You've slight cause to do so, I fear. And please don't treat this as a joke. It's a serious affair—terribly serious—for me."

"I regret that. I can only hope that—that—"

He paused; she looked the inquiry she would not put into words.

"I can only hope that in the case of the Tenneys the right of substitution is not barred."

"It is absolutely barred."

She spoke hastily, determinedly, perhaps defiantly. The young man smiled, but the smile did not reach his eyes.

"Pardon Herbert a question. Is there any Hubert—in the flesh?"

She threw back her head, and now there was open defiance in her voice. "The question is unwarranted; I shall not answer it. You've no ground for such a suspicion, no reason—"

There she checked herself, and her tone changed swiftly. "Forgive me! I'm showing slight remembrance of the great favor you've done me. I'm an unworthy debtor, an ingrate!"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Tenney with the fervor of his years.

"It is not nonsense; it is all true. I'm deeply in your debt—how deeply you can never know. Now that it is all over—"

Tenney broke in impatiently. "Pardon me! It's just beginning—for me. When we meet at lunch—"

Her quick gesture of dissent interrupted him. "We are not to meet again. You are not to be at Lavelli's at one o'clock."

"Oh, but I am!"

For an instant she hesitated. "No; Mr. Tenney, you must break the engagement. To keep it would be to undo all that you have done for me. We must part forever—here and now. It's ungrateful and cold and brutal for me to say these things, but they're true. Promise me you won't come to Lavelli's!"

There was a plea in her tone and a still more potent appeal in her eyes. It caught Tenney and held him.

"If—if there were any way—anybody to present me more conventionally—" he began, but she stopped him.

"There is no way—nobody." Suddenly she put out her hand. "You've proved my friend in what has been a crisis for me—I'd like to remember you as a friend. But if we were to meet again, you could be only my enemy."

Tenney had taken the hand, and was holding it with a grasp that was steadier than his voice.

"But there's Mrs. Dunton! What will she think of my desertion? At least, let me lunch with you. After that—why, we'll cross bridges when we come to them."

"No, no; you must not! In all kindness and mercy, promise me you won't come! This must be the end—for you and for me."

Tenney was gazing into those compelling eyes. "I—I promise," he said slowly and with all reluctance. "I'll break the luncheon engagement. But I won't promise not to hope I shall meet you again."

Her hand was withdrawn from his clasp.

"The promise you have given proves you most surely my true friend," she said. "The promise you won't give isn't necessary. Believe me, our paths lie far apart. Good-by, Mr. Tenney; good-by forever and ever!"

CHAPTER II.

The Defamatory Letter.

FOR twenty-four hours Herbert Tenney meditated with growing discontent the loneliness of a city of four million commonplace folk, the soul burden of hotel luxury, and the oppression of a lack of definite purpose in life.

To be sure, he might have started on the journey westward, which he must make in the course of the next week. He even sent for the railway folders.

But Templevale was among none of the stopping places on the great routes westward.

Tenney smoked a cigar and drifted into day-dreams, and in the smoke-rings he saw a face which was not Mrs. Dunton's—a face which had no need of mystery to add to its lure.

He sat up with a start and threw away his cigar.

His pledge had been limited to the broken engagement at Lavelli's. There was nothing to prevent a little investigation of the people who had figured in the comedy; possibly there might be found opportunity to make some sort of belated excuse to Mrs. Dunton.

Tenney buried himself in the depths of a huge railway guide. He found three or four Templevales, and settled upon the most promising, a residential town two hundred miles to the northeast of the city.

It was early evening when he arrived in the Templevale of his choice; and the street lights were beginning to twinkle when, having supped at a hotel, he set out for a ramble.

A diplomatic inquiry or two had brought him before a house, old-fashioned, rambling, hospitable; possibly in need of paint, but weather-tight and substantial. So much Tenney could perceive in the gathering dusk; and taking station near the gate, where a clump of shrubbery offered protection from observation, he studied the place more closely.

The crunch of gravel interrupted his meditations. The gate swung and a plump figure appeared, a figure he recognized, though the head was hidden in the swathings of a voluminous crocheted shawl. She was so close to his refuge that retreat was out of the question.

Besides, he was of opinion that here was an unexpected boon of fortune. He stepped forward briskly and put out his hand.

"My dear Mrs. Dunton," he said suavely, "this *is* delightful! What a happy chance this is! And you are well, I trust, and so is Miss—Miss Margaret?"

The lady addressed gave a start of surprise, peered hard at the young man, uttered an exclamation, stared at the outstretched hand, and suddenly and with decision put her own hands behind her.

"Mercy on us! but you here?" she said. "Of all the impu— But I won't say that. I guess it's part and parcel of the foreign ways you picked up, staying there as long as you did."

Tenney, naturally disappointed at the reception of his overtures, still contrived to grin amicably.

"I must apologize most humbly," he said. "It was atrocious of me to break that luncheon engagement. Awfully sorry—inexcusable, quite! I beg pardon a thousand times over. But there were circumstances I couldn't foresee —made it impossible — you understand."

"No, I can't say as I do," remarked the lady with unwonted briskness. "I thought it was downright mean; I think so still, especially after that letter that came to-day. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"But I am—thoroughly ashamed."

"And poor, dear, broken-hearted Margaret! It's a marvel how she bears up as well as she does."

Tenney felt like a pilot groping his way along a foggy channel. "Indeed! I hope, though, she is not—ah—ah—not seriously indisposed."

"Indisposed!" The head in the muffling wrap was tossed scornfully. "You might well choose a better word—you who write such letters!"

"Well, it wasn't well chosen, I'm afraid," admitted the still groping youth. "But I wasn't speaking so much of the letter as of my failure to meet you at luncheon. You know, I—I—"

Mrs. Dunton helped him out, though not in kindliness.

"I know this much: the letter explained why you didn't come to luncheon and a lot more besides. It explained all I want to know about you, Mr. Tenney. The things you said, and the cold-blooded way you put them! I wonder the earth doesn't open and swallow you up! Why, you said—you said—"

"Yes?" queried Tenney encouragingly.

The lady glared at him.

"Don't you remember what you said? If I'd written a letter like that, it would be branded right through the poor, thin, little soul of me."

Then the glare softened, because of the dimming of her eyes.

"It must have crushed Margaret, dear heart! I—I—" Here there came a resurgence of wrath. "Do you want to be reminded? Do you want to see that awful letter?"

"Very much, Mrs. Dunton," said Tenney, promptly and respectfully.

She uttered a sound which was very like a fortissimo sniff, swung on her heel and reentered the yard. "Come with me, then," she commanded; and the young man followed her to the house.

They climbed a short flight of steps, crossed a broad piazza, passed through a hall and reached a room, big, low-ceilinged, mildly illuminated by a shaded reading lamp.

Mrs. Dunton fumbled among the papers on a desk in a corner and, letter in hand, turned to him.

"Here it is—the poisonous thing!" she said. "Margaret left it with me, for I wanted to read it over, just to see how contemptible a man could be. No wonder you've tried to forget it! But, if you're willing to look at it again, here it is."

Tenney took the letter, and stepped nearer the lamp, bending down the better to examine the document.

It was written very legibly, in a small, clear hand of peculiar regularity. He ran his eye down the first page; then suddenly straightened his back and glanced at Mrs. Dunton, who at the moment presented a sorry picture.

The white wrap had slipped from her head and lay in a disordered mass upon her shoulders; the tears were welling again, and her lips were trembling.

"Have you seen—enough?" she demanded brokenly.

Tenney said "No, Mrs. Dunton," and said it quietly. Once more he bent over the letter, and this time he read it from beginning to end.

MY DEAR MARGARET:

I find myself confronted by a most distressful duty. Gladly would I shun it now, as I put it from me when I met you face to face; but what was perhaps excusable then, with your greetings still in my ears and your hand resting in mine, would be rank cowardice now, when the dictates of wisdom have asserted themselves.

So I hasten to my task. What I have to say is not to be broken gently. I ask you to relieve me from any engagement, into which you may regard me as having entered with yourself.

The situation is so clear to me that I trust you will have no difficulty in viewing it in the same reasonable light. A rash word or two, spoken in youthful folly, must not be suffered to lead to consequences we both might most deeply repent.

As always, I cherish for you respect and regard, but, unhappily, I cannot blind my-

self to the stern facts: there is too great a discrepancy in the lots Providence has assigned us in life to permit a marriage to be regarded by the world as other than a mesalliance. I realize that Mrs. Dunton, with high generosity, has accorded you a daughter's place in her household, and I lament that this—if you will pardon the expression—does not enable you to meet what I may call the acid test of the class among whom are my acquaintances and friends.

I realize, too, that my countrymen, except of that class of which I speak, do not openly accept the very just and sensible theory of the essential desirability of a dot; but I am firmly convinced, by my observations abroad, of the wisdom of the system.

I refer to this phase of the matter with reluctance, and only because I hope you may rise superior, as I have risen superior, to the provincial cant and prejudice of a new and raw country, which binds itself in chains to Mammon and then blatantly proclaims its freedom in all things.

The decision to tell you this, firmly if considerately, has been taking form in my mind for some months. If my tongue failed me when we met, you must deem it a temporary tribute to the memory of our old fondness rather than any substantial change in my well considered purpose. Intentionally I failed to join you at luncheon. Another meeting, I saw, could be but cruel kindness to either of us.

Will you be so good as to convey to Mrs. Dunton an expression of my esteem and regret that we may not improve our acquaintance? I beg you to accept for yourself assurances of the tender place our association shall hold in my recollection. And so, in profound sorrow that Fate has interposed an insurmountable bar between us, I subscribe myself your sincere friend,

HUBERT.

Tenney looked up, to find Mrs. Dunton watching him with pathetic eagerness. He folded the letter with great precision, marking the crease with a certain restrained savagery of movement. Mrs. Dunton dabbed her eyes with an end of the white shawl.

"Why—why don't you say something?" she quavered. "Of course, you can't deny you wrote it—the writing's just like that of all your other letters Margaret's shown me, but you might, at least, admit you felt the stirrings of shame!"

"I am ashamed of that letter."

Tenney spoke slowly, and there was the shadow of a frown on his face. "It's a beastly letter—come to read it over, you understand."

"But you don't try to deny it's yours. There wouldn't be any use. I —I'd recognize your hand wherever I saw it."

The frown deepened.

"Yes, it is not a common hand, I admit," said Tenney. "It's out of the usual run—easily identified, I fancy. Only about those other letters now—if you happened to have any of them with you, you know. If I might see—"

He heard a step in the hall, and paused. Then he turned toward the door. The girl was standing there, her face as white as the dress she wore.

CHAPTER III.

Under False Pretenses.

MRS. DUNTON was the first to break the silence and relieve the tension of the situation by action. She hurried to the girl, threw a protecting arm about her, and fell to patting her shoulder lovingly.

"Don't be afraid, deary! He sha'n't hurt you. And you needn't speak to the monster. Go to your room, and I'll attend to him. There, there! Don't cry, precious!"

The girl gently extricated herself from the encircling arm. She took a step forward, her gaze fixed on Tenney and the fateful letter, which he held.

She was still very pale, but her eyes were blazing.

"Why did you come here?" she asked, her voice low but vibrant. "Why should you pursue me—persecute me? I had thought you a man of honor, a gentleman."

"Not—not after he wrote that awful letter!" Mrs. Dunton put in hysterically.

Tenney felt his cheeks redden. "But, Mrs. Dunton, I haven't said—"

There he broke off abruptly. The wrath was gone from the girl's eyes, and in its place was something he did not understand, save that he read in it a warning and a plea.

"You have read it — read it through?"

Tenney bowed. "From end to end," he said.

"And he's had the grace, at least, to admit he's ashamed of himself," Mrs. Dunton contributed.

"Oh!" To Tenney's ear the cry was freighted with a curious relief.

"Why, to tell the truth," said he, "anybody—any decent citizen, I mean —would have to be ashamed of it— reading it over, you know. It's stilted and selfish—and—and scoundrelly."

"Then why did you write it?" demanded Mrs. Dunton.

Tenney dodged the pertinent inquiry, delaying reply till he had sought inspiration from those speaking eyes.

"I suppose everybody has his crazy hours; it's said we're all a little mad, you know. Everybody is sorry afterward for things he does. Then he tries to make amends as well as he can."

"But you—you came here!" cried the girl reproachfully.

Tenney was seized by an inspiration. "Of course I came. And I came to withdraw that letter. Let us assume that it never was written. Behold!"

The girl guessed his intention and sprang toward him—too late. He had torn the sheet in two, crumpled the fragments, and tossed them into the fireplace.

"There!" he said with a touch of triumph. "That infernal thing is out of the way, destroyed. It's asking a deal, I know; but I do ask you from the bottom of my heart to try to forget that ever it was written."

The girl had clasped her hands; her expression, as he noted with unflattering certainty, bespoke consternation.

"But we can't forget! It's impossible! You don't realize — you don't understand."

"I understand what I wish to do," said Tenney. "It has been done in part. Won't you help me do the rest?"

"Never!"

But aid for the young man was at hand. Mrs. Dunton, the benevolent well-wisher for her kind, interposed.

"Now, now, Margaret; don't say that! After all you've been to each other, you can't dismiss him with a word. No, no! I know what you're thinking, and I don't blame you — he has behaved abominably. But now he's repentant, and you must give him a hearing, anyway. I'm going to leave you two—to yourselves—to make your peace, if you can—and kiss and make up!"

With which kindly pronouncement, being in one of her rare moods of high decision, Mrs. Dunton laid hand on the door and closed it behind her with something very like a bang. Tenney turned to the girl.

"Perhaps I should not have intruded myself upon you," he said. "But I'm here and — and — well, shouldn't we make the best of it?"

"Your promise!" she said bitterly. "You gave it, and I trusted you!"

"I kept my promise—to cut the luncheon. There was nothing in the pledge about Templevale. And Mrs. Dunton had spoken of my coming here."

"You spoiled everything—ruined everything!"

"Not with intention."

"But not the less utterly."

"But perhaps out of the wreck I can help you to build anew."

She dropped upon the old davenport and buried her face in her arms. Convulsive sobs shook the slender figure.

Tenney gazed at her ruefully for a moment, crossed the room, and stared industriously into the darkness beyond one of the deep windows. A long time he stood there, motionless, until he was satisfied that her sobbing had ceased.

Then he turned and slowly retraced his steps. She lay very quietly now, but her face was still hidden from him.

"I don't know just how to begin,"

he said gently; "but, evidently, we must make a start somewhere, if we are to come to an understanding. On the pier I took the rôle of another man. I was presented as the other man to Mrs. Dunton. I appear here, and am confronted with a letter purporting to be signed by the other man. In the circumstances, it seems to be incumbent upon me to accept responsibility for the letter. Now, I wonder if you'll tell me who the other man is."

No answer from the recumbent figure.

"Or where he is."

"I can't tell you—I won't!"

"Then will you answer another question: Is there *any* Hubert Tenney in the flesh?"

She raised her head from the pillows and met his glance unwaveringly. "I shall not tell you. Why should you, a stranger, expect me to do so?"

"Unfortunately I have been a stranger, but I hope to cure the fault."

"That may not be. You could not serve me better than by leaving me instantly and forever."

There was hint of doggedness in Tenney's air. "I can't run away—I wouldn't if I could. I'm too interested in the game and too deeply involved in the play."

"The game! The play!" she repeated. "If you know what a play in deadly earnest it has been for me—what it has meant to me! For years I've been like one ever beset by danger, barely escaping one trap after another.

"And at last I thought I had found a way to safety. It was a desperate chance, but I took it, and for a day believed I had won through. But now you come—to spoil it all—to make my last state worse than the first."

"I can't agree to that," Tenney protested. "I'm ready to do anything to help you—except go away. You know, I've practically fathered that infamous letter and then destroyed it. You know—"

She laughed bitterly. "That letter! There you dealt me a cruel blow!"

"I? I dealt you a blow?"

"Blindly, perhaps, but crushingly. That letter was written with a purpose; it was an essential part of my plan. And now you appear to tear down in an instant all I have laboriously built up!"

She sprang to her feet and took a step toward him almost threateningly. "Oh, that letter—that miserable letter! I wrote it myself! Now do you understand?"

Tenney hesitated an instant.

"I understand, at least, that the ghost of a Hubert is laid pretty effectually. So you were the writer? And there were other letters, which came before, in the same hand? Mrs. Dunton told me, you know. You wrote them all, of course?"

"All—every one."

The young man took a turn the length of the room and back.

"It's dawning on me," he said. "Hubert the ghost answers for correspondence treatment, but a flesh and blood person has to be exhibited—once, let us say—to Mrs. Dunton. Once exhibited, he's expected to retire permanently from the scene. Turning up here, I spoil that part of the arrangement.

"That is, I spoil it, unless you'll suffer me to play the Hubert rôle for a while and then withdraw as gracefully as I may. I own I don't see how I'll fill the bill convincingly without your cooperation. Give me that and—"

"Oh, but I cannot!"

"Pardon me, but I think you can. You've merely to go on as we are, giving me a sort of qualified acceptance as Hubert, who has been behaving badly and is now properly penitent. I'll try to justify your clemency. Of course, you might turn me off—send me away to-night; but I—well, frankly, I wish you wouldn't. I'd like to clear myself in some degree of the odium Mrs. Dunton must attach to the author of that fiendish letter. Besides, there's another thing."

"And that?" There was doubt in her expression, perhaps suspicion.

Tenney's smile combined the ingenuous and the ingratiating.

"You're in a fix of some sort. I don't know what it is; you haven't been precisely specific, you understand. And when I've talked of helping you I've been rather general in my remarks, necessarily. Now, if I could linger a little — why, you never can tell what may happen, what chance may arise. Having smashed your plans and behaved like a bull in a china-shop, I might be able to patch up some of the fragments."

He had hoped for an answering smile, but there was none.

"No; I cannot take you into my confidence," she said. "The situation is impossible. You're here under false pretenses—"

"Exactly! As an impostor!" Tenney put in. "Still, why can't I be a well-meaning, tolerated impostor? You can dismiss me at any time; you've only to fall back on that letter and declare that I haven't been able to satisfy you I didn't mean it. And as for the false pretenses — well, they've been going on so long for the ghost Hubert that it can't do much harm to maintain them a day or two for a masquerading Hubert. Naturally, you'd be giving the fellow a chance to make good—to render the play effectively realistic, you know."

Somebody in the hall coughed loudly and warningly.

The door opened and the head of Mrs. Dunton appeared. A glance at the pair in the room seemed to end her doubts. The door swung farther, and the plump mistress of the household was fully revealed.

Man and maid were standing near each other, to all appearances engaged in amicable conversation. Mrs. Dunton beamed expansively.

"Oh, I knew you two'd make it up," she declared vivaciously. "Of course you would! I just felt in my bones you'd see the trouble was all a mistake and straighten everything out. And so you've agreed and made peace again, haven't you?"

The girls lips moved, but Tenney spoke first.

"There's a truce, at least, Mrs. Dunton."

"Good!" cried the lady.

She advanced toward them, benevolence writ large on every feature. "Good, I say! A truce is a step on the right road, anyway. Oh, I knew what would happen, and I've prepared for it. I've sent to the hotel for your things, Hubert; for you'll be my guest while you're in Templevale. There, there! Not a word, not a word! Of course, you'll stay with us—I insist, positively insist!"

CHAPTER IV.

Complications.

AFTERNOON of the following day found Tenney in cheery mood and keen enjoyment of the part he was playing.

He had done very well, he thought, all things considered, and had filled a difficult rôle with what he flattered himself was distinguished success. To be sure, in his discussions with his hostess, he had found himself now and then skating on thin ice, so to speak; but the ice, if thin, had held until he could escape to safer footing.

Luckily for him, as it appeared, the reports of Hubert's doings abroad had been characterized by a degree of vagueness which was now to help Hubert's impersonator amazingly.

It was not hard to discourse airily of life in great capitals and incidents of travel afloat and ashore, or to dwell upon the charms of existence on the other side. Hubert, evidently, had been supposed to enjoy Europe in a somewhat aimless, lackadaisical fashion, settling down now and then for a few months of study, with rather purposeless tours between his intervals of industry.

Some things Tenney had seen; others he could imagine. By permitting Mrs. Dunton to lead in the conversation he got along famously, and stretched his three months' observation of foreign lands and peoples to cover as many supposititious years.

Perforce the girl was his ally in this. Against her will she had been driven to tell him something of the career of Hubert, who was depicted as a youth of fortune and artistic taste and no encumbering relations, who had gone abroad for a year and had remained for several, postponing his return sometimes with a reason and sometimes without one.

Mrs. Dunton, in fact, referred feelingly to the disappointments Margaret had experienced because of the vacillations of her suitor. Why, there had been trips to New York to meet him, only to discover too late that he had changed his plans.

Tenney made excuse for these remissions with such grace as he could attain, and was assisted by the generally forgiving humor of Mrs. Dunton in this hour of reconciliation.

The girl puzzled him. By every evidence, here was a young person, in health, normal; truthful; leading a sane, if commonplace, existence; without cause for deceit or guile. Yet, as he knew, she had built up an elaborate fabric of deception, had invented a romance and maintained it for years.

Bit by bit, he gleaned some slight knowledge of her history.

She was Margaret Drake — it was not until that morning that he had learned her surname; she was twenty-four; there was no bond of kinship between herself and Mrs. Dunton, who, however, seemed to be devotedly attached to her. And the girl was fond of her protectress; of that there could be no doubt.

Why, then, should she have chosen to live a lie, apparently with sole purpose to mislead the woman upon whose bounty she depended?

Tenney studied this problem and studied the girl, marking with wonder her poise and composure.

In the presence of Mrs. Dunton her manner toward him was precisely what it should be, given such conditions as were assumed to exist. There was a certain reserve in it, fully justified, in view of the fact that he posed as a suitor who, having grossly offended, now sought pardon.

He was on probation, and she bore herself accordingly, guardedly, but without reproach or vindictiveness. When the hovering and solicitous mistress of the mansion left them together the girl drew farther into her shell, and his efforts to draw her out again were wasted.

"Good grit—fine thing!" Tenney reflected admiringly. Indeed, the mystery about her was serving to increase the hold she had taken upon his fancy.

It was the heart of a warm and sunny afternoon, and they had the wide piazza to themselves. Tenney, permitted to smoke, was stretched luxuriously in a deep arm-chair.

On the other side of a tiny work-table sat the girl, busying herself with some pretty trifle of feminine adornment. Tenney watched the deft movements of the tapering fingers; he considered the clean-cut profile, the rounded chin; he told himself that he was perhaps an adventurer who was faring beyond his deserts.

The girl broke the silence. Her work dropped to her lap, and she turned toward him.

"How long do you expect this to go on—as it is?" She spoke somewhat quickly, but evenly and with a hint of the determination of one who has reached a decision.

"How long?" Tenney repeated. "Why, it has just begun. I confess I've been living strictly in the immediate present."

The fine line he had noted before showed between the arched brows. "There must be an end, a speedy end. It's all wrong. And it doesn't help."

"I hope it may."

"No, no—impossible!"

"Pardon me if I doubt that."

"It's an abuse of hospitality."

"Guilty!" said Tenney. "Guilty, but with extenuating circumstances."

"There can be none."

Tenney sat straighter in his chair. "At least, you may hold yourself blameless in that respect," he said a little stiffly. "I am not here at your invitation, I confess."

"But I can't shirk the responsibility."

"Mrs. Dunton was not to be denied."

"She believed she was serving me."

"She certainly was doing me a very friendly service."

There was the briefest of pauses. Then said the girl:

"Mr. Tenny, there can be but one result. You must go away. The letter you saw was meant to put Hubert out of my life forever. You have brought him back, but you have not changed the conditions."

"If I knew more about them—"

"I can tell you nothing."

It was the young man's turn to hesitate. "What would you have me do to explain my retreat? How could I bring it about—naturally and realistically, you know?"

"I will arrange everything. We fail of a real reconciliation. We can quarrel, if need be. You can stalk away in a passion."

"But I'd have to bid farewell to Mrs. Dunton—to thank her—to show some lingering shreds of courtesy and decency!"

"You can make the parting brief. I'll supply the—the—"

"Foot-notes?" Tenney suggested grimly.

"Call them what you please. They will be merely a trifle in a great total of deceit."

The young man leaned toward her; his hands were gripping the arms of the big chair.

"Why add even the trifle?" he asked earnestly. "Why not let things continue in *statu quo* for a while? You can't tell—there's always a chance, as I've said. And as for your plan—well, there's an obstacle. It takes two to make a quarrel. I'm peaceable; I won't fight. Why should I?"

"I'll invent a cause. We'll follow the line of that letter. You've seen me in my home—it's the only place I can call home—and once more you are convinced there is too wide a gap between our stations in life."

"Confound that rubbish! Pardon me, but that's such utter nonsense, you know!"

"Not from Hubert's point of view."

"I'm Herbert, then, for the moment."

"You cannot be, even for a moment. You are here as Hubert Tenney, and you must act the part consistently."

"And if I decline to do so?"

"Then," she said unhappily, "there can be for me only full revelation, exposure, disgrace; loss of friends, of a roof to shelter me; poverty—yes, starving poverty. Do you know what that is? Have you ever felt its crushing grip?

She clasped her hands to her heaving bosom, and gazed at him with appealing eyes.

"Can you imagine what it must mean to one like me, untrained, unskilled, helpless? Why do you condemn me to such a fate? Why do you sacrifice me to gratify a whim? For you this is a trifling incident, an amusing farce; for me it's a tragedy."

Tenney got upon his feet. He took a step toward her, halted, and looked down at the bowed figure.

"I am in your hands," he said gravely. "I confess, I hadn't guessed the affair was so critical for you. You wrong me, though, in one respect. I don't find this a trifling incident, a merely amusing farce. It's more than that to me; it's going to be a vital

chapter in my life. I want to prove myself your friend. I believe I can, but I must leave the decision to you. Bid me go, and I shall obey. Grant me another day—just one day—and I may make you believe as I believe. The scene is set; we can carry on the play."

"I can't endure the strain—it's breaking me."

"I trust," Tenney said contritely, "you will forgive my blindness. It seemed to me—I didn't understand—I thought you mistress of the situation."

"It has been torture!"

"Then it shall be ended, when and as you will. Shall I go at once to Mrs. Dunton to make my adieu? Shall I tell her—"

He broke off abruptly; for, with a half suppressed cry, the girl had risen and caught at the little table for support. Her cheek had paled, and she was trembling.

Tenney, following the direction of her gaze, saw a man entering the gate, a tall man, broad of shoulder, young, well dressed, carrying a valise. Then, turning to his companion, he read in her face a dread which moved him to swift and impulsive speech.

"Give me the day I've asked! You fear that fellow more than you fear me. Let me be your ally against him."

With a mighty effort of will she regained self-control. "How can you be my ally? That man knows too much; he suspects more."

"Put me to the test," Tenney urged. "It will be, at least, one man against another."

"Finding you here—"

"He will find Hubert."

"Whose existence he has doubted."

"Then his doubts must fall. He can't deny the evidence of sight and hearing. Who is the fellow?"

"Roy Trachtman, Mrs. Dunton's nephew and confidential agent and man of affairs."

"He has seen me—I'll have to be explained. Better let me make the explanations personally."

An instant she hesitated. The newcomer was advancing along the graveled path. He raised his hat and called out a greeting, gay and familiar—too familiar, it seemed, to Tenney's critical ear.

"Surprise for the surpriser! Margie, this is good fortune indeed! I'd hardly dared hope to find you waiting to bid me welcome."

"You may stay—for a little—but only for a little," she murmured to Tenney. Then, smiling brightly, she moved to meet Trachtman and extend fitting greetings to the confidential agent of the house of Dunton.

CHAPTER V.

Roy Trachtman.

TENNEY, it may be, would have received with reservations any young man appearing upon the scene at this stage in the proceedings, but he found himself disposed to dislike Roy Trachtman.

He took exception to the newcomer's manner, to his countenance, to his voice, to the unnecessary seconds for which he held the girl's hand, to his method of declaring his pleasure at making the acquaintance of Mr. Tenney.

There was the slightest of pauses, a barely perceptible raising of the eyebrows, a smile—bland, perhaps, yet robbed of a trifle of its suavity. None of these things were quite as they should be.

"Ah, yes; Mr. Tenney, Mr. Tenney." Trachtman repeated the name, and his smile broadened. It showed teeth, white, strong, even — and showed too much of them. "Truly, this is an unforeseen pleasure."

"Mr. Tenney came over in the Palatia," said the girl. "She was two or three days overdue, you know."

"The delay was not serious—merely annoying," Tenney contributed.

"And the old rule that all's well that ends well still holds," said Trachtman smoothly. "What one has to wait for should be the more appreciated. Of course, after so long a waiting—so many years, indeed—it may have seemed like piling up the agony to be held up at the very last even for a day or two—separation makes the heart grow fonder, I've been told. But, after all, one may forget past disappointments in the joyous present."

"One may," said Tenney dryly. There was in the other's eye a flicker of cynical amusement he found intensely exasperating. Miss Drake came to the rescue.

"The delay had its compensations. It gave us an opportunity to go to New York to meet him. We had hoped to find you, Mr. Trachtman, for your aunt was anxious to see you—on business matters, I believe. You weren't at your office, though."

"No; I've been out of town more or less lately," Trachtman responded. He added a dutiful expression of solicitude for his aunt's health, Tenney improving the opportunity to survey critically this new factor in his problem.

Trachtman, he was forced to confess, was by no means a bad-looking fellow, though more pleasing in general appearance than in detail of feature or expression.

His eyes were a bit overbold, his mouth hard, his cheek bones too prominent, his forehead high but narrow. He might be an able man, but Tenney declined to believe him one to be much troubled by scruples. His garb bespoke not only prosperity but also an unusual degree of care and wisdom in the selection of his tailor.

Tenney had heard enough to realize he was an important person in the family counsels, and the thought irked him exceedingly. A fellow like that might cause a deal of unnecessary trouble in a household, might be prone to interfere in concerns by no means his.

At this point in his reflections, however, Trachtman chose to make his excuses and go in search of his aunt, declining the girl's assistance in the task.

Oh, no; he had no need of help; he knew the house perfectly; he could not think of tearing Miss Drake from the society of Mr. Tenney. He seemed to dwell with a little unnecessary emphasis upon the latter name, and, grinning in a fashion Tenney regarded as especially unpleasant, disappeared through the doorway.

For a moment there was silence on the piazza. Tenney glanced inquiringly at his companion, whose expression gave him scant comfort. Relieved of the need Trachtman's presence imposed, she looked perturbed and uncertain.

"What is there we can do?" he asked at last.

"Would that I knew! His coming is frightfully unfortunate."

"Why should it be?" Tenney spoke with a touch of elation, to be accounted for only on the ground that she had not rebelled at his coupling of their interests in the emergency.

"For many reasons. I've told you he suspects too much, guesses too closely at the truth. Then, there's his influence with his aunt, his power over her."

"But not over you."

She shook her head. "Unhappily, I am in his power, in some measure."

"Does that inevitably follow?"

"Inevitably."

Tenney's gravity matched her own.

"I think," he said slowly, "I think it might be better for you to give me more of your confidence, to put more trust in my discretion. We'll have to face this fellow, we'll have to play the game as partners."

Again he was cheered by her acceptance of the alliance, but he went on as soberly as before:

"We'll have to do the best we can

with the cards we hold, we'll have to have team-play. Consider, now! You may not know me well, but, at least, you don't fear me—as you fear him, I mean."

She met his gaze frankly.

"That is true: I don't fear you personally. It isn't that you especially are here as Hubert Tenney; it would be as bad were some one else in your place. It's because anybody is here—and is found here by Roy Trachtman! We can't maintain the decepton—with him."

"Yet how can we avoid attempting to do so?"

"I don't know."

"We must have some plan, some definite understanding," he insisted. "There's Mrs. Dunton to be considered. Remember how far we've gone with her—she mustn't be disillusioned. As for Trachtman—why, we must find some way to choke him off—drive him off—buy him off."

"I fear he is not for sale." The color was creeping into her cheek and she spoke more quickly. "Not that he's unmercenary, but—but in this case he might be hard to influence."

Tenney's air grew dogged. "Nevertheless, I urge some definite arrangement. Mrs. Dunton, I infer, will inform him of the situation—as she understands it."

"Undoubtedly. She has no secrets from him."

"Then," said the young man with decision, "the plot of the story is arranged for us. We're in the hands of Fate. I continue Hubert, no matter what he suspects or knows, until—until you choose to dismiss me."

For a little she regarded him searchingly. "It may be Fate, as you say. It may be wise; it may be mad—I don't know which it will prove—but I see no other course."

Tenney's face brightened. "We'll be like the old-time sailors," he cried. "We'll make a fair wind out of a foul."

She declined to share his optimism. "You don't understand," she said ruefully. "Any wind that blows for us now may drive us to shipwreck on the rocks."

CHAPTER VI.

The Chains of Debt.

A VERY excellent supper—a most appetizing repast, indeed—spread by Mrs. Dunton in honor of her guests, was wasted upon one of them.

Tenney, to be sure, ate what was put before him, but he ate mechanically, unappreciatively, with scant thought of food or drink and an obsessing sense of the one great duty of vigilance. He must play his part, and play it to the life.

In this matter that gentleman proved of unexpected assistance. Trachtman chose to take the lead in the conversation. To do him justice, he talked well, when he chose; and this night he exerted himself to the utmost.

So far as Margaret and Tenney were concerned, there was a subtle difference in his bearing, a difference hard to analyze and harder to endure. Yet, if Tenney felt the difference, it seemed to be impossible to resent it. The veiled amusement in his eyes was, after all, veiled in a fashion to escape Mrs. Dunton.

Only once, however, could the critic charge Trachtman with a deliberate attempt to entrap him.

In the midst of a spirited description of a public function of somewhat barbaric magnificence, the narrator broke off abruptly and turned to Tenney.

"I fear this sounds very pale and mild and tame to you," he said apologetically. "Our city fathers did their best, but after the coronation festivities— You enjoyed them greatly, I believe?"

Lucky for Tenney was it that he was on his guard. "The coronation?" he repeated and gained a precious second.

"Pardon me, but you're in error. I didn't chance to be in London at the time."

"Indeed!" Trachtman was watching him closely. "My mistake, of course. Still, I'd an impression you were there—from what I heard of your letters, you know."

"I was at sea when they were making a king."

"Oh! At sea?"

Trachtman's lips curled, and Tenney caught the characteristic and unpleasant gleam of teeth, though he could take no exception to the remark. "That wasn't so bad, perhaps. One can be at sea—a little at sea, so to speak—and still fare not so badly."

From across the table the girl offered a suggestion. "Hubert heard a great deal about the coronation and wrote about it; that was the way, as I recall. Of course, it must have been."

"Oh, of course!" chimed in Trachtman readily; but Mrs. Dunton was less easily satisfied to drop the topic.

"Why, now, that's very funny," she said, wrinkling her brow. "If Margaret weren't so sure—and, naturally, she'd remember best—if she weren't so positive Hubert wasn't in London, I should have said he was. But, then, I don't know—sometimes it's as if I couldn't recall anything accurately. That's one of the reasons, Margaret dear, I have to rely on you for so many things."

"Permit me to envy your support!" quoth Trachtman lightly. He was still smiling—less cynically, it seemed to Tenney. "But to go back to my narrative."

And he plunged again into his recital of civic splendors, carrying it through with a dash and a spirit which won Tenney's grudging admiration. Trachtman, he reached the conclusion, was a good actor—a fellow who chose to mask a sullen disposition under an assumption of bonhomie, and who succeeded marvelously.

He looked, too, like a man who was accustomed to rule others, to carry his point, to win his fights. He had the air of success, possibly unscrupulous success, but still success.

Tenney carried this thought with him when they left the table, and found scant comfort in it when the four settled themselves in the deep chairs on the piazza.

It continued to trouble him while he smoked what should have proved to be a very good cigar and listened to the purr of the well-content Mrs. Dunton, who had fallen to his lot by what he was quite sure was not an accident. Trachtman and the girl were at a little distance from them, and he could hear the murmur of their voices, though both were lowered so that he could not catch their words had he chosen to try to play eavesdropper.

Mrs. Dunton was running on tirelessly, dealing with a theme which, under happier auspices, he might have found absorbing—the manifold perfections of Margaret Drake, her patience and sweetness and loyalty and loveliness.

All this was good to hear, but what concerned him more was that Trachtman and the girl had risen and moved to the far end of the porch. He watched them out of the corner of an eye and, despite the dusk, perceived that the man was talking earnestly while the girl listened with half-averted head.

Mrs. Dunton wriggled herself out of her chair and got upon her feet with a sigh.

"You'll have to excuse me a moment, Hubert," she said. "Norah has been with me twenty years; but I always make it a point to put away the silver myself." She paused. "You are going to make it up, aren't you—you two?"

"I—I hope so, Mrs. Dunton," said Tenney soberly.

There was another pat on his shoulder, and she left him to endure certain prickings of conscience for the part he was playing in the deception

of so worthy a soul. He pulled hard at his cigar, glared at the tall figure at the end of the porch, and sprang to his feet.

He strode down the steps and across the lawn, halting only when he came to a boundary hedge. There he turned, but did not immediately retrace his course. It had occurred to him that, after all, he was little more than a pawn in the game they were engaged in, and youth receives such ideas with resentment and bitterness.

Presently he left his lonely refuge, though it was not allowed him to leave there his recent unflattering reflections. Still bearing the burden of them, he moved toward the house, going slowly and heavily and keeping his gaze upon the porch-end. In the increasing darkness the two figures there were barely discernible.

As he neared the steps the voice of Trachtman rose sharply and angrily; there was the sound of something like a struggle. Tenney quickened his pace.

He was almost at the foot of the steps when the girl appeared at the top of them. She hurried down the short flight with reckless speed; for on the lowest she seemed to stumble. She pitched forward, but Tenney was in time to catch her.

For an instant his arm was about her and he held her close.

He marked her panting breath, he felt the swift beating of her heart, he knew she was clinging to him as one in fear clings to a protector. His pulse quickened, the arm about the slender figure tightened; he was no longer merely a pawn in the game.

From the vantage-ground of the piazza Trachtman looked down and saw them standing there, rescued and rescuer, and laughed jeeringly.

"Verily, Mr. Tenney, you were where you were needed most," he said. "She'd have come a nasty header but for you. Still, I wonder if you don't specialize in the opportune appearance."

"Sometimes," said Tenney, "I happen to be in time."

The girl had slipped from his arm, but stood beside him, facing Trachtman.

"My heel caught," she said a little unsteadily. "I—I was abominably careless. But you are quite right—Mr. Tenney saved me."

Trachtman descended the steps and kicked a little strip of metal projecting above the lowest.

"Ah, the old scraper was the man-trap," he observed. "Beastly dangerous affair, at that. All out of date, too, like the haircloth and the thank-you-ma'ams in the road—all relics of the past, the inconvenient, straight-laced past, when one was expected to walk the narrow path and keep the feet clean if one was to enter a friendly home, and observe the speed laws and the laws of hospitality. Not much fun or excitement in living then, I fancy. We do better nowadays—that is, unless some of those forgotten obstacles or notions rise to bother us."

Tenney said something between his teeth—something hasty and heated, but not quite intelligible.

His pulse was still bounding and a curious content with existence as a whole was mingled with wrath at this coolly insolent and capable opponent. Trachtman laughed his jeering laugh and leisurely ascended the steps, paused very briefly at the door, and then, whistling softly, entered the house.

Tenney glanced at the girl and saw that she was trembling.

"You've got to let me help you—now," he said eagerly. "Whatever he has done, he's forcing the play. We can't let him have all the moves. What has he been doing? Something Machiavelian, I'll be bound!"

"He knows more than I even suspected. And he doesn't hesitate to threaten to use his knowledge."

"To force you to do things you don't wish to do?"

"He offered terms, with a penalty

if I rejected them. First, I was to send you away—"

"And you refused?" Tenney broke in.

"I hadn't answered definitely when he made his next demand. After that I—I ran away from him. He tried to—to detain me."

"So I guessed," said Tenney grimly.

There was a pause, a long pause. Then said the girl, with a manifest effort:

"He is willing to marry me. It is the price—the price I must pay. And I—I hate him!"

"But why must you pay the price?"

She clasped her hands, with a quick, despairing gesture.

"It's because of the money—the chains of debt that bind me. It's a great sum, a terrible sum! Thousands and thousands of dollars, he declares."

CHAPTER VII.

Margaret's Confession.

IN his observation of the Dunton place Tenney had made note of a summer-house in a corner of the grounds, a rustic affair whose designer seemed to have had a pagoda in mind as a model and to have lacked courage to carry out his conceit. The result was a hideously ugly little structure, but one now offering the very desirable boon of privacy.

"We're going to hold a council of war," he said to the girl. "Come with me, please."

She made no response, but followed while he led the way; nor did the young man speak again until she was seated on the bench built against the wall of the summer-house and he had taken station at the entrance, as if to prevent her flight, should she be so disposed.

"You've referred to a debt," he said. "That, of course, implies a debtor, who is—"

"Mrs. Dunston."

"For money advanced to you—lent to you?"

"Expended for me."

"Thousands and thousands of dollars expended in your behalf?" Tenney said questioningly. "That must cover a considerable period."

"Three years—a little more than three years."

"In which you've lived with her, as you're living with her now—on about the same scale of expense, I mean?"

"Yes."

Tenney rubbed his chin in perplexity.

"You puzzle me," he admitted. "Not that I know much about such things, but the total must have mounted amazingly, considering—well, considering what you've had, to put it bluntly. This is an awfully comfortable old place, you know—I like it immensely—but it isn't palatial."

"Oh, but there were other things—clothes, lessons—she insisted I must have the most expensive masters—travel, and the rest. It must have counted up frightfully. Still, I didn't dream it—it was so staggering, until he told me to-night."

"What did he say the debt was?"

"Over twenty thousand dollars," she said desperately. "And I—I've not a penny I can honestly call my own!"

Tenney left the entrance and settled himself on the bench at a little distance from her. His movements were marked by a certain deliberation.

"If you will be so good," he said quietly, "I wish you'd enlighten me farther. How did this arrangement come about?"

"I'd been her companion, an employed companion. Then she practically adopted me. After that I seemed to be swept along by the tide of her generosity."

"But generosity implies gifts, not claims and accounts and debts to be paid."

"There is a debt, a debt of honor—if there can be honor in such a deception as I have practised!"

Tenney bent toward her. "I decline to believe the case is as black as you paint it. There must be some excuse, some reason, some—"

"There was a reason. Mrs. Dunton was determined to fit me to become a worthy mate for Hubert Tenney."

"Who didn't exist!" The young man spoke impetuously, yet with a touch of alarm.

"Who existed only in my imagination—and hers."

Tenney sank back in his seat. "Go on, please. This romance had a cause. What was it?"

"Fear! Fear of want—something you've never known as I have known it. And I'd tried—tried so hard! But what could I do? Other girls were self-supporting, but they had training, skill, experience. Willingness to work would not make amends for ignorance.

"And the need came so suddenly—there was no hint, no warning. I had been living with an aunt; I had supposed her well-to-do; we lived very simply, but she never told me about her affairs.

"Then there was an accident. My aunt had a fall; there were internal injuries; she—she was taken from me. Then I learned that we had been living on her life-interest in an estate. There was nothing for me."

"But you had kinsfolk, friends?"

"None to whom I could turn at such a time. We had lived very quietly—in retirement, almost. We had no intimates. There were distant cousins, whom I had never seen. I was too proud to appeal to them; for I had pride—then. I'd yet to learn my lesson of helplessness."

"But you found a friend in Mrs. Dunton."

"She was to prove the best and most unselfish friend in the world. That came afterward, though. In the beginning I was in her pay—her service—half companion, half nurse. She was an invalid in a way, not seriously ill, you know, but ailing, fretful, unhappy."

"A hypochondriac?"

"Perhaps."

"Then a wonderful cure has been wrought. If you're responsible for it the debt should be on the other side."

"She lacked interests, things to take her out of herself," said the girl. "The doctor took me aside and urged me to supply the want—anything, he said, that would make her think of somebody else. That really led to the trouble; for, unwittingly, I made her find a new interest in my fortunes and misfortunes.

"Her curiosity was roused, and so was her imagination. The poor, little story I had to tell was not enough; she was sure there must be a secret romance. It was easier to let her believe this than to persuade her of her error.

"The doctor told me I was doing her more good than his drugs could; and so I suffered her to go on, adding chapter and chapter to the romance, while I contented myself with weak denials which merely added to her certainty. So the tale grew and grew along familiar lines."

"Yes," said Tenney encouragingly.

"The prince and the beggar maid! Could you ask a plot more fascinating?"

"I might," said Tenney with meaning.

"Not for the beggar maid or her confidante. And so the prince, very vague at first, took form. He had to be in Europe—far off, you know. Then his stay there had to be accounted for. Then he had to be described more and more minutely. He was young and handsome and rich and proud. There had to be letters from him."

She paused briefly.

"There—there *were* letters. They served their purpose only too well.

Mrs. Dunton was charmed with Prince Charming. She must see his photograph—of course I had it. I put her off with one pretext or another—or, rather, tried to put her off. She took the disappointment to heart; she grew worse; the doctor blamed me. Then I—I showed her a picture. I'd bought it from a photographer in the city."

Tenney moved closer. "I don't blame you," he said simply.

"But I had full cause to blame myself and repent. That photograph made a strange difference—it seemed to make Prince Charming very real, certainly for Mrs. Dunton, almost for me. For her it was like a magic completion of her cure. She was no longer a self-centered invalid, but a woman with a definite and absorbing purpose—to prepare me for my honors as the prince's bride.

"We ended the old relation of mistress and companion. She told me she regarded me as a daughter. And I—I hadn't the courage to tell her the truth. I tried to and failed miserably. I was afraid of the world outside.

"Then one false step came fast upon another. I must cultivate my music—she sent me to a famous teacher. I protested faintly, and she overruled me. Next it was painting, then languages—Prince Charming's princess must be a polyglot.

"She must see something of the world, so we traveled a great deal, but not across seas; even Mrs. Dunton's devotion was not equal to an ocean voyage. Then the future princess must be suitably attired. There were trousseaux—yes, two or three of them.

"You see the prince wrote now and then of an intention to return to this country. Those letters marked intervals of remorse when I had determined to end it all at any cost; and she was equally determined that I should go to him bedecked in the latest mode."

"But he didn't come?"

"No; in each instance my courage failed. There was a letter instead. He had been detained; once he was ill; again it was an invitation to join a yachting party in the Mediterranean. Oh, I was fertile in excuses."

"Yet you let him come at last."

"Against my will. Mrs. Dunton found his name in the published lists of the Palatia's passengers. Then we learned that the ship was creeping into port. Naturally we must hasten to New York to meet Prince Hubert. I went with her as a lamb to the slaughter; I could see no escape from discovery and humiliation. I tried to tell myself I didn't care—why struggle to postpone the inevitable? Yet, at the eleventh hour, I hit upon a plan, a fresh deceit.

"If the Hubert Tenney on the Palatia resembled in any degree the Hubert of my fable, I'd force him to play the part for a little. Mrs. Dunton should see him. Then he should disappear. Another letter in the chain should bring news that he asked a release from our engagement. It was a desperate chance, yet it would have succeeded, if—if—"

"If I had not spoiled the move," Tenney said gravely. "I didn't understand, of course. Yet, had I known—" He checked himself. "It's a curious chance that led to the misprint in the list—Hubert for Herbert. But the name itself—how did you happen to choose it?"

"By another curious chance, as you call it."

"There was fate in both. Let's put it that way."

There was a long silence, which the young man ended.

"Pardon me, but I'd like more facts. Suppose your project had succeeded. You would have been rid of the fantom suitor, but the debt—if there really is a debt—would have remained. And that, I suspect, figures in Trachtman's overtures."

It seemed to him, watching her in

the faint light, that she shrank at his words.

"It would be wiped out, canceled, forgotten, he said."

"How might that be? Would he pay it?"

"I—I don't know. He has wonderful influence over his aunt; she depends upon his advice in all her business affairs."

"Umph!" said Tenney enigmatically. "By the way, though! Does Mrs. Dunton ever refer to your financial obligation?"

"Not as an obligation, but I know it has made a great difference with her. She has been troubled about expenses, and has talked of the need of economy."

Once more there was a pause. Then said Tenney:

"You'd made up your mind to be rid of Hubert. He was to drop out. We'll assume he did drop out. The debt still remained—for the sake of argument we'll admit it is a just debt. What were you going to do about it?"

"Pay it—if it took my whole life! A plan was working itself out. I could become a trained nurse. Mrs. Dunton's doctor, I felt sure, would help me to secure admission to some hospital; and she herself would understand my wish for active occupation. She'd find its cause in my—in the destruction of my hopes. Then, in two or three years, I should be self-supporting, earning money, and saving it—"

"It wouldn't work!" Tenney spoke curtly and decidedly. "Your interest charges would eat up your savings."

"Interest charges?"

There was bewilderment in her tone, and, as he fancied, a note of reproach.

"Debts bear interest," he said doggedly. "On twenty thousand it would be a thousand a year, at least—too much for you to meet. You'd simply get in deeper and deeper every year. Once admit you owe this money—"

"But I do!"

"Perhaps not legally."

"Certainly morally. You don't think me wholly a swindler, do you?"

"No; I don't think you a swindler," the young man said slowly. "You're a victim of circumstances, uncommon circumstances. Yet the moral obligation exists—you're quite right. There's only one drawback to your idea: it's utterly impracticable."

Again it seemed to him she shrank from him; and he cursed himself as a blundering and stupid and comfortless counselor.

He was saying not the things he longed to say, but harsh things, such as might be spoken by a cold-blooded man of law advising a client of little knowledge of the world or of the statutes. A curious restraint seemed to be upon him.

She had told her story and made her confession with a self-control at which he had marveled, and which, perhaps, had influenced him to unconscious imitation.

It was all very unsentimental, and, it might be, by so much the more sensible, when there was a pressing problem of dollars to be disposed of; but it lacked the vital and satisfying element. She had taken him at his word, and accepted him as an ally.

He was racking his brain in her behalf, and she might regard him as icily unsympathetic.

"I'd like a chance to think over the case," he said at last. "There's a point I'm going to consider settled; you won't pay the price as Trachtman would have you pay it."

"Anything but that! I'd rather die! Yet—yet—"

"You won't pay the price—Trachtman's price. It isn't that which bothers me. There's another matter, one of which I'm profoundly ignorant. I wonder, now; I wonder—"

He broke off, hesitated; and before

he could resume their conference was effectually interrupted.

"Margaret, oh, Margaret!" Mrs. Dunton called from the piazza.

The girl sprang to her feet. "We must go in," she said. "That is, I must go. Of course, if you wish to remain here for a little—"

But Tenney, too, had risen.

"No, I don't care to linger—I'm not seeking my own society just now," he explained. "I'm seeking information, and it's possible I'm going where some is to be found."

CHAPTER VIII.

Hubert Begins to See.

THAT good and amiable soul, Mrs. Dunton, having devised an innocent little plot, was carrying it out with a fine and comforting sense of artful avoidance of all appearance of design.

Naturally enough, she was eager to learn what progress had been made toward a reconciliation of Hubert and Margaret; and at the same time she planned a demonstration of one of the girl's accomplishments which were to fit her for the lofty station Prince Charming would give her.

So Margaret was now at the piano, and Mrs. Dunton had beckoned Tenney to a place beside her in a corner of the comfortable library living-room, while Trachtman, left to his own devices, lounged near the musician.

A glance at his hostess had assured Tenney that Trachtman as yet had done nothing to shake her belief in the romance; and, satisfied of this, he settled himself to listen admiringly to the performance.

The girl played well; not showily or brilliantly, but with feeling; but it may be that his admiration was given less to her artistry than to the composure with which she filled her difficult rôle. Even in her manner to Trachtman there was no hint of the recent distressing episode; while it must be said that that worthy's bearing was equally calculated to avoid stirring doubts in Mrs. Dunton's mind.

Very much at his ease was Mr. Trachtman, very affable, very pleased, apparently, with the company in which he found himself—possibly in the fashion of a cat surveying a brace of safely cornered mice upon which he might pounce at his pleasure.

Tenney, watching him vigilantly, if covertly, felt a touch on his arm.

"I love to hear her play — don't you?" Mrs. Dunton whispered. "It's so—so sympathetic, you know; critics have told me her touch is really wonderful. Don't you think it is?"

"Yes; yes, indeed!" the young man answered a bit hurriedly. "Not that I'm a critic, though. You see, I like music, but know next to nothing about it."

Mrs. Dunton tapped his arm in mock reproof. "How modest we are. And after all the operas and concerts we heard abroad! Remember, I saw your letters!"

"Oh, I'm strictly an amateur. Liking things doesn't necessarily confer knowledge of them."

"But you like Margaret's playing?" There was a note of anxiety in her voice, which was not lost upon him.

"Immensely!" He turned to her, smiling. "You've done a lot of things for her, Mrs. Dunton; you've been a fairy godmother."

The lady beamed.

"It's dear of you, Hubert, to say so. But I haven't done a great deal, after all—merely what I could. Of course, I knew how you looked at life—how you must look at it, with your fortune and your ancestry and your environment. And I wanted Margaret to be prepared to take the position in society you would give your wife. And—and—" again the anxiety crept into her voice — "and it's going to come out all right, isn't it, Hubert?"

"I hope so, most devoutly."

"Then I shall be amply repaid."

Tenney shook his head.

"I'm afraid that can't be. Think of all you've done for her—the masters and the travel you've given her. Such things are—well, to put it bluntly, they're expensive. The spirit of good deeds is the chief element, perhaps; but we can't get away altogether from the other elements—the cost, for instance."

"Don't think of it for an instant."

"Pardon me, but I must think of it," he insisted. "Luxuries are costly, and Margaret has had luxuries—thanks to you."

A shadow seemed to fall upon Mrs. Dunton's face.

"Why, living is frightfully expensive," she confessed. "The money melts away one doesn't know how. But that isn't due to Margaret; it's due to—to everything."

She waved a hand as if to take in the household in a comprehensive gesture.

"Yes, it's everything. I don't understand it. Roy tries to explain—he manages my affairs, you know; but I've such a wretched head for figures that what he tells me comes in at one ear and goes out of the other. Don't let's talk about money, though—I hate the sound of the word."

"Very well," said Tenney, "we'll drop it for a pleasanter theme. Tell me about the trips you've taken with Margaret."

The shadow melted, and Mrs. Dunton beamed once more. Across the room Trachtman lazily got upon his feet and moved to the piano, resting an arm upon it and looking down at the girl.

For a time he stood thus, in silence; then spoke.

She raised her head and calmly met his gaze. The man glanced at the pair in the corner and showed his teeth in a cynical grin. Mrs. Dunton was now talking busily, and Tenney listened with every appearance of absorbed attention.

Trachtman strolled to the table, picked up a magazine, turned its leaves with a pretense of languid interest, and drifted back to his former place beside the piano. The girl was playing very softly, but he spoke to her in a tone clearly audible from one end of the big room to the other.

"You deserve better treatment, Margie. That pair yonder are flirting scandalously. 'Pon my soul, I didn't think it of Aunt Emma!"

Mrs. Dunton heard, and left a sentence unfinished. "I—I flirting?" she gasped. "And with Hubert, of all men! Nonsense! Why, I wouldn't—" she broke off; giggled in embarrassment half real, half feigned; then continued apologetically.

"Of course, you're joking, Roy, but it was mean of us. I forgot, for the moment, that Margaret's music was especially for Hubert. He'd wish to hear it because—oh, we all know why."

Trachtman laughed a trifle raspingly, but Tenney gave him no heed.

The young man's eyes were fixed upon the girl, and upon the color which was mounting to her cheek. If she had been charming before, he found her adorable now, in this moment of maidenly confusion at mention of his name and his mission—the first moment, be it said, in which either had appeared to move her beyond the strict requirements of the rôle she had assumed.

Others than Tenney, however, had marked the blush.

"Oh, we all know why!" Mrs. Dunton repeated meaningly and joyously. Her air was that of a general, who, confronted by a difficult situation, achieves a masterly retreat.

Trachtman's face darkened, and he spoke bruskly. "I'm reminded of a duty. Aunt Emma, I've brought your new insurance policy."

He drew a folded document from a pocket. "I regret to interrupt pleasure by intruding business; but, being reminded, there's no time like the

present. I'd like to see this stowed away in the safe. If you'll lend me the key—" he paused, and turned to Tenney. "My aunt has a strong-box of her own, and there's only one key. I insist upon her keeping it in her personal possession."

"I'm sure it's an unnecessary precaution," Mrs. Dunton observed, while she fumbled in a mysterious recess of her gown. "I'm sure, too, it's a great nuisance sometimes. Still, I suppose it's the businesslike way, and I'm as ignorant of business as a child. But here it is, Roy. Be a good boy, and attend to it for me."

Trachtman took the key and opened a closet door, revealing a small, old-fashioned safe, which he proceeded to unlock with somewhat of a flourish, thrusting the policy into a pigeonhole, and shooting the bolt with a click. Then, ceremoniously, he returned the key to its owner.

"Now, my dear aunt," he remarked, "having disposed of practical matters, we can return to heart-throbs. And, as you were saying—"

The girl had left the piano and drawn a little apart from the others. Tenney crossed to her.

"Can you find some pretext to give us ten minutes alone?" he asked. His voice was low but steady, and the tone was matter-of-fact. "I've obtained some light, but I suspect you can furnish me with more."

An instant she regarded him searchingly, doubtfully; but he withstood the scrutiny.

"It may be important — indeed, I believe it will be," he urged.

She turned to Mrs. Dunton. "Hubert hasn't had the night view of Templevale from the knoll. I think I'll show it to him, if you'll excuse us."

"Do, by all means!" Mrs. Dunton responded readily. "Templevale is very pretty, Hubert, by day or by night—the street lamps are very effective."

Trachtman's lip curled.

"Ah, that's but part of the story!" said he. "Believe me, Mr. Tenney, Templevale is idyllic, wholly idyllic—as I don't question you'll find it to the end."

CHAPTER IX.

A Financial Discrepancy.

THE view of Templevale from the knoll, by moonlight, deserved more admiring study than Tenney was disposed to give it.

Indeed, he had slight thought for slopes and groves bathed in mild radience or the cheery twinkle of lights from the more thickly settled parts of the town; and, when he had guided his companion to a rustic seat, he took his place beside her, with the manner of one more concerned with his reflections than with what might be before his eyes.

There was silence for a time. Then the young man spoke, rather abruptly.

"The books don't balance. There's a discrepancy. It's a big discrepancy. I can't account for it."

She looked at him inquiringly, but waited for him to go on.

"It's about the debt, of course. Mrs. Dunton has given me some notion of what she has done, but the items, as I figure them, don't fill the gap. Has she supplied you with much money — made you presents of cash or securities?"

"No," said the girl simply.

"You've had an allowance—for spending-money, for instance?"

"Yes—in a way, that is. In the beginning, of course, I had wages; and, afterward, there was supposed to be an arrangement that I should have an equal amount for pin-money. We weren't very businesslike, though, either of us, and the program wasn't carried out. It has been a long time since either of us has spoken of it as an allowance."

"But you've had personal expenses right along. Would they have ex-

ceeded the allowance, supposing it had been paid regularly?"

"I'm sure they wouldn't," she said quickly. "Yes, I'm sure. You see, if I haven't kept accounts, I've tried to have some general idea of the situation. And I've been economical—it hasn't been hard in a town like this."

Tenney nodded. "So far, so good! Now for the next item. She took you to California last winter?"

"Yes."

"The winter before it was Florida?"

"And Asheville."

"Then there were a couple of months at the seashore and a trip to the mountains? Anything else in that line?"

"Visits to New York now and then—perhaps a dozen in the three years."

"Long visits?"

"Oh, no. Usually a week."

"For theaters, opera, that sort of thing?"

"And shopping. I told you, you know"—she hesitated an instant—"I told you she provided me very generously."

"Yes—the trousseaux!" Tenney spoke grimly. "I remember. Now, don't think me idly curious, but I wish I knew what they meant—in cost, you understand."

"Is it necessary?"

"I believe it advisable, at least," he said persuasively. "If we're to make common cause, we must have mutual frankness. And this—well, it seems to me a point of a good deal of importance."

She did not respond immediately, and he waited her decision with such patience as he could muster. Suddenly she turned to him.

"Is it really essential? Can't we pass this by? There are things I can't forget, but they're none the less bitter to recall."

"Pardon me, but I fear it is essential."

Again he had cause to marvel at her self-control.

"It was almost a thousand dollars the first time," she said. "Mrs. Dunton would have lavished a great deal more upon me, for she had a very exalted idea of the—the splendors awaiting me. There I rebelled, though, and we compromised. It was to be a small trousseau, but excellent in all respects. The next was not so expensive—many of the things would still answer, you know. The third—yes, there was a third and last—was the same way."

Tenney kept his eyes straight before him. "Thousand for No. 1; less for the others. Something over two thousand for the three — fair estimate, isn't it?"

"Yes, that would be fair," she answered.

"You're certain — you saw the bills?"

He felt rather than saw that she glanced at him doubtfully, and remorse seized him. Truly, she must deem him a hard and inconsiderate adviser!

"It's a matter of business—I can't make it easy for you," he said contritely. "But if I lack tact, I hope you'll credit me with good intention."

"I saw the bills; the estimate is fair." Plainly, having confided so much to him, she had decided to go on.

"Then there were your music masters, painting masters, and the rest of them. Mrs. Dunton was a bit more revelational on that score than possibly she realized. You don't think of any other items, do you—big, sizable items, I mean?"

She considered for a moment. "Why, no; none that I can recall. There'd be minor matters of expense now and then—"

"I'll make an allowance for that sort of thing—incidentals, you know. There 'll be some other allowances—I'm going to attempt a problem in mental arithmetic."

"Why should you?" She spoke a little hurriedly, with what he recognized as a trace of resentment. "There's no question of my debt—of my obligation."

"But a very grave question as to its amount."

"How can there be? How can I dispute what—"

He stopped her with more kindness than courtesy.

"I'm going to talk plainly. Disregarding everything else, you owe Mrs. Dunton money, but you don't owe her twenty thousand dollars. She used to pay you for your services as her companion, and part of that pay was food and shelter.

"Under the arrangement you've had for the last three years she has continued to enjoy your companionship; so I am going to count that as meeting the items of board and room, to put it in a plain manner. The lapsing pin-money offsets your minor expenses. So we have left the principal accounts—clothes and travel and instruction.

"Now, figuring these as accurately as I can, I make it out that you are chargeable with not much more than a couple of thousand a year—certainly not more than twenty-five hundred dollars, or seventy-five hundred for the three years."

"I don't understand you. They must know, Mrs. Dunton and Roy Trachtman, and they—"

Again he interrupted her.

"I doubt if Mrs. Dunton has as clear an idea as you have. And as for Trachtman — why, he's thoroughly untrustworthy. And there's a difference between twenty thousand and seventy-five hundred."

"A difference?" she said bitterly. "Not to me—one sum is as remote as the other."

"There's the biggest of differences — one's within the limit; the other's—" He checked himself, hesitated, and continued with a marked change of tone. "There's the interest, for one thing, you know—oh, yes; the interest. It's a thousand a year in one case and less than four hundred in the other, you see."

"I—I hadn't thought of that," she said hesitantly. She put a hand wearily to her forehead. "But even four hundred— And you may be wrong, after all."

"I'm right," said Tenney curtly.

She rose from the bench and moved slowly toward the house, the young man springing up and following her. Neither spoke until they came to the steps, where the girl halted and faced Tenney.

"I must bid you good night," she said. "I haven't thanked you for your—your concern for my troubles, but, believe me, I'm not ungrateful." Impulsively she extended her hand. "I've confided in you, and I trust you!"

And then she had torn her hand from his grasp, and was darting up the steps before he could frame an answer.

Tenney stood where he was, conscious anew of that magic quickening of his pulse. Then a cynical voice spoke, and Trachtman loomed in the doorway through which the slender figure had vanished but a moment before.

"Being deserted by the fair, you and I can have a smoke and confidential chat. Come into the library. Too early yet to turn in."

Tenney accepted the invitation. As he entered the brightly lighted room Trachtman was taking a box of cigars from a cupboard.

"Aunt Emma's treat," he observed. "She keeps them in stock for me. Don't be afraid—they're harmless; I prescribe the brand, you know."

He bent over the lamp, lighted his cigar from its flame, straightened his spine, and watched the other follow his example.

"Now we can gossip comfortably," said he. "To begin with, you might

gratify my natural curiosity by telling me who the devil you are."

CHAPTER X.

Threats.

IT was an unexpected thrust, but Tenney luckily was alert. He met Trachtman's eye, and made answer calmly:

"I'm glad you put that query on its true ground—curiosity. I fancy you'd have difficulty in finding another."

The tall man showed his teeth in an ugly grin.

"Not the least! As a kinsman of Mrs. Dunton I'm quite entitled to demand the credentials of a stranger whom I find trespassing upon her hospitality. Of course, you're not the mythical Tenney."

"That is my name, nevertheless."

The other laughed outright.

"Come, come! You're too clever a performer to waste my time or your own. Suppose we drop all pretense and admit facts perfectly known to both of us. There isn't any Hubert Tenney in this affair—there never has been. And that's a fact, I may add, I've taken some pains to establish. Why, you might as well tell me you wrote this letter!"

And he pulled from a pocket the fragments of the sheet Tenney had torn in two and tossed into the fireplace.

The younger man took a step forward. "I'll trouble you for that letter," he said sharply, but Trachtman merely laughed again and, crumpling the paper, threw it on the floor.

"Bless you, it's of no consequence to either of us. Both of us are perfectly aware of the identity of the charming authoress. A year or two ago I felt suspicions of the epistles from abroad, and took the precaution to submit one of them—inadvertently left in my way—to an expert.

"Interesting report he made, vastly interesting, especially his conclusions from a comparison of exhibit A with exhibit B, which chanced to be a note in the lady's ordinary hand. Never a doubt in the world, he assured me, of the identity. Certain betraying characteristics can't be avoided, you understand. But perhaps I'm boring you with such details."

"You can tell me what you please."

"Thanks!" said Trachtman dryly. "That happens to be my purpose in this interview. So I'll remark that, following the clue, and causing certain investigations across the ocean, I made fairly sure that one Hubert Tenney had never been heard of in places in which, according to his letters, he should have been well known. Hence to find Hubert here piques curiosity. Then, too, there are other grounds, as I've suggested, for my inquiry — the duty of protecting my aunt from an impostor. I repeat: Who are you, anyway?"

"My name is Tenney, as I've told you."

"For the moment, perhaps. But what was the name back in the States, as they used to put it out West?"

"Tenney."

"Where did she pick you up?"

"You seem to have a talent for investigation—suppose you find out for yourself."

"Time's lacking. Also I don't care to take the trouble. You're on the witness-stand—better testify."

"Why should I do so?"

Trachtman pulled vigorously at his cigar and exhaled a volume of smoke.

"I don't think you a fool," he said. "No, if you hadn't some brains you'd not have been picked for this performance. Assuming, then, that you're reasonably intelligent, I hold that you must see clearly enough the futility of standing mute. I've only to introduce my aunt to this little secret of ours, you know, to make your position here absolutely untenable."

"Why refrain, then?"

Trachtman waved a hand. "Oh, I've my reasons! One is, I'd really like to know the whole story; there are parts I still have to guess at. For example, where did our fair plotter fall in with you? I've kept an eye on her doings and her acquaintances, but you're from outside the circle I can account for.

"Next, why did she call you in—or anybody, for that matter? There, though, arises a complication. If she has her fantom suitor prove faithless, why produce somebody to impersonate him and plead for a reconciliation? It isn't consistent, in the light of such knowledge as I have. That's why I demand more."

"I can't admit the force of your argument."

"There speaks hasty youth," quoth Trachtman. "Better reconsider. If you don't I may be driven to unpleasant measures."

Tenney's air was stubborn. "I still see no reason to affirm anything or deny anything."

"Yes; it's a phenomenally difficult position," Trachtman went on. "She is threatened with exposure, disgrace; there's even danger of more practical punishment."

"In other words, you regard her as in your power? Why hesitate to turn the screws?"

"Because I'm a merciful soul. Moreover, I'm fond of her—she's an attractive little schemer. I prefer to deal with her—and with you—in my own way. That's why, after you've made confession, I propose to let you go on condition that you go at once. Subsequently I shall arrange the affair of the charming sinner to my own satisfaction. In view of other things I'm disposed to overlook the fact that she's a swindler and—"

Tenney broke in savagely. "Take that back! She's no swindler! You know it as well as I do."

Trachtman showed his teeth.

"Oh, if the word stings you I'll withdraw it, but I can't shut my eyes to what she's done. No matter how you phrase it, the truth remains that, in one way or another, she has mulcted my aunt of a lot of money. More than twenty thousand dollars absorbed in three years—that's pretty active work, all circumstances considered."

"That's merely your statement. Prove it!"

"Here's the case in a nutshell. Three years ago my aunt was living within her income. Since then, with no increase in the scale of household expenditures, she has eaten into her capital to the extent I've mentioned. I happen to know this absolutely, for I've negotiated the sale of her securities and turned the proceeds over to her.

"Now, that money has gone to one person—which means, I take it, that she has accumulated a neat nest-egg. You will understand that my aunt has been, and is, completely under the domination of this person, and that she is a child in money matters. At various times I've endeavored to interfere, but all in vain. Caution and reason have been wasted on infatuation. You've heard of such cases before, I fancy."

"It is one thing to hear; another to believe."

"We'll assume you do believe it, however."

"I can assure you I do not."

"Oh, then waive the point," Trachtman growled. "We'll drop theories and face the facts. The money is gone; only Margaret Drake has profited. Both of us know how the world would look at the performance—I'm saying nothing of what the courts might be disposed to do about it. That's precisely the question I'm striving to avoid. Also I can make certain that it won't be raised, provided you take yourself off. Which, as it happens, is the proposal I've been leading up to. Get you gone, and I guarantee an escape from all publicity and retribution. Do you agree?"

"No!" said Tenney explosively.

Trachtman devoted his attention to his cigar for an interval. "Remember, it's an escape for both of you I offer. You go and she stays, and nobody is the wiser—or the sadder."

"No," Tenney repeated.

There was a hostile gleam in the other's eye.

"Bravely spoken, but rashly. You don't fully comprehend conditions, I fear. If you did, we should have had none of this bashful reticence as to your past and present. You'd be explaining everything—making the best of a bad bargain and admitting the strength of the cards I hold. As it is, you'll drive me to harsh measures."

"Which means—"

Trachtman shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll leave you to your own imagination. Infatuated as my aunt is, I think I can establish my case, even to her satisfaction—or, rather, to her intense dissatisfaction and sorrow. After that—why, man, you can picture for yourself the plight of a young person whom I'm doing my poor best to preserve unharmed! I don't say anything of your own prospects of coming out of the scrape gloriously—indeed, I'm not especially concerned for your welfare."

"So I suspected."

"And justly. Further, you might as well reckon in the probability that if things go badly, I can hit upon some method of establishing a—well, let us call it a legal liability, certainly on the part of our common friend, not impossibly on the part of yourself. You're at least an accomplice."

"Whatever I am, it is with all good will for the task I've undertaken."

Trachtman scowled. "I don't care whether you like your job or not. My interest centers on your acceptance or refusal of my terms."

Tenney took a step toward the door. "We're making no progress," said he. "Perhaps we may as well end this conference — it's leading nowhere."

"Just a moment!" the other interposed. "Don't suppose you and your delightful schemer are going to be permitted, in any event, to get away with the loot. Bear that in mind when you're thinking over my proposition—oh, yes; I'm going to give you time — until to-morrow morning, in fact. I won't accept an answer now, but I'll insist upon one at ten o'clock, let us say."

"You've had my answer — it will be the same to-morrow."

"The long night watches tend to reflection," Trachtman observed. "Think it over, my young friend; think it over!"

CHAPTER XI.

The Fight in the Library.

TENNEY slept badly.

As Trachtman had said, the night watches tended to reflection, and reflection was not comforting. The fellow meant trouble; it was undoubtedly in his power to make it most serious trouble with possibly far-reaching consequences.

Tenney swore between his teeth, and set himself determinedly to review the affair. Trachtman probably had presented the matter as the world at large would regard it. Here was an elderly woman, living quietly and comfortably and within her income.

Appears a younger woman who is received as a member of the household.

At once outgo increases. The elderly woman exceeds her income, dips into her principal, expends relatively large sums for her protégée. Her man of business has records of securities sold and amounts turned over.

The money melts; it is gone. Who would doubt that the girl had contrived to secure it? More, who could doubt, when informed that for years she had been systematically misrepresenting her affairs and playing upon the ready sympathies of her victim?

Why, his own presence would add to the weight of damning evidence; for how could he be regarded except as an accomplice, brought in at the eleventh hour and detected in company with his principal? Yet, however the world might see it, Tenney felt no doubts of the girl's story.

She had told him the truth, bitter though it might be; and, believing, he had devised a plan whose success was now grievously endangered by Trachtman's declaration. If the debt to Mrs. Dunton—and Tenney deemed it a debt most justly due—were twenty thousand dollars, he was without power to intervene.

If it were no greater than the seventy-five hundred dollars of his estimate, there might be at least relief for the girl from her obligation, as measured in money.

Here he must balance the conflicting evidence, her uncertainties and his calculations against Trachtman's records. Tenney shook his head over the problem. After all, it was the money which gave Trachtman his real hold upon them, which in the event of exposure must cast upon the fictitious romance the blight of a cunning confidence game.

So Tenney, turning uneasily on his bed, reflected much and slept little, and arrived at no decision save to rise early and seek conference with the girl.

This purpose being strongly impressed upon him, it chanced that it was not yet daybreak when he awoke with a start from a restless doze to find himself, of a sudden, oddly indisposed to close his eyes again. Every sense seemed to be alert.

He peered about the room, and raising himself on an elbow, listened intently. For a little the silence was unbroken. Then there was a sound, faintly suggesting the creak of a floor board under a cautious foot.

It was repeated, after an interval; then came another sound as of a door swinging gently on its hinges.

Tenney slipped from the bed and tiptoed to a window.

His room was in an ell, commanding a partial view of the main part of the house and of the windows of the library, whose curtains appeared to be closely drawn—all but one, at the bottom of which gleamed a narrow line of light.

He watched it for a space, and made sure that it was not the moving beam from a burglar's bull's-eye, but the steady glow of a lamp. Somebody, in no haste, apparently, was paying a visit to the library. And, unless intuition were playing him false, the somebody was Roy Trachtman.

Silently, but with expedition, Tenney dragged on trousers and coat, and in stockinged feet crept down the stairs.

The library door was slightly ajar, sufficiently, however, to give him opportunity to look into the room. And there he saw Trachtman, fully dressed except for collar and tie, kneeling before the old safe, whose door was opened wide.

Whatever the business in hand, Trachtman was going about it with much deliberation.

Not only were his movements unhurried, but also he paused now and then to inspect the papers he was taking, one by one, from the safe, occasionally turning to the lamp for a clearer view. Presently he produced a note-book, and began to check up what seemed to be items in a prepared list.

So calmly did he engage in this, and so free did he seem to be of fear of interruption, that Tenney, recalling his part in the conduct of Mrs. Dunton's affairs, was inclining to the reluctant notion that the nephew, after all, was probably engaged in some legitimate errand.

Except for the hour, the view was reasonable enough; and even here there might be good explanation. Trachtman might have been wakeful; he might have wearied of wooing

slumber and have decided to descend to the library and do the work he had to do while the rest of the household slept.

Meanwhile Trachtman had finished his inspection of papers and making of notes, and was replacing the documents in their pigeonholes. This accomplished, he fumbled for a moment with what appeared to be a refractory drawer. Then he approached the lamp once more, and the watchful Tenney saw that he held a plump roll of bills.

Trachtman counted the money and wrinkled his brow in calculation.

He repeated the count, hesitated, and slowly selected a number of the bills, which he thrust into a trousers pocket. The others he returned to the drawer. Then he glanced about him with the manner of one who desires to be assured that nothing has been overlooked.

Tenney was on the point of retreating, but an exclamation by the man in the library caused him to change his purpose.

It was an exclamation not loud, but betraying a degree of cynical amusement. As he uttered it, he bent down and picked up the fragments of the letter which, a few hours before, he had thrown upon the floor.

Now they interested him anew. He smoothed the crumpled paper, fitted the jagged edges of the pieces, spread them on the table, and prepared for leisurely perusal.

Now, in view of the circumstance that the contents of the letter were well known to everybody who might be supposed to be concerned even indirectly, possession of it might reasonably be deemed of slight importance—in fact, Tenney had made no effort to recover it when Trachtman threw it away; but now, of a sudden, the young man was seized of a determination to wrest it from the enemy, an illogical determination, it may be, but one inspiring action.

He tore open the door, sprang into the room, grasped at the torn sheet of paper — and missed it by an inch as Trachtman caught it up.

Startled though he might be by the other's entrance, the older man kept his head.

"Oh, it's you, is it? An unexpected pleasure but easily accounted for in that two of us are early risers, eh?" he said. "You couldn't wait for ten o'clock, perhaps. What's your answer to my proposition?"

Tenney wasted no words. "I want that letter. Give it up!"

Trachtman grinned sourly. "Gently, gently! It's no more yours than mine."

"I claim it, nevertheless."

"I don't admit the claim. You can't enforce it."

Tenney's response was a leap forward, a leap so impetuous that as he grappled with Trachtman he had a shade of advantage. Not that his adversary shunned the combat. The vigor of attack was quite equaled by the energy of resistance.

Given two able-bodied males, full of mutual ill-will and battling in a confined space, rules are likely to be disregarded and obstacles to suffer damage. Trachtman, giving ground at first, collided with a chair and sent it crashing to the floor; rallied his strength and gaining better foothold, swung Tenney against another, which was upset much as the first had been.

Then a little stand and the vase it had supported went down in wreck and ruin, followed by a lamp—luckily not the lighted one—which had stood on the ledge of Mrs. Dunton's desk.

Tenney's heel caught in a curtain and brought it down with its rod; but with the wall as a brace he was able to force his adversary toward the center of the room. There, both panting from their unusual exertions, they stood locked in a savage embrace, intent only upon recovering wind and entirely heedless of alarm among the other members of the household.

Trachtman still had possession of

the greater part of the letter, though Tenney had succeeded in capturing the remainder.

At this stage of the fight, its honors being by no means definitely established, came interruption. Pale and fearsome faces looked in at the door.

There was a shrill and quavering cry in the voice of Mrs. Dunton, who tottered into the library, threw up her hands in consternation, and collapsed upon the davenport. The girl, wide-eyed but silent, glided to her side and put an arm about her.

As by common consent the adversaries parted and fell back a pace.

Each was still breathing hard; each had hidden his share of the spoils of battle in a convenient pocket. Neither seemed to be in haste to attempt explanation of the scene.

Tenney, meeting the girl's eye, tried to throw into his glance an unspoken message of encouragement. Even in this crisis he found her charming, and was ready to vow that there was wondrous grace in the lines of the long dressing-gown in which she had robed herself in haste.

To be sure she could hardly but fare well in contrast with the dishevelled state of her benefactress, who was decked miscellaneously and strangely, if sufficiently, in the garments which had come first to her hand. Indeed, Mrs. Dunton, hair in confused disarray, chin fallen and eyes rolling, made a sorry picture.

Yet she it was who broke the silence.

"Why—why—what's happened? I never—never heard of such things happening—happening in my house! Why—Why—it's awful!"

There was no response.

"And everything knocked about, and that lamp—my prettiest lamp—broken into a thousand pieces!"

There was none to gainsay her or offer comment. Her gaze roamed the room and came back to the two male figures.

"Why — why — it was a fight—a regular fist-fight! And you grown men, both of you! I never was so frightened in my life! It sounded as if horses were galloping all over the lower floor."

Trachtman grunted.

"Umph! At least, then, you knew it couldn't be a burglar raid."

His aunt sighed deeply.

"Mercy me! I couldn't think of anything it could be except—except anarchists." She seemed to have trouble in recalling the word, but to find relief in its use; for she went on more briskly:

"Yes, anarchists — that was it. And I couldn't think why they should want to bother me. But I had to come down to see what it was. And it was just a fight—a miserable, vulgar fist-fight, after all!"

"No, no; you err in your technicalities, my dear aunt. A friendly little wrestling bout, perhaps, but a fight—oh, no; not in the least."

Mrs. Dunton surveyed him dubiously.

"I don't see, Roy, why you and Hubert should wish to wrestle, or why, if you did, you couldn't go outdoors. And just look at what you've done."

"I apologize abjectly for youthful exuberance."

Again Tenney stole a glance at Margaret. Trachtman, apparently, was disposed not to take advantage of the situation to expose the plot and the plotters; for reasons of his own he was willing to let its ultimatum run to its limit.

But Tenney could not read the girl's expression.

He hoped she would continue to play the game, while yet it might be played, coolly, warily, with skill. Let Trachtman patch up such excuses as he chose to present to his aunt. There was still a margin of a few hours in which Hubert's impersonator might confer with Margaret on the questions which had robbed him of his slumbers.

Mrs. Dunton had been peering hard at her nephew. Now she made a remark of singular tactlessness.

"It was a fight—I'm sure of it. And Hubert was getting the better of it. Why, Roy Trachtman, you're bleeding! And he made you bleed!"

The man's dark face flushed wrathfully. Before this he had hardly been aware of the tiny stream of red trickling down his chin. Now he was aware of little else save that he was being shamed in the eyes of the maiden for whom he had fought.

"And you're bigger than he is," his aunt insisted.

Trachtman's temper cracked under the strain. "Nonsense!" he growled. "If you weren't as blind as a bat you'd have seen what has been going on under your nose. You wouldn't have been caught by such a bunco game, such a—"

There he checked himself, but the mischief had been done.

"Bunco game, blind as a bat?" Mrs. Dunton gasped. "I don't understand. I—I— What does he mean, Margaret? I can depend upon you, anyway, to tell me the truth."

Both men raised warning hands, but the girl gave them no heed. She had risen from her place beside Mrs. Dunton and stood with bowed head and hands clasped.

"You shall have the truth—at last," she said. "You have been tricked, deceived, despoiled — for years. There was no engagement; there was no Hubert Tenney. It was all false—all a lie. And I told the lie and lived it because I was a coward, the most miserable coward in the world!"

CHAPTER XII.

"Hubert—or Herbert."

MRS. DUNTON uttered a curious, half-stifled cry, and sank back weakly among the cushions. Tenney crossed to the girl and stationed himself at her side, facing Trachtman, who was scowling venemously, and who said, "Well, you have completed the wreck!" with savage emphasis.

"It had to be," said the girl wearily. "I could endure the burden no longer."

Trachtman ripped out an oath, and Tenney instinctively stepped between him and Margaret. The movement caught Mrs. Dunton's attention, and she sat up with a start.

"Why, Margaret, what nonsense you've been talking! Of course there's a Hubert, for here he is! You can say what you please, but he doesn't vanish."

"Not with the suddenness with which he appeared, at least," snarled Trachtman.

"But it wasn't sudden—that is, we saw his name in the paper, and knew he was coming. We looked for him and there he was. I can't guess what you're driving at. It's all a joke—you're trying to tease me, aren't you, Margaret?"

"I'm trying to tell you simply the truth. Hubert never existed except in my wicked imagination."

"Then why's he here?" Mrs. Dunton's tone was shrilly impatient. "Why was he on the steamer? Why did you present him to me? Why did he write that letter?"

"He didn't write it."

Mrs. Dunton stared blankly at her protégée. "You—you say the letter wasn't his? And there wasn't any Hubert? Then who—who is this?"

There was a second's delay in the answer. "I don't—don't know," the girl faltered.

Mrs. Dunton whipped about to Trachtman with unusual swiftness. "Tell me, Roy! You must know!"

"Unluckily I don't," said her nephew with a shrug. "I appreciate the implied compliment, but it's undeserved. Better go to headquarters for information—ask him."

Tenney cleared his throat. "I'm afraid, Mrs. Dunton, I—"

The girl broke in upon his by no means fluent speech.

"It doesn't matter who he is. I'm the offender, the plotter, the traitor. I'm responsible for everything. I must pay the penalty—I want to pay it, to bear the punishment, to suffer for my sins. I can't attempt excuses, I can't hope for forgiveness—I don't deserve it. All I can do is to make full confession, and go away and hide myself somewhere and—"

"*Margaret!*"

An instant their eyes met. "This is all true; the other was all a lie."

Against her will and uncomprehendingly Mrs. Dunton was forced to believe. Whatever the past might have been, she could not deny the present. Yet she turned again to Trachtman, as one in despair might snatch at a single desperate chance.

"Roy, I can trust you, at least. What does this mean? I beg you for the truth—the truth, on your word of honor!"

It was an appeal to stir even a callous heart. "I think it has been given you—at last," he said gravely.

A moan burst from the elderly woman's lips. She wrung her hands; her bosom rose and fell with her gasping breathing; the tears, unchecked, ran down her quivering cheeks.

"Margaret—go away and leave me—oh, but you cannot! I—I can't live without you; I can't let you go. I've depended on you so—you've been everything to me—my world. You've had my love, my care, my trust—"

"And I have proved faithless!"

"But you won't desert me? I don't care what you've done, or say you've done. We'll forget everything; we'll begin anew. Everything shall be as it was."

"No," said the girl sorrowfully; "nothing can be as it was. All the faith you once had would change to suspicion, deserved suspicion, inevitable suspicion. I must go away—there can be no other course."

"Pardon an inquiry!" said Trachtman gratingly. "As my aunt's man of business I make it. You are her debtor for a very considerable amount. How and when do you propose to repay her?"

"Repay me?" Mrs. Dunton wiped away her tears, the better to scan her nephew's face. "Why—why—I don't expect—"

"I do, then!" Trachtman broke in. "I expect the debt to be paid. In fact, I demand that it shall be paid."

The girl bowed her head. "I shall do my best, but I—I'm afraid it will take a long time."

Mrs. Dunton's expression was one of blank bewilderment, but Trachtman broke in bruskly:

"Here are the cold facts. In three years my aunt has impaired her capital to the extent of twenty thousand dollars. The money has been spent for Miss Drake or given to her. I regret to insist upon a vulgar consideration of cash, but it can't be avoided. Also, as I have arranged for the sale of the securities which have been sacrificed, I am an authority on the amount involved. Hence I am in a position to demand repayment and restitution of sums procured through fraud. That's the word — fraud. Any court would so hold these acts."

It was time for Tenney to intervene.

"Mrs. Dunton," he said, "we can avoid talk of courts, I think. If you care for my opinion, here it is: There is a debt justly owed you; but it isn't one of twenty thousand dollars, or half that. It amounts to about seventy-five hundred dollars, perhaps less, certainly not more."

"What do you know about it?" Trachtman demanded. "Have you had a division of the swag?"

Tenney disregarded the query. "You should have some idea of the expenditures, Mrs. Dunton. You've made them, you know."

The elderly woman was rocking her body to and fro. "I—I suppose

so," she quavered. "But I'm such a wretched hand at figures—I don't know—I don't remember. Roy sold things for me, and gave me the money, and it—it melted."

"When he sold some stock for you, did he turn over all the proceeds at once?" Tenney put the question too quickly for Trachtman to interfere.

"Why—why, not usually. He thought the money—too much money, you know—might attract burglars. So he'd keep most of it, and let me have it as I needed it."

"Oh!" said Tenney. Trachtman started at the other's tone.

"I can assure you, my aunt expressed complete satisfaction with the arrangement."

Still Tenney declined to be diverted from his inquiry. "You kept no account, Mrs. Dunton?"

"Of course not. Roy attended to that."

"And accurately," said Trachtman.

"I'm sure you did, Roy," cried his aunt. "I trust you absolutely, you know—with everything."

"Even with a key of the safe?" It was the girl who spoke, low and tensely, and she pointed at the open door of the old strong-box.

Trachtman swore under his breath.

Mrs. Dunton leaned forward, peering at the telltale evidence of the raid upon her papers. A hand sought the mysterious recess of her dress, which, as it chanced, was one of the garments she had donned in haste, and presently her key was produced.

She stared at it in bewildered fashion, then stared in turn at the other key protruding from the lock.

Now, it happened that, like some other persons who are sure of few things, Mrs. Dunton was especially fixed in her opinion of the few. The single existing key of the safe was something beyond doubt or question. Yet before her eyes was a duplicate, an effective duplicate, as was established by the open door.

"Roy!" There was an unwonted note of authority in her voice. "Roy! I am surprised beyond measure. It isn't right; it's all wrong; it's presuming upon my confidence."

Trachtman smoothed his brow, and strove to speak lightly. "My dear aunt, you forget that again and again you've suggested that I might have a key. What has occurred is that at last I've followed the suggestion. I should have mentioned the circumstance, but forgot to do so."

"I'm sorry you forgot." Mrs. Dunton was nearer grim cynicism than she often approached. There was even a sort of firmness about the line of her mouth, which encouraged Tenney to venture to push the advantage he had gained.

"Mrs. Dunton, will you take the trouble to count what money you have in the safe?" he asked. "You know, I hope, how much should be there."

His hostess rose to her feet. "There is—that is, there should be—about three hundred dollars. I paid some bills yesterday and counted what was left. And, for once at least, I haven't forgotten."

She moved toward the household treasury, but Trachtman stepped in her way.

"You needn't take the trouble," he said. "I drew upon your cash for a hundred just now. I fully intended to credit you with the loan, so it would have been all the same in the end. And, having made this explanation, I suggest that we go back to our original topic — not my debts, but Miss Drake's debts, and how she proposes to liquidate them."

The purpose and determination faded from his aunt's face. Again her lips trembled; again her eyes were dimmed by tears. She staggered toward the old davenport and dropped upon it.

"First Margaret; now Roy! There's nobody I can trust. Oh, I wish the earth would open and swallow me up!"

Trachtman laughed savagely.

"The earth will do nothing of the sort, my dear. It will permit you to live and devote yourself to the collection of what is owed you, beginning, let us say, with the contribution of the fair, if fickle, Margie. I own I'm a bit curious as to the number of its making."

"And I," said Tenney impulsively, "have an idea I may speedily enlighten you." He drew a check-book from a coat pocket, caught up a pen from the desk, and wrote rapidly. Then he approached Mrs. Dunton, a slip of pink paper in his fingers.

"This represents the amount I believe Miss Drake owes you," he said. "I've tried to make the estimate accurate, and I can vouch that the check is good. Frankly, I couldn't have advanced the sum our friend yonder mentioned, but I can manage this well enough."

The girl gave a little cry of protest and tried to catch the slip of pink paper as he dropped it in Mrs. Dunton's lap. Also that lady put out a blindly objecting hand, escaping which the check fluttered to its destined place.

Tenney caught the girl's arm. "Believe me, this is the best way out of it —the best for everybody," he said quietly.

"But I can't permit you to give me such help. It's out of the question. This is all my own—"

She struggled to break from his hold, but struggled vainly; while Mrs. Dunton, full of a new hope, raised streaming eyes and burst into a cry of entreaty.

"Oh, isn't it true, after all? You are really Hubert, aren't you—the Hubert Tenney we waited for so long?"

"Herbert, not Hubert," he answered gently. "But the important thing's that I'm a Tenney. And I've come at last, ready and willing to take the place of the missing member of the family."

"And discount the family bills mighty liberally," Trachtman interposed.

"To the extent of the grafting agent's percentage," the other retorted.

But Mrs. Dunton was in no mood to rest content with such exchanges. "You haven't yet told us who you are," she declared.

Tenney glanced at the girl and found that she would not meet his eye.

"There's little to tell, Mrs. Dunton," said he. "I'm a sort of an engineer, and my business is out West. I'm on my way back to it after a holiday on the other side. Of course, I'm an intruder, I suppose, and an imposter, and all that, and yet—" he hesitated—"yet I can't be as repentent as I ought to be."

"Even if you are led by pity to pay my ransom!" cried the girl.

"I shouldn't call it that." He had released his hold upon her arm, but, by some blessed coincidence, his hand touched hers and closed upon it. "A ransom? Oh, no! There are other ways of putting it, much more appropriate ways, more—more—"

Mrs. Dunton was nodding violently. Trachtman, to whom none of the others was giving thought, sidled noiselessly toward the door.

"More expressive of—er—er—of mutual confidence and trust and—er —er—and the rest of it," Tenney concluded a bit incoherently.

The little hand lay unresistingly in his, and for an instant a face had been raised, a face in which the color was mounting and glorious eyes were responding timidly to the message they read in his own.

The pink check slipped unheeded to the floor. The hands of Mrs. Dunton were clasped, and on her broad face was the ecstasy of a generous and forgiving and matchmaking soul.

"Bless my heart, but it isn't going to make any difference!" she exulted. "Hubert or Herbert—I believe one's just as fine as the other!"

(The end.)

Forty Ali Babas and a Thief

by Albert Payson Terhune

Author of "Articles of War," "The Sword of Ali Diab," "Dad," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"I'm a Bargain."

"HOW did you get in here?" demanded Ulrich Laing, glowering up from a maelstrom of papers that swirled across the surface of his table-desk.

The visitor did not reply to the stark question. Instead, he glanced carelessly back toward the half-open door of the inner office, then down at his own well-shod feet, and continued his leisurely advance toward the desk.

Laing half rose to his feet. The newcomer's advance had neither the bravado of a crank or creditor nor the temerity of a canvasser who has won his way through forbidden portals.

And Laing, who knew something of men, was mildly puzzled. Perhaps that was why his pudgy hand halted on its journey toward the desk-bell. The visitor had halted at the far side of the desk, as though courteously waiting an invitation to sit down.

As his involuntary host did not offer such invitation, but continued to glare at him with puzzled query, the stranger whiled away the momentary pause by glancing about the room.

It was perhaps the most unusually furnished private office in New York. Its appointments might well have been epitomized in one word—rugs.

Rugs covered the floor, to the blotting out of any view of parquetry or other basic flooring. Rugs lining the walls to the topmost molding, obliterating wainscot, baseboard, and all else.

Of the four chairs, two served as "horses" for rugs.

And in the heart of it all—the desk-center was a ten by eighteen-inch Persian "foot-rug" of unbelievable antiquity—sat Ulrich Laing, the "rug king," foremost rug-dealer and expert of the New World; a man whose rugs were his religion as well as his fortune.

The brief, appraising glance of inspection over, the intruder again met Laing's lowering gaze. The rug king noted that the man's look was level, self-possessed, without a hint of effrontery, and wholly unafraid.

"I asked you," repeated Laing, "how you came here."

"Obviously," returned the other, "through the door. The one just behind me. That one."

"Naturally," sniffed Laing in elephantine sarcasm, "that one. Since it's the only one leading into this room. But now that you're here—"

"Pardon me," gently interposed

the visitor, "but it seems I know more about your office than you do. That is not the only door. There is another over there. Not behind that big iridescent rug. Your safe is behind that. Behind the reddish rug, just to the left of it."

Laing's scowl was wiped away into crass blankness.

"How do you know?" he rapped out. "Whose been blabbing or—or showing outsiders around here while I was away?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," answered the stranger. But if you are wondering how *I* knew, the mystery is easily solved. Those two rugs are thin and limp. The window is open and there's a draught against them. The door-knob and the handle of the key under it are quite plainly outlined. As to the thick, short knob of the safe—"

"H'm!" grunted Laing. "You seem to use your eyes."

"I think that is what they were given to me for," gravely assented the other. "And I have had to make the best use of them. You see, I'm a thief."

Again, Ulrich Laing half-rose from his seat and again his fat hand crept toward the bell. Yet he scanned his guest's face sharply for trace of jest or mental aberration.

"Don't bother to ring," the stranger reassured him; "I am not here to rob you. And, by the way," he broke off, "let me give you a hint that will be of value to you: if you *must* carry your bill-folder in your upper left-hand vest pocket—a foolish place where every dip is certain to look first—don't raise your hand to it when you hear the word 'thief' mentioned."

Laing dropped his hand to the desk as though it burned him. But a reluctant grin began to twist his mouth-corners. This man amused him.

"I'm a thief," went on the visitor. "We'll call me Galvin Brenner, if you like. Partly because it happens to be my real name. I—"

"How did you get into my private office? Who let you in? The boy at the outer door—"

"Is still there, for all I know. He didn't see me. Because I didn't want him to. I had to get to you, personally. A note would have done no good. You'd have thought I was a crank and refused to hear me."

"What do you want?"

"A job."

"Safe-cracking or merely second-story?" queried Laing, with the truly brilliant professional repartee which made him the sure-fire laugh-evoker of all his employees on such rare times as he deigned to unbend.

"Neither. I want a job in your store."

"My present staff robs me quite enough, I think," flashed Laing, with another inspiration of wit that showed him to be at his very best this morning. "They don't need any professional aid."

"You don't understand," protested Brenner, "and I'm wasting both your time and my own. Let me get down to business. I am a thief. A crook. I am thirty years old. For twelve years I have been living by my brains off the stupidity of gulls.

"I'm not a 'congenital criminal'—whatever that may mean. I have stolen because I was brought up to. I've steered clear of prison because I've had more sense—and maybe more luck—than most crooks. And now I'm turning honest."

"Why?" asked Laing, interested in spite of himself.

"Because there's nothing in the other game. Because it means a life of danger, of worry, of sleeping with one eye open, of such care and planning and foresight as no financier can employ. And in the end, even the best, luckiest crook clears up less than the average delicatessen dealer. By and by he gets too old to steal cleverly. Then he's nabbed or he goes to pieces and starves. There's nothing in it, I tell you. Half the work, along decent

lines, would win a fortune. I'm through with it."

"That's why you're quitting?"

Brenner hesitated.

"That's one reason," he said sullenly. "The only one, I suppose, you'd believe. You'd laugh at me if I said I'd always envied men who weren't sick with fear, down in their hearts, every time some one touched them on the shoulder. Men who could look themselves in the glass, when they shave, and say: 'I may be down on my luck, but I'm clean. I'm *straight!*' Well, that's the way I want to be. It's the way I'm *going* to be.

"I came into some money a little while ago. Not a fortune, but a few thousands. Clean money. From my aunt. Enough to keep me going while I look around, and while I am working my way up to a living wage. So I'm making the start."

"Very edifying!" yawned Laing, who found the latter half of the confession far less interesting than the first, and who was beginning to be bored. "But why tell all this to *me?*"

"To you? Why, I explained that. Because I'm coming to work for you."

"You seem quite certain."

"I am. You advertised in the *Planet* this morning for a rug salesman. I am a born salesman. I want the job. It's to your interest as much as to mine. I've no references. I could have had a dozen of them very neatly forged for me. But I want to start square. *Square.*"

"Quite so," agreed Laing, turning to the papers on his table. "But I'm sorry to say I've no opening for you. Good day."

Brenner's exaltation, bred of earnest, tense eagerness, fell from him at the rebuff. Once more he was the debonair man of the underworld.

"Hold on, Mr. Laing," said he. "You are going to hire me, I think, As much for your own sake as for mine. You want a salesman. I've told you, I'll make a good one. I want experience that will help me on my start at being honest. So I'll work harder than most beginners. I'm offering you, besides, all the skill and cleverness that have won me a place in a world where men are cleverer than in yours. I'm a bargain. Take me."

"This isn't bargain day in the Ulrich Laing Company."

"Listen to me!" urged the thief. "What did you expect to pay this salesman you advertised for?"

"I expected to start him on seventy-two dollars a month, raising him as he proved worth while and then giving him a commission and salary. That is our custom. But—"

"Good. Well, I'll start on seventy-two dollars, and I'll stay at that till you think I'm worth a raise."

"I wasn't going to pay seventy-two dollars to a greenhorn. I advertised for a man who knew rugs."

"That's easily fixed. Tell me once the name of a rug and show me the rug, and I'll guarantee never to forget either its name or its make. Inside of a week I'll know your stock backward. Inside of a *day*. Try me."

Laing, nettled at the fellow's calm assurance, thrust out a finger toward one of the floor rugs and growled an Oriental name. In almost the same breath he indicated a wall rug and creaked out a title chiefly made up of guttural consonants.

A third and fourth he designated, naming each; and a fifth.

Then he turned sneeringly to Brenner.

"There!" he announced. "I've 'told you once' the names of the rugs and shown them to you. You say you'll guarantee never to forget. Let me hear you point out and name three out of the five I've just shown you."

"Whew!" laughed Brenner, "I had no idea there were so many outlandish names in the world. I've heard of Bokharas and Shervans and Khorassans and Daghestans and a few other 'ans,' but these are new ones on me."

"Stumped, eh?"

"Stumped? Not noticeably. Let me see."

Methodically he touched every rug in turn that Laing had pointed out, and at each touch he named that especial rug correctly. It was a feat of memory and of observation that caused Laing's little eyes to open wide.

"You know rugs," he accused.

"I know these five. Are there more kinds?"

Laing eyed him long and thoughtfully.

"If you *do* know rugs," he said at last, "so much the better. If you don't, a trained memory like yours would master the outer details of the business in no time. So you'd be willing to start at seventy-two dollars?"

"Yes."

"How would you live while you're learning to make good?"

"I've told you I received a little legacy lately."

"Oh, yes. From your uncle. I remember."

"No. From my aunt."

"And you've really been a crook for fifteen years?"

Again Brenner laughed; pleasantly, heartily.

"Mr. Laing," said he, "twelve years, I said. If you're trying to trip me up in my story, as you seem to be, you're wasting time. Why, man, don't you suppose if I chose to lie, a memory like mine could master every point in my lie; so that I couldn't be cornered?

"But it's nothing to me whether you believe me or not. I want a chance to be honest and make good. I can get money, all sorts of money. But I want *honest* money. I'll work for you as no other employee will. I want a chance."

"So you said."

"It's harder to turn honest than you think. To start out without references, with the Brand of the Crook on you. To know your boss will always doubt you and that if anything is missing from the store during the next ten years you'll be suspected. I'm ready to fight down all those obstacles. Give me a chance."

"To learn the value of my goods and the combination of my safe and how to get into my store at night?"

"Yes. If you choose to put it that way. As to getting into your store, that would be child's play. I've never seen your safe, except through that rug hanging over it. But I'll engage to open it in four minutes. As to stealing your goods, I can do that as easily 'from the outside' as in your employ. I repeat, I'm a bargain."

"Why did you pick out *my* advertisement rather than any other?"

"Because you were pointed out to me once, in the Knickerbocker bar. I size up faces pretty easily. It is part of my trade."

"And you sized up mine?"

"As the sort of man who would —understand the crook temperament. As the sort of man who is honest for revenue only. The man who isn't above taking a good bargain if that bargain happens to be marked 'crooked.' That's the sort of bargain *I* am. It's up to you."

There was a pause, while Laing slowly digested Brenner's words and did some rather rapid thinking.

"When can you come to work?" asked the rug king at last.

"I'm here now," replied Galvin Brenner. "Mr. Laing, you and I are going to get on swimmingly. But I've a hunch that things will happen."

CHAPTER II.

For Sale: Forty Ali Babas.

WITHIN three days Galvin Brenner had mastered details of the rug business that the average beginner could not have hoped to grasp in as many months.

The "price code" he had learned and could read as easily as the plainest figures, after half an hour of study.

The names and textures of rugs that he had once seen remained photographed indelibly in his memory.

Laing's reluctant admiration for his new salesman grew apace. The more so when, on the second day, Brenner quietly lifted two fingers as a countrified customer was leaving the store.

The stranger, with a lightning-quick gesture, dropped two small but costly rugs from under his coat and fled.

On the third morning, as on the second, Brenner was the first salesman to enter the store; just as the porter was laying down the rugs and putting the place to rights. Full of zeal at his new trade, Brenner helped the porter arrange stock, and waited, with a truly bewitching grace, on an old lady who had dropped in on her way to an out-of-town train.

Presently a second porter came in with a big bundle of rugs that had just arrived from the custom house.

Brenner fell upon them, cut their binding cord and spread them out in one corner of the outer shop to await Mr. Laing's arrival.

They were not large nor, to his mind, especially prepossessing. Nor were they of any of the designs or fabrics to which he had accustomed himself during the past two days.

There were forty of them. And on the cord that bound them, as well as on the outermost rug of the bundle, were scrawled two tagged letters. So badly were the letters printed that Brenner was forced to examine them for a moment or two before he could decipher them as "M. P."

At once he understood.

The letters represented the retail code price. Most stores have such ciphers; each letter representing a numeral; the whole cipher forming a ten-letter word or phrase whose first letter corresponds with the number "1" and the last with "0."

The Ulrich Laing Company's cipher was "Make Profit." Thus, as a single glance showed Brenner, "M. P." stood for "15." And as no decimal marks were apparent, the retail code price of the rugs was, of course, fifteen dollars.

Scarcely had he gleaned this bit of information when the head salesman called up on the telephone to say he was ill with grippe and could not come down to work that day. The second clerk lived somewhere in New Jersey and was prone to missing trains. He, too, had not yet arrived. The third salesman—as always on a morning when consignments from the East were due—was down at the Custom House.

Mr. Laing was also unaccountably late. And Brenner realized suddenly, with a thrill of real pride, that he himself chanced to be the only salesman on duty. After two days of employment he temporarily represented the entire selling force of the great rug-house of Ulrich Laing. On his shoulders rested full responsibility.

Meantime, customers were beginning to drop in. It was the "first flight" of early shoppers. An elderly man was among the earliest. Drifting idly through the store he chanced to note the forty new rugs, some rolled, some flat, in their corner of the front show-room.

He stooped, picked up one of them; held it to the light, felt its texture and shook it slowly to catch a view of the sheen along its surface.

"What rugs are these?" he asked, indicating the one in his hand and the thirty-nine other new arrivals.

Brenner had been expecting such a question. And his answer was ready.

While he had a parrot memory for the name and good points of every rug that had been described to him during the past two days, yet this consignment seemed to contain no rugs of the kind he had been shown. Nor had any invoice or bill of lading accompanied the bundle. That was doubtless in the pocket of the clerk who piloted the forty rugs through the custom house.

Wherefore, Galvin Brenner resolved to bluff.

He dared not classify these rugs under any of the names he had learned, lest the buyer might be familiar with such varieties. And as he cast about for an Oriental name, the new consignment's number, forty, awoke in him a train of association.

"I asked what rugs these are," repeated the customer a little impatiently.

"These?" echoed Brenner. "Oh, these are the famous Ali Baba weave. We are introducing them into America. You will see from the—"

"How much is this one?"

"They are all fifteen dollars apiece. Please don't laugh at the absurdly low price for such treasures. As I said, we are introducing them here. And so we are letting the first lot go out at a shameful sacrifice. A month from now, one hundred dollars wouldn't buy a rug like this. You will note that the weave—"

"I'll take this. And this. And that one over there."

"You are wise, sir, to get in on the ground floor. A month from now—By the way, shall we add one more rug and make it an even sixty dollars? That—"

"Yes."

"And—"

"Those four will be enough for the present. Have them wrapped up and phone for a taxi. I will take them with me."

Before the elderly man had finished counting out his money, a woman who had entered the store wandered over to see what her fellow shopper had bought. Noticing that he had selected four rugs from an especial collection, she too became absorbed in Ali Babas.

And ten minutes later she left with two of them.

Her interest in them attracted two other early customers. And so on for the next two hours, at the end of which time twelve of the Ali Babas had been sold.

They were sent to the delivery department with orders to distribute them on the first trip.

Then the belated New Jersey salesman came in and Brenner was relegated to his proper place in the rear of the store.

But he was in a glow. He had made good. The "rug king" was certain to be pleased.

"Who was on duty here when the store opened?" demanded Ulrich Laing as he hurried in a few minutes later. "You?"

"I certainly was. And I sold—"

"I went down to the Custom House myself this morning to handle a special consignment of rugs and bring them up here in person. The boat docked an hour before schedule time. And when I got there I found Caton had already sent them up. They come all right? Where—"

"Yes. All forty of them. A couple of hours ago. But—"

"Good. I was afraid they might—"

"But they 're not all here *now,* by a long shot."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Mr. Laing, that I sold no less than twelve of those forty rugs in two hours!"

He looked expectantly at his employer, ready to enjoy the latter's amaze at such quick work by a greenhorn.

And the amazement he looked for was assuredly visible. Indeed, it was writ large all over Ulrich Laing's wide face, turning the ruddy visage an ashy gray and making the little eyes pop out like a lobster's.

"You—sold—you sold—" babbled Laing thickly.

"Twelve in two hours. They went like gold bricks. They went so fast I wished I dared run up their price from fifteen dollars to—"

"*Fifteen dollars!*" croaked Laing, a queer paralysis holding him moveless and all but dumb.

"Yes. That was the retail code

price—'M. P.'—fifteen dollars. And if Parker hadn't come in to take charge, I believe I'd have the whole forty sold by now. Better put me in the front of the store, Mr. Laing. I told you I was a born salesman. I—"

"You're a born criminal idiot!" bellowed Laing, suddenly finding his voice and his motive power. "You've wrecked us! Where are the rest of those forty rugs?"

"Over there. What's wrong?"

But Laing had torn away and was actually galloping across to where the twelve unsold items of the "Ali Baba" consignment were lying. He threw himself upon the relics, sorting, examining, muttering, his hands palsied, his breath coming in short gasps.

As he reached the last of the twelve, Brenner standing bewilderedly over him, Laing threw up both arms and cried in stark horror:

"Gone! *Gone!* Good Lord! *Gone!*"

"What?" began Brenner.

But blindly Ulrich Laing lurched away and rushed into his private office, slamming and locking the door behind him.

CHAPTER III.

A Strange Quest.

FOR a full half-hour Brenner stood mooning around the shop, wondering mightily what had happened—and why.

He realized he had made a mistake. Presumably a big one, judging from the usually self-contained Laing's almost babyish emotion. But what was the blunder? His suspense came to an end at last. Laing's errand boy hurried into the front store with a summons for the delinquent to come immediately to the private office.

Brenner obeyed, bracing himself disgustedly for a further exhibition of horror on the part of the rug king.

To his surprise and relief, he found Laing seated calmly at his table-desk in the rug-lined office, bearing no sign whatever of his recent distress. Brenner found it in his heart to admire the man's powers of restraint.

"Sit down, Brenner," said Laing, indicating the only other chair that was not rug-strewn.

Brenner seated himself, alertly waiting for the next move.

"Brenner," continued Laing in the same even voice, "you sold twelve rugs this morning. You sold them at fifteen dollars each. You seem to expect me to commend your zeal. My only excuse for not doing so is that each of those rugs was worth more than one thousand dollars."

"No!" gasped Brenner.

"That may account," resumed Laing, "for the ease with which you were able to get rid of them for fifteen dollars apiece. The merest tyro among our customers could see what wonderful value he was getting for his money."

"But the code price—the 'M. P.' on each?"

"That was not a code price. It was an Arabic sign. Looking at it upside down, I suppose, it was barely possible that an ignorant man might have mistaken the symbol for these two letters. You evidently did."

"Mr. Laing," said Brenner abruptly, "I've played the fool. And, like most fools, I've harmed some one else instead of myself. If I had twelve thousand dollars, or anywhere near that sum, I'd pay it over to you to square things. But I haven't. My legacy was only four thousand nine hundred dollars. I've got most of it left. Of course, I'll transfer that to you. And I'll pay up as much of the rest as I can, from time to time."

"I suppose one good haul from a safe-cracking job would do it?" sneered Laing.

Brenner flushed slightly under his tanned skin.

"I'm afraid I can't help you that way, Mr. Laing," he said stiffly. "When I said I had dropped the old game, I meant it. Henceforth I play

square. If there's any honest way I can get the money for you—"

"There's a way you can get the rugs back for me. At least, I think there may be. That is why I sent for you just now, instead of discharging you out of hand. Are you sincere in your wish to atone for this gross and costly blunder of yours?"

"Try me," said Brenner, steadily.

"Good. You say you were a crook for twelve years. Well, here is a chance to put your predatory talents to use in a good cause. Steal back those rugs for me."

"Steal?"

"Oh, call it by any name you like. *Get* them. They are mine. They were sold under a misapprehension."

"But—"

"If your new-born conscience bothers you, you can leave the cost price in place of them when you take them. If I sent to the purchasers and asked them to sell back for fifteen dollars what is worth more than a thousand, they would laugh in my face. Will you do it?"

Brenner walked to the window and stood there, his hands behind him, looking out. Long he stood there, motionless, his back to Laing. And the rug king eyed him as tensely as might a speculator the ticker whose next purr will mean fortune or failure.

At length Brenner turned back into the room. At sight of his face Laing caught a breath of relief.

For Brenner's eyes were aglow with the light that was, perhaps, resolution, perhaps mischief, perhaps both. Possibly a feminine novelist might have described it as "the joy of battle."

"You're on," he said briefly.

"You'll do it?"

"I'll get you as many of those rugs as I can lay hands on."

"And for each you bring me," chimed in Laing, "I'll give you—"

"You'll give me nothing," contradicted Brenner. "And it'll be my own money I leave in their place."

"Good!" assented Laing, with genial patronage. "That's the way I like to hear a man talk. I got the list of addresses for you. Here it is."

"You must have been pretty sure of my consenting to steal them back."

"Brenner, my boy," laughed Laing, "I owe most of my success to being able to size up men; and some of the rest of it to my habit of trying to sop up spilled milk instead of crying over it."

"And I'm to do the sopping for you? All right. Each rug I get I'll bring to you at once. Good-by."

CHAPTER IV.

Underground Work.

UNWONTEDLY early each morning thereafter Ulrich Laing reached his office. Daily he expected to find Brenner awaiting him there with one of the lost rugs.

But days passed, and with them no Brenner.

The thief was busy night and day. He knew it was not enough to have the addresses of the rugs' present owners. He could scarce march into the houses of such people, locate and snatch up a rug, and depart unchallenged.

There must be no danger of failure nor of capture. That would at once end his campaign of restoration.

Wherefore, he laid his plans as carefully and as cunningly as though he were arranging the theft of the British crown jewels.

By devious courses, he traced half a dozen of the rugs; learned the nature and occupants of the abodes in which each was domiciled, and, as far as possible, the characters and weaknesses of the possessors themselves.

More than once during his researches, he called for help from his old comrades of the underworld, and for that help he paid well.

More than once he found himself—as canvasser, gas inspector, telephone

lineman, or delivery man—in the very presence of one of the coveted rugs.

At last his line of advance was ready, and he prepared to angle for the first half-dozen of the "Ali Babas."

After that, a new campaign could be mapped out for the hardest part of all—the tracing of the rugs that had been carried from the store by hand instead of by delivery.

Mr. Morrie Cauler had just reopened his popular and well-established place of business on a side street just north of Forty-Second Street and west of Broadway.

Mr. Cauler's establishment had suffered a temporary eclipse, due to an overinterest on the part of the local district attorney's office.

He had long since persuaded the precinct police captain that his house was a good one to overlook. And this persuasion had been backed by a politician of high repute and by a monthly subscription to an unlisted civic fund.

But the district attorney's men, unjustly distrusting police aid, had one night descended without warning and with a hydraulic jack, upon the Cauler palace of mischance; had cruelly refused to believe that certain perfectly innocent contraptions on view there were other than roulette wheels and faro layouts, and had not only taken certain prisoners (on "John Dealer" and "James Wheelman" warrants) but had wrecked the whole establishment.

Thus, when a gentler and more amenable district attorney came into office and Cauler was enabled to open once more for business, the house needed thorough refurnishing.

After which a house-warming ensued.

At this function Mr. Cauler was pleased to see his old acquaintance, Galvin Brenner.

There had been disquieting rumors that Brenner had "gone good." And Cauler was glad that the suspected man should clear his bad name by public reappearance at this wholesale reunion of the underworld. Also that Brenner should take so keen and critical an interest in the new furnishings. It was a pleasure to see his absorption in the costly rugs and draperies.

A hired decorator had done the job, and had charged for it the gilt-edged price that the underworld was always taxed for its garish luxuries. The admiration of a man like Brenner went far to reconcile Cauler to the decorator's bill.

In fact, Brenner could not keep his eyes off the sumptuous display long enough to patronize the tables to any profitable extent. A whirl or two of the wheel, five minutes at the faro layout—and off he would be on another delighted inspection of the room.

The hour grew late and play ran high. Men in evening clothes—known habitués of the place and, as such, admitted by the "wicket man" began to fill the gaudy rooms—drifting in from clubs, theaters, and dances.

And before the advent of these more profitable customers, the underworld gradually effaced itself.

But Brenner stayed on. He was no longer interested in the habiliments of the place, but in one roulette wheel. Here he played steadily, but without system, staking very small sums on the colors and on the "*pair et impair*" and seldom varying in fortune.

An observer would have scored him as a piker or as lacking interest in the game. But at such places there are few observers of men whose play is small and conservative.

A "plunger" entered. He began to play heavily. All eyes in that part of the room, except those of the actual players, were on him. Brenner strolled over to the buffet.

His cigarette fell on a small rug that lay there.

He picked up the rug with no effort at concealment and began to brush off the ashes he had spilled on it. Then,

his back to the rest, and facing the buffet, he folded the rug and slipped it under his coat. He did it unconcernedly.

No one noted. All eyes were still on the game or on the plunger.

A minute later, Brenner was gone. So was the rug. On the buffet corner lay three five-dollar bills twisted into a spill.

Down the thick carpeted stairs Brenner sped. Along the hall toward the guarded front door. And as he went he shed the cheap waistcoat he wore.

In its place, beneath his close-buttoning business coat, he wrapped around his chest and waist the rug The rug for whose acquisition he had spoiled Morrie Cauler's house-warming.

Past the lookout he hurried and laid his hand on the doorknob.

As he did so there was a sudden crash. The door flew inward, almost knocking him down, and a cataract of blue-clad men gushed into the hallway.

CHAPTER V.

Flight!

A NEW police captain had been slated for the precinct which was honored by the presence of Mr. Morrie Cauler's temple of chance.

He had come on duty that afternoon, instead of the following morning, as had been originally planned.

He was a reformer—until the right people in the district could have time to argue away his reform ideas. And a spectacular raid, at the outset, seemed the quickest way to set such arguments in motion.

Hence the descent upon Cauler.

The customary warning had not been sent. The police had massed quietly.

The hydraulic jack had been applied with so little noise that even the lookout had not time to spread the alarm before the door was burst in.

Galvin Brenner gathered as many of the foregoing facts as were needful to his personal uses in a smaller fraction of a second than any three hundred dollar stop-watch has yet learned to indicate.

His body working as quickly as his mind, he leaped back behind the inflying door, and crouched there for an instant while the bulk of the raiders surged into the house.

Then, bending low, he darted out, ducked under the upflung arm of a policeman in the vestibule, dodged a second unprepared bluecoat at the top of the steps, cleared the nine brownstone steps in one flying leap and—landed in the arms of a patrolman at the bottom.

The impact knocked his captor off his balance.

Wriggling like an eel, Brenner twisted himself free before the policeman could renew his grip, and made off at a "hundred-yard" clip toward the North River.

Ordinarily, so old a denizen of the underworld as Galvin Brenner would not have exerted himself in the very least to avoid capture in a gambling-house raid. For he knew that mere patrons of such places usually suffer no worse fate than a temporary inconvenience of appearing before a magistrate, answering to the time-honored cognomen of "John Smith," and then escaping with a perfunctory scolding from the bench.

But, just now, Brenner could not afford to be caught. At the station house he would have a hard time explaining how he came to be wearing a Persian rug instead of a vest. Cauler would recognize the rug. And not only would Brenner lose forever his standing in the underworld, but—what was of infinitely more import—he would lose the rug as well.

Wherefore he ran. And, because he ran, two policemen gave chase.

And one of the two, being new to the force and to the possession of firearms, drew his pistol and fired.

The bullet passed between Galvin's arm and his ribs, scratching viciously through the side of his coat in its whizzing flight.

The hour was very late, the side street dark. Not a soul was on the sidewalk ahead of Brenner as he raced toward Ninth Avenue.

His heels were light, and he was gaining slowly on the two panting bluecoats, one of whom, without checking his pace, smote every few moments on the pavement with his night-stick.

That signal and the pistol-shot, Brenner knew, were certain to bring every policeman on beat in that section of Ninth Avenue on the run to head him off. There was no hope of gaining the docks.

Even as he realized this, the thing he had dreaded happened. Under the glare of electric light that marked the dark street's egress into Ninth Avenue, a third policeman appeared.

The fugitive was neatly pocketed.

Scarce slacking his pace he dashed into the areaway of an apartment house.

He opened the area door by smashing the glass and turning the key on the inside. Then he darted back into the ash cupboard under the front steps and concealed himself.

In an instant the two policemen were in the areaway. Seeing the broken glass and open door they rushed into the basement hall, colliding in the dark with a sleepy janitor aroused by the racket.

And in the ensuing scrimmage Galvin Brenner calmly stepped out of the ash bin and regained the street and safety.

Ulrich Laing reached his store next morning to find Brenner awaiting him. The emissary followed Laing into the inner office and spread out on the desk a somewhat dusty rug.

"I brushed it as well as I could," he explained, as he finished the story of the night's events. "But the area ash bin was the only safe place to hide in."

Laing was not observing the ashes, but a faint groove that showed on the rug's under surface. Brenner followed his glance.

"I hope that scratch won't injure the rug's value," said he. "It's where the cop's bullet grazed. My coat got it much worse. See?"

"Brenner," remarked Laing after a thought-laden silence, "you're something of a man. I think I like you. Sit down and have a smoke while you tell me more about the chase."

"Thanks," refused Brenner, "but I haven't time to smoke or to brag. There are still eleven rugs to get. I must work faster if I don't want to make a life job of my hunt. Good-by. I'm off for the next."

CHAPTER VI.

Sanctuary!

FATHER AMBROSE CURRAN sat in his parish house study.

House and appointments were new and were adjuncts to the lately built Church of St. Festus, which reared its spire in the heart of an upper East Side slum as a rallying-point in its never-ending battle with the sin and sorrow and poverty that so tightly hemmed it in.

The little parish house had been furnished by loving and loyal hands.

Yet as he looked about, for the hundredth time, at its simple luxury, Father Curran wished once more that his living and working quarters might have represented less outlay and that he might have had the spending of the price-difference for his adored poor.

Then scolding himself roundly for his own ingratitude, the priest bent once more to the task of preparing his monthly parish reports.

But they were doomed to delay this afternoon. Within a single half-hour he was interrupted by two whining appeals for money aid; by a wife who

wanted his prayers and his counsel for a drinking husband; by a girl who was soliciting clerical advertisements for a Sunday newspaper, and by a man who had come to make a thank-offering to the church.

This last-named caller came on business of such rarity and of so wholesome a nature that Father Curran felt his own battered faith in human nature reviving.

"I won't take more than a moment of your busy time, father," began this thank-offering man in a brisk, businesslike voice, as he set down the suit-case he carried and accepted the chair tendered him.

"Here's my case: I have had a little stroke of luck. And I'd like to donate a percentage of it to your poor. Will you attend to its distribution for me, in any way you see fit? I shall be obliged to you. The sum I'm giving is small. Only fifteen dollars. I wish it were bigger. Here it is."

He laid a ten-dollar bill and a five on the desk and rose to his feet to go.

"I thank you most heartily," said Father Curran. "I wish more men when they have what you call 'a little stroke of luck' would remember our unfortunates in this way—"

He broke off in dismay. The caller, while extending his hand to meet the priest's in farewell, had suddenly cried out and collapsed into his chair.

"You are ill?" exclaimed Father Curran in dire concern. "You are suffering? Let me telephone for—"

"No!" gasped the stricken man. "A touch of—of vertigo. I often—often— Drink of water, please—I—"

The priest hastened from the room before the stammering appeal was completed. Quickly he came back with a glass of cold water which he held to the visitor's twitching lips.

At a draft the young man emptied the glass, then sighed and opened his eyes wider. After which he rose somewhat shakily to his feet.

"Thank you," he murmured. "I'm —I'm all right again now. I often have these turns. There's nothing serious about them. And they're over in a few minutes. I'm sorry to have bothered you so."

As he spoke he stooped and picked up his suit-case.

"Hold on!" urged Father Curran, "you are surely not well enough yet to go out. Lie down over there on my couch for a while. I'll have my housekeeper make you some strong coffee."

"No, thanks," returned the other, "I'm all right. Good day."

"But let me go with you as far as your home," insisted the priest. "You may have another attack and—"

"It isn't necessary," growled the visitor ungraciously. "I'm well again. Besides, you're busy."

"Oh, I can spare time easily for such a trifling service as that," exclaimed Father Curran, with a guilty look at his work-piled desk. "I'll get my hat and—"

"I'd rather be alone, thanks. I'm quite recovered. Good-by."

The stranger turned abruptly on his heel and, suit-case in hand, cut short further argument by striding bruskly from the room and from the house.

"What an odd man!" commented Father Curran, going back to his desk. "Almost rude, in spite of being so generous."

He set himself to work again, but, even as he sifted out statistics and filed appeals, his mind reverted to his late guest.

"A thank-offering," he mused. "And in money! How much wiser than to spend it on furnishings that I've no right to sell for people who need help! Yes, the desk must be worth eighty dollars. And then that fancy rug— Why, bless my soul, where *is* the rug?"

He stared blankly at one equally blank space on the floor in front of the desk. Then he looked in bewildered fashion about the floor, on the chance that his housekeeper might

have placed the rug elsewhere in the room.

And his wandering gaze at last fell on a figure that was just entering the study doorway. It was his recent visitor, the thank-offering man.

At sight of him Father Curran quite forgot the mystery of the vanished rug.

"You were feeling worse," he cried, "and so you came back! You did right. Lie down there, and I'll telephone for our own doctor. It's the hot weather, probably. But he'll have you all right in no time. He's a splendid doctor."

"I am not sick," answered the visitor, in a curiously constrained voice, like that of a scared child that admits a grievous fault.

"But—" began the priest.

"Father Curran," blurted the stranger, flinging open his suitcase as he spoke, "here is your rug. I thought I could go through with this job. But I can't. I draw the line at cheating the Church. Send for the police, if you like."

CHAPTER VII.

Confession.

FATHER AMBROSE CURRAN looked long and silently at the thief. And as he looked he read the face of the man before him as lesser souls might read a printed page.

Into his mild eyes dawned a light that transformed and almost glorified them. Then—

"Sit down, my son," he said gently. "It seems that you and I have much to say to each other. It is tiring to stand when one has just been ill. Sit down."

"I was not ill," said Brenner sullenly, "it was part of the dirty trick I played you. I pretended to be sick and asked for water to get you out of the room while I stole this rug. I lied to you. Even about the 'thank-offering.' I lied to a man who trusted me. The first man who ever trusted me.

"And I robbed you while you were trying to do me a kindness. I suppose," he finished with almost impersonal disgust, "I suppose I've dropped just about as low as a thief can."

"You are not a thief," gravely corrected the priest. "So far as I am concerned you are honest. If sudden temptation has made you take what was not yours, you just have atoned by restitution and by confession and by offer to endure punishment for your faults. You stand before me—absolved!

"But," he went on presently, "why should you have taken the rug? If booty was your object there are costlier things here. In this drawer there is money. And—if you are a thief—why did you bring me money as a thief? If it is part of a stolen sum," he broke off sternly, "I warn you I will not accept—"

"No," answered Brenner, "it was not."

"You saw me put your fifteen dollars in the drawer," continued the bewildered priest, "and you must have seen there was more money there. Why did you not take that as well as the rug?"

"I do not need money. I need the rug. I cannot explain. And I am not a crank. Nor," Brenner continued, "in the sense you use the word, am I a thief any longer."

"I do not understand," replied the priest, "I do not understand any of it. But this I do know: you are a penitent man—a soul in pain—at heart a man who longs to be good. Since you wish this rug, take it. It is yours."

"No!"

"You have already paid me its probable value in that supposed 'thank-offering.' Take it. It is yours, by my free gift. A man could not so lower himself for anything as you have done for this rug, unless behind it all were some powerful mo-

tive. I do not ask what that motive is. If you were wrong in your impulse, you have proved your repentance. Take the rug."

"Let me pay you—"

"You have already paid. In more than money. Listen!" Father Curran's eyes sparkled with sudden laughter. "I will tell you a secret. Even when you came back, I was wishing my furnishings here could have been simpler and the money they cost could be put to uses that would make me happier.

"It was an ungrateful—an unworthy wish. But you have made part of it come true. Now we have both confessed.

"I can see you are anxious to be gone. And I have work to do. Good-by. And—if ever I can help you, remember the door of God's house stands always open."

At the nearest post-office sub-station Brenner bought a hundred dollar money order, signing a fictitious name to the application blank. And he mailed it to Father Curran.

"He'll have trouble refusing *that* instalment on my debt," thought Brenner as he hurried down-town toward the great rug-emporium.

He arrived just at closing time and entered the private office as Ulrich Laing was climbing into his street coat.

Without a word Brenner spread out the rug on the desk.

Laing, as before, shot a keen glance at the rug; then frowned slightly, as though in disappointment. But instantly his face cleared.

"Come, come!" he exclaimed, ponderously genial, "this *is* progress. Two in one day. At that rate we'll have the lot of them back inside of a week. Let's hear the story of the second adventure."

He leaned back in his chair, an expectant smile overspreading his puffy, florid face.

"There's no story," said Brenner curtly. "At least—none that you could understand. And if there were, I've no time to tell it. I've a busy night before me."

CHAPTER VIII.

A Queer Find.

VAN CLEEK DUYCK went home.

Chiefly for the time-honored reason that there seemed to be no other place to go.

He had run out to the Arareek Country Club for the night, to be on hand at a strictly illegal prize-fight that a group of the club members were planning to engineer in a near-by barn at dawn on the following day.

It was to be an informal and old-fashioned bout, such as they had read of the "Corinthian bloods" attending in the days of George IV. Each fighter had his clique of frenzied backers among the club members. The battle was to be the most exclusive on record. Barely fifty spectators, and that fifty representing as many millions.

The whole thing had been one of the happy inspirations of Van Cleek Duyck's fertile brain. And it had been loudly acclaimed. In fact it had been just a trifle too loudly acclaimed. So loudly indeed that it had reached the straining ears of Sheriff Flick of Arareek County.

The sheriff had been plenteously blackballed by the ultra-close Arareek Country Club. And now, by way of jocund repartee, he proceeded at the eleventh hour to arrest both fighters and to hold them, temporarily, without bail as "disorderly characters and menaces to the peace of Arareek County in the State of New York."

The sad news had confronted Van Cleek Duyck on his arrival at the club that evening. And as his fellow members seemed inclined to blame him for the fiasco, he did not enjoy his stay there.

After various libations he decided that he hated everybody, and he came back to town on the 10.50 train.

He did not care to be seen at any club or restaurant. For, at such a place, some fool of his acquaintance was certain to ask questions about the fight. And he did not want to do any more explaining just then.

It was too late to go to a show or to call anywhere. So, against every precedent in his short but event-strewn career, Van Cleek Duyck actually went to his own home at the unheard of hour of 11.45 P.M.

Such a thing had not happened in a year. He had given his valet the evening off. His three Jap house-servants, relying on their employer's regular custom of returning homeward in conjunction with the morning papers, had fared forth on a night of celestial recreation at the Nippon Club.

Wherefore, the early-arriving Van Cleek Duyck was hazily pained to find his "house left unto him desolate."

He fortified himself with a comforter or two at the sideboard; then roamed lazily upward toward his bedroom; singing plaintively, off key, as he went.

At the door of his room he felt for the electric key; he turned it and set aglow the shaded light clusters on three walls. He was sober—to a modified degree—but he was very unhappy.

He had been so happy, no later than last night! He remembered how he had sung a blithe roundelay as he came up-stairs then—conquering the writhing banisters and the wabbly steps. He recalled how droll had been the antics of the rug just within his bedroom doorway. It had jumped up and embraced him around the ankles; playfully trying to throw him.

Even that merry little door rug, apparently, lacked the heart to rise and frolic with him. Poor little rug!

And—say, where *was* that romp-loving rug? Who had dared move it from its fall-inducing resting place?

Maybe it had crawled under the bed. He would look.

Yes, it was altogether likely the poor, ill-treated rug had crawled under the bed; since there was no other hiding place so accessible in all the room.

Mr. Van Cleek Duyck went ponderously on all fours and reached a long, groping arm beneath the bed's white side lattice.

His reaching fingers promptly found and triumphantly closed around —a man's ankle.

CHAPTER IX.

For High Stakes.

TO look under his bed for a rug and to find, instead, a fellow man seemed to Van Cleek Duyck the most deliciously mirth-provoking episode in all his experience.

His gloom was swept away by a gust of overjoyous laughter. Releasing the squirming ankle, he collapsed into a sitting posture on the floor and laughed until the room rang with his merriment.

And as he sat thus, the man under the bed began slowly to emerge.

Duyck, speechless, helpless from laughter, sat, goggle-eyed and open-mouthed, watching the gradual appearance of a pair of hands, then a head, then broad shoulders.

He had pictured mentally—so far as his present mentality could picture anything—a bullet-headed, unshaven ruffian with bristling black jowl, a soiled handkerchief about his neck, and a jimmy and a dark lantern in either hand.

Instead, his uninvited guest had a clean, strong face, well-cut clothes, and —in place of jimmy or lantern—he drew from under the bed after him an Oriental rug.

"This belongs to you, I think?" suavely observed the intruder as he rose, brushing off the knees and elbows of his suit. "I commend your servants or your housekeeper. I've seldom found the floor under any bed so clean."

"Wh—what were you doing under there?" demanded Duyck weakly, the laugh-spasm almost clearing his brain. "And what did you take the rug there for? It—it doesn't make sense."

"Oh, yes, it does," Brenner reassured him. "It's plain as day, when you've got the diagram. It's usually the comic paper burglar that hides under the bed. But, at a pinch, it's a hiding-place not to be despised."

"You're—you're a burglar?"

"Do I look like a war-scare? Who but a burglar would be hiding under your bed at this time of night? I was after this rug."

He folded it neatly and tucked it under his left arm.

But Duyck, still sitting cross-legged on the floor, wagged a reproving forefinger at him.

"'Twon't work, old scout!" admonished the sitter. "'Twon't work. Never heard a clumshier lie in all my life. Came up here to look for a cheap rug, and skipped all the perf'ly good silver in the dining-room? No, no! Too bald. Too shiny. Won't work. 'Fraid you're only a poor, measly honest man. Get out!"

"Gladly," assented Brenner. "There's only one more thing to do before I go. Here."

From his pocket he drew a five-dollar bill folded around a ten-dollar gold piece.

"What's that for?" queried the puzzled Duyck.

"To pay for the rug, of course. Since you've so mercilessly exposed me as an honest man, I'll have to live up to the part. Here."

He dropped the money into one of Duyck's feebly gesticulating palms.

"Hold on!" commanded Duyck with awful sternness. "What'cher take me for? I'm no bally rug-dealer. That rug isn't for sale, either. And, besides, it's most likely worth a lot more than what you're trying to pay me for it. My man got it for me when I burned a cigarette-hole through another one and—"

"And he paid fifteen dollars for it at Ulrich Laing's. What he taxed *you* for it I don't know. But there's the fifteen. Good-by."

"I'm not selling!" solemnly retorted Duyck. "I'm holding for a rise. What'cher want the rug for, anyhow? What'cher doing in my house at all?"

"I'm buying rugs, as I told you. And, having bought, I'm going."

Brenner took a step toward the door; but Duyck caught him by the trousers leg.

"You stop where you are," ordered the clubman, "or I'll lick you."

"My little friend," soothed Brenner, making no effort to escape, "I want this rug. I have only to land on your jaw to put you out of business while I make a getaway. Don't force me to. If the price isn't enough—"

"Now, that's a fair offer!" declared Duyck, scrambling to his feet. "Come on up-stairs to the gym. We'll put on the gloves. If you can put me out, the rug's yours. If you can't, why—it isn't. Fair sporting offer. Come on up."

Brenner mentally contrasted his own bulk and clean, athletic strength with the thin-chested, swaying figure before him.

"I'm afraid you are too formidable a boxer for me," he replied. "You're 'way above my class."

"Quite right!" beamed Duyck, highly pleased. "Sensible man to avoid a licking. Play you a poker hand for the rug. One cold hand."

Brenner hesitated.

Common sense told him to rap the half drunken fellow over the head, or to gag and tie him up, and to walk off in safety with the rug. But it irked him to do violence to a man so palpably helpless. It was like snatching a toy from a crying child.

In poker, luck is with the drunk as fully as with the sober. And something about Duyck's innate sportsmanship appealed to the plunderer.

"One poker hand," repeated his host. "One cold poker hand!"

He shuffled to a table and drew out a deck of cards encased in a red silk case. Riffling the cards with a rare skill for one whose fingers were so unsteady, he offered them to Brenner to cut.

Brenner merely tapped the deck with his finger-tips. And, with a nod of appreciation, Duyck proceeded to deal two hands—face upward.

He dealt with a lightning speed and accuracy, betokening years of instinct and skill beneath momentary haziness.

Not until he had dealt the tenth card did he glance at his own hand, lying scattered on the little table before him. And by that time Brenner's face could have told him the story of the deal.

Duyck had two pair—sevens and tens. Brenner's hand could boast but a pair of fives.

"You win!" philosophically observed the visitor.

CHAPTER X.

From Frying-Pan to Fire.

BLINKING, Duyck peered across at Brenner and studied his face with wavering intensity. But the latter showed no hint of chagrin. Not a muscle betrayed a sense of loss nor of defeat.

"Good!" approved Van Cleek Duyck with tipsy solemnity. "I said you weren't a burglar. And I said—or I'd have said it if I'd thought to—that you've got good blood. And now I think I'll join myself in a drink to celebrate. Have one?"

"No, thanks."

"No? You're wise," remarked Duyck, unlocking a wall cellaret and taking out a bottle and glass. "Always resist temptation. I always do. Till there isn't any resistance left."

"Good night, old chap," said Brenner, "and thanks for giving me a chance to win the rug. It was white of you."

"I gave you your one best chance just now when I turned my back on you to drink," hiccuped Duyck. "Why didn't you grab the rug and run for it? You could have made a very clean getaway."

"You had won the rug from me. Won it fairly. I'm no welcher."

"*Fairly?*" scoffed Duyck. "Here, my crank friend, take your silly rug and clear out. I'm blessed if I can guess your game. But you're a man and a sportsman. I've tried you by every stunt I could think of. And you strike twelve every time. 'Won the rug *fairly*,' did I? Look here!"

He caught up the cards, ran his fingers through them, and began to throw poker hands on the table with bewildering rapidity.

And such hands! Full houses, fours, flushes, straights—at will. He wound up the performance by dealing a royal flush.

"What chance had you?" he laughed. "Candy from a baby! Mulcting the ultimate consumer! I can throw hands like those till doomsday, or till my wrist breaks.

"I guess you're too much of a man yourself to need me to explain that I'm never cur enough to do it except for fun. A knack an ocean liner shark taught me when I was a kid. After he'd bled me for a year's allowance. It's my only accomplishment. That and keeping the distilleries from closing down. Take your rug."

Brenner choked down a gust of anger at having been the butt of a youth for whom he had felt only an amused contempt. He picked up the rug and turned to the door.

"There's your fifteen dollars," said he, pointing to the money on the floor.

But Duyck was already filling his glass again.

"I will now indulge in a curious custom," quoth he, "which the Fiji Islanders have borrowed from the ancient Visigoths, who, in turn, are believed to have learned it from the Phenicians. I will accept my hospitable invitation to have just one more drink."

He suited the action to the word. When he spoke again the momentary clearness was gone from voice and brain.

"G'night, O seeker of adventures for the criminally insane," he babbled. "Be off, I prythee, while the offing is still at its best."

Filling his glass, he broke into song:

"Oh, I had a little hen, with little wooden legs,
And she supplied our table with the choicest wooden eggs.
She's the wisest little chicken we've got around the farm,
And an—anozzer li'l drink won' do us any harm!"

Galvin Brenner left his host testing the truth of his song's last line. Down-stairs he went, the rug over his arm.

And in the foyer he came face to face with a severe-looking man in black. With this personage was a policeman.

"You see, constable," the man was saying apologetically, "Mr. Duyck—I'm his valet—is out of town to-night. And when I came home just now and found the street door standing wide open, I fancied perhaps some—"

He broke off. Brenner had seen the two new arrivals too late to duck out of sight. He stood, before their double gaze, on the stairway's lowest step, the rug conspicuously on his arm.

"I was right!" cried the valet. "Look, constable!"

The policeman had not only looked but leaped. Pistol drawn, he was upon Brenner. The valet, close behind, had caught up a heavy walking stick.

Brenner, not being a born fool, made no move to escape, but stood smiling debonairly at the excited pair.

"Put down that gun, officer," he suggested blandly. "It might go off. I don't think poor old Duyck would care to have me killed all over his foyer rug. And speaking of rugs—"

"'E's a thief, constable!" declaimed the valet. "Take 'im in custody!"

"What are you doin' here?" asked the policeman.

"Being held up, apparently," laughed Brenner, "I—"

"What were you doin' with that rug?"

"Van Cleek Duyck just gave it to me. I took a fancy to it and—"

"And to the plate as well, I'll warrant!" chimed in the valet. "Constable, Mr. Duyck never—"

"Come!" broke in Brenner with the air of a man who tires of a comic situation too long drawn out. "We'll step up-stairs, all three, and Dr. Duyck will clear up the matter in a single word."

He turned and led the way upward; the two others trailing doubtfully and sullenly after him.

"My master is from home, constable!" cried the valet suddenly, as they neared the bedroom door. "I forgot, for the moment. This is a trick. An ambush, maybe. He—"

Brenner had stepped into the room. The policeman followed at a bound, as if fearing his prey was trying to escape. The valet followed more cautiously.

There, stretched at full length across the foot of the bed, sprawled Van Cleek Duyck, having passed into peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER XI.

Desperate Remedies.

AT sight of Duyck the valet started right dramatically. Forgetful of the main issue, he explained:

"In all his clothes, too! 'Orrible! 'E'll want 'is ice water the instant he wakes up. 'E always does after such times."

The servant darted into the adjoining room whence presently issued the sound of chipping ice and splashing water.

Meantime, Brenner had seized Duyck by the shoulder and was shaking him with mighty vigor.

"Wake up and explain!" he shouted.

Van Cleek Duyck opened one eye

and smiled serenely up at the policeman.

"My name's Norval-on-the-Grampian-Hills, off'cer," he cooed. "And you'll find the cash for my fine in my right hand trousers pocket. Keep th' change."

"Duyck!" clamored Brenner, renewing the shaking. "Wake up!"

Thus adjured, Van Cleek Duyck wearily raised himself on one elbow and gazed about him.

"Mr. Duyck," appealed the patrolman, pointing to Brenner, "do you know this man? Did you give him this rug? He claims to be a friend of yours."

Steadfastly and coldly, Van Cleek Duyck stared at Brenner. He looked him up and down with an impartial and judicial gravity.

At last he spoke:

"Never set eyes on th' fellow in my life," he announced, disinterestedly.

Then, pillowing his head on his arm he went to sleep again. He was not overcome by drink, but merely desired to slumber. And he was a man who followed his desires.

"I guess that settles it," said the policeman, again drawing forth his revolver and with it a pair of handcuffs. "The 'gentleman burglar' stunt is about wore out, anyway!"

At sight of the highly business-like handcuffs and pistol, the valet set down the ice water pitcher he was bearing into the bedroom and prepared to enjoy the final scene of the "crook melodrama," in which he was privileged to play so smug a part.

Brenner was swayed by a rage that set every nerve in his body tingling. This drunken freak of Duyck's memory was likely to rob him of both rug and liberty. To have won so easily, and now to be arrested for a theft he had not committed, was the crowning stroke of ill luck.

Rage and the crying need to do something at once, if the desperate situation was to be saved, lashed Brenner into prompt action. His eye fell on the brimming ice water pitcher, and the spectacle brought inspiration.

Even as the policeman advanced, Brenner called out in sharp authority:

"Wait! One moment, you!"

And, before the officer could interfere or guess his intent, he had snatched up the pitcher.

At a single gesture he reversed it; sending a half gallon of ice-cold water cascading down over the slumberous Duyck's head and neck.

The valet cried out in horror. The patrolman, dimly scenting assault, leveled his revolver and ordered:

"Drop that and hold up your hands."

Brenner obeyed. He dropped the empty silver pitcher on Duyck's face.

"All right, officer," he said cheerily. "I'm just trying to bring Mr. Duyck back to his senses long enough to convince him that he knows me. If all that water, and the pitcher, too, can't do it, nothing can. See, he's coming around."

And, indeed, under the inundation of cold water and the sharp blow, Van Cleek Duyck had come back from dreamland on wings of haste. He was far more indifferent than drunk, and had merely returned to slumber as a means of avoiding noisy questions.

He had already struggled, gasping and sputtering, to a sitting posture. The valet was making frantic dabs at his streaming head and face with a bath towel.

Duyck brushed aside the servant's loving ministrations and got to his feet. Dripping, choking, swearing, he glared about him like a wet hen.

"Well!" cried Brenner in the quick incisive tone that doctors employ in speaking to the delirious. "Are you sober, yet? Sober enough to get me out of this muddle?"

"What's that?" asked Duyck crossly. "Who poured all this water on me?"

"I did."

"I like your nerve. For two cents

I'd punch your ugly head for it. Why in blazes did you try such a fresh kid joke as that?"

"To sober you up. I—"

"What right had you to sober me up? Did I ask you to? I didn't want to be sobered up, yet. I—"

"But I wanted you to be. If I hadn't brought you to your senses I'd be on my way to the police station by now."

"It's where you belong. It's where any man belongs who pours ice water on a man and then pounds him over the head! Hello, what's the cop doing here?"

"If you please, Mr. Duyck, sir," began the valet. "I came home and found—"

"The cop," interposed Brenner, "is here to arrest me for stealing. He caught me leaving the house with this rug you gave me. I told him how I got it. He wouldn't believe me. He asked you. You were tipsy and you denied any knowledge of me. I had to wake you up, unless I wanted to be jugged for theft."

"I see."

For a whole minute Duyck sat, face in hands on the bed-edge, the water still dripping mournfully from him.

Then he looked up, first at Brenner, then at the policeman. And his look and his voice bore no trace of drunkenness.

Yet Brenner held his breath. For it was quite within the range of possibility that the shock of awakening might have driven from the sleeper's mind any memory of the evening's events.

"Officer," said Duyck at last. "Thanks for looking out so well for my interests. But it's all right. This is a friend of mine. I gave him the rug. Here is a little something to pay you for your trouble. Good night. Hardin," to the valet, "show the officer out. Then come back here and change me into dry clothes."

The appeased policeman and the still incensed valet departed.

Duyck turned on Brenner, speaking with swift incisiveness.

"I don't know you from Adam," said he. "And I don't understand any of this—how I chanced to give you a rug or how you happened to be here at all. But any idiot can see you're telling the truth. I'm afraid I was a bit misty.

"It's all right. Come back and explain when you feel like it. Have a drink? No? Well, good luck! I'm glad it was only a rug and not my strong box I gave you."

CHAPTER XII.

In the Lair of the Newlyweds.

IN the week that followed, Galvin Brenner called three times upon Ulrich Laing. Each time he bore with him one of the forty Ali Babas.

Once he brought a pair. And each time Laing favored the trophy with that same look of hopeful inquiry.

Yes, and always the glint of eager expectancy died in the rug king's little eyes as he caught a closer view.

Then he would nod approval. And with the air of a child awaiting a bedtime story he would lean back to hear the tale of his emissary's newest adventure.

Brenner fell to noticing that tense look of interrogation and the ensuing well-controlled twinge of disappointment. It set him to wondering.

Presumably the rugs, though of different patterns, were all of equal value. And it puzzled him that his employer should show chagrin whenever a glance at one of the rugs showed him the apparent absence of a mysterious something which he seemed to be expecting.

What this "something" might be Brenner could not fathom. Which irritated him, as time went on.

He had now brought Laing six rugs. Besides those acquired from Cauler, Father Curran, and Duyck were three more.

Two had been abstracted from a reception room in a garish uptown hotel by a man dressed in a porter's livery and carrying a hand vacuum-cleaner.

No one had objected; even when the porter had walked unconcernedly out of the big caravansary with his plunder.

For not only uniform, but livery as well, carries with it a mighty weight of law-abiding authority—in New York.

Next day the hotel's proprietor was perplexed to receive by mail a "John Doe" money order for thirty dollars. With the order was a typewritten slip of paper reading:

To 2 Ali Baba Rugs (benevolently assimilated) at $15 per. Total $30.
Account closed.

The third rug had well-nigh caused its captor's downfall.

Brenner had traced it to a mansion of gingerbread flats, high in the Bronx. There, his underground investigations had showed him, dwelt an uncommonly newly-wedded couple named Faune.

Indeed, they had been married but four days when Brenner honored them with his visit. The rug had been a wedding gift from a rich but cautious aunt.

Being poor both in money and leisure, the Faunes had wasted neither of these scant commodities in a honeymoon trip. They had gone at once from the church to their new home.

And next morning the groom had returned to his office, after only a single day's absence.

His wife had a way of walking to the subway station, two long blocks distant, every afternoon to meet him on his return from down-town. He always managed to catch the same train and reached the Bronx at exactly 5.46.

This then (as the couple kept no maid) was the psychological hour for Brenner's furtive call.

Thither, accordingly, on the afternoon of the fifth day, he repaired.

He reached the house at just eighteen minutes before five, suitcase in hand, climbed five flights of stairs (the only reason the Faunes lived on the fifth floor was because there was no sixth) and halted before the varnished door of their flat.

He figured that he had at least a full five minutes to search for the rug, secure it, and depart.

Running a thin knife-blade between the metal door-jamb and its wooden side-strip, he pressed back the lock with ridiculous ease—as flat thieves have done by thousands ever since the first "gingerbread" apartment house was built—and turned the knob.

The architecture of such places is of a painful sameness. Also, poor people with presumably only one handsome rug are prone to keep that same rug in the living-room.

So, unerringly, Galvin Brenner turned to the left and made his way down the short, twisted hall to the living-room. And there, on the floor, in front of the cheap, lightwood upright piano, was the rug.

Moreover, at various points, littering the ill-varnished floor, were other rugs. A full dozen, of all sizes and all degrees of sleazy ugliness, overlapping one another from sheer numbers.

Brenner had neither time nor desire to enter upon a closer inspection of this phenomenal rug crop in so small a space. He stepped into the room, his footfalls wholly deadened by the multitude of floor coverings, and made his way toward the rug he wanted.

As he did so, the sound of voices broke in on his plans. Two women were coming down the hall from the rear of the apartment.

Brenner slipped behind the scrim curtains that parted the living-room from the adjacent bedroom.

He shoved his suitcase under a chair, for he knew he would probably

have to depart in a hurry when he should find a chance to go at all. And a bulky suitcase is not an aid to rapid flight.

He swept the neat little bedroom with a single glance. There was no other means of egress except that leading into the living-room.

The folding bed was up. That would offer no shelter. Nor was there a spot in the entire tiny room where a child could have hidden.

The women had well-nigh reached the living-room. Brenner's faint hope that they might go out of the flat door was quickly dispelled. For, as he crouched behind the flimsy curtains, he heard them enter the room he had just quitted.

From the scraps of talk he subconsciously heard, he gathered that Mrs. Faune was showing a girl friend over the apartment, and he heartily cursed her negligence in choosing this day, of all others, for breaking her new custom of going to meet her husband.

"I left my wrist-bag in your bedroom, I think," observed the guest, as they left the hall. "I'll go in and get it. Then it 'll surely be time to meet Carl. He'd never forgive me if I made you late."

"Oh, I've lots of time," returned the bride. "See, my watch says just half-past four."

"Oh, women's watches!" groaned Brenner to himself. "I used to think it was a joke that they never keep time. Now I see it's a tragedy!"

"Let me get the bag for you," went on the bride, taking a step toward the bedroom, evidently as a measure to speed the parting guest.

But the latter had caught sight of the brave if motley array of carpeting.

"Bess!" exclaimed she, trying to stifle a laugh. "Every time I come here I feel as if I were in a rug shop. And now that the afternoon sun shows them up so plainly—"

"*Plainly?*" echoed her hostess. "Say, rather, *hideously!* Don't laugh. I feel more like crying. Our own pretty rugs are in the other room. These are the 'gift rugs.'

"I read a funny story once about a bride who got twenty-seven berry spoons and all of them marked, so she couldn't exchange them. But thirteen rugs as wedding presents are even worse. Thirteen rugs! Carl says he'll strangle the next person that dares to send us one.

"I could stand the other twelve; but the rug over in front of the piano I take as a personal insult. Aunt Maida gave it to us. She is so rich she can afford to be stingy. But I'm her only niece, and I certainly thought she'd give us at least a check for a hundred dollars when we were married. She knows how hard up we were and what a wonderful difference a hundred dollars would make to us at this time."

"And she actually sent you nothing but that homely rug?"

"Not a blessed thing. Carl says it's so ugly that maybe it's a magic carpet. I think some time I'll stand in front of it and wish for it to change itself into a hundred-dollar bill. I—Oh!" she broke short in dismay, "my watch is *stopped!* That's why it's so early. I must have forgotten to—"

"Quick! He'll be so disappointed if you're not there. I'll get my bag. Oh, I remember now. I left it in the dining-room. I put it on the sideboard there, when we were folding up the tablecloth the Cantons gave you. I'll—"

Together they raced down the hall. Brenner, in one bound, was in the living-room.

He snatched up the rug, laid a hundred-dollar bill in its place, and bolted for the door.

"There's *one* woman who 'll believe in magic all the rest of her days!" he chuckled under his breath, as he noiselessly let himself out of the apartment and shut the door behind him. "And I guess it's a hundred dollars mighty well spent."

He flung the rug over his shoulder and started for the stairs. A man was toiling up the last flight.

"That you, Bess?" called the climber hearing Brenner's light footfall. "You were late."

He looked up, but not before Brenner had had time to wheel about and approach the flat's door again.

The householder thus beheld a man engaged in deciphering the name-card on the door.

Then he caught sight of the rug that hung over the stranger's shoulder, and he bristled like a fighting dog.

"Who are you looking for?" he challenged.

Brenner turned, his face meek and stupid.

"I'm looking for C. L. Faune's apartment," he mumbled. "I got a rug to deliver here."

"You have, hey?" thundered the bridegroom. "Well, unless you want to be thrown down-stairs and then walked on, you'll turn around and carry that rug so far away it 'll discover a new street. Chase, now!"

"But," pleaded Brenner, "they gimme orders to deliver—"

"This is my flat," stormed Faune, "and no more of those horrible rugs go into it except over my dead body. Why," with a second look at the Ali Baba, "I've got one already of something the same pattern as that. And it's so ugly I have to lock it up in the kitchen at night. I'm not going to harbor another one like it. Take the thing away! And—"

The flat door opened and the bride and her friend emerged.

At sight of Faune, both waxed incoherently voluble; each explaining in a different key the reason for the delay in starting for the subway station.

And under cover of the triangular volley of babble, Galvin Brenner quietly walked down-stairs, bearing the rejected rug triumphantly in front of him.

"I'd give a lot," he mused, "to see these Newlyweds' faces when they find the hundred dollars—and a new suitcase!"

CHAPTER XIII.

In "Millionaires' Row."

AS Brenner finished the recital of his escape from the newlyweds, Laing observed patronizingly:

"You were quite right in saying that half the cleverness employed in theft would make a man a success in any honest line. But half the bad luck you've had in this quest would have swamped any square man's business interests."

"I suppose so."

"Except when you got those two rugs from the Hotel St. Crœsus," added Laing, "you've had the narrowest sort of escape every time. And as there are six more rugs to get, one of two things will happen: either your run of bad luck will break, or else you'll find yourself behind bars.

"And," he ended with a twinge of anxiety, "if you *do* get locked up, remember our bargain: you're not to bring my name into it."

"That's understood. I'm no squealer."

"Even if you were," said Laing uneasily, "it would do you no good. It would be your bare word against mine. The word of a self-confessed crook against an established business man's. No one would believe you."

"My friend," drawled Brenner, "I suppose the only thing that kept you from many a thrashing is the fact that you've no idea how offensive you are. Ignorance is easily forgiven. But let that go. You're right in one thing. I *have* had a rotten run of luck, so far as discovery is concerned. The worst I've ever had.

"I suppose it's because I've turned square! When I was a real thief my good luck was a byword. I could get away with chances no other chap would dare to take. It's queer how fortune

changes when a man is trying to keep straight."

"Perhaps," suggested Laing with elephantine playfulness under which seemed to lurk a trace of sincerity, "if you'd managed at each place to steal some little trifle for yourself, as well as the rug, you might be luckier. It might break the hoodoo."

"As I just told you," smiled Brenner, rising to go, "your ignorance of your own offensiveness saves you from a lot of hospital treatment."

"Where next?" questioned Laing, in no wise offended.

"I'll tell you after I come back. It is always my one unbreakable rule to tell my plans—*afterward*—in case they succeed. Because, then, if they don't, no one can guy me for failing."

Up the servants' stairway of an architectural crime, that stood in a line of similar mansions known to the newspapers as "Millionaires' Row," climbed Galvin Brenner.

On his vest lapel under cover of his coat was an electric light inspector's badge. In his pocket was a credential card from a light company.

These matters are not wholly difficult to arrange when one knows how. And Brenner, like many another notable of the underworld, "knew how."

The rightful owner of these credentials and of the empty black kit-bag Brenner carried, was twenty dollars richer for their temporary loan. He had lent them before on the same terms, and always on the following morning they had been faithfully restored to him.

The kit-bag was no part of a regular inspector's equipment. But no householder would note that discrepancy.

The hour was early—barely eight o'clock. General Clyde Irwin, owner of the house—and of a seven-figure fortune and the finest private art collection in the Western world—was giving a heavily formal dinner to many fellow-magnates and art patrons.

Thus there was but little life just now in the servants' living quarters or in any part of the big house save in the dining-room, kitchen and butler's pantry. On the dinner's success was bent the thoughts and energies of the whole household, both the above and below-stairs' contingents.

Brenner moved peacefully up the servants staircase to a suite of rooms on the third floor. There he wandered forth into a sort of foyer and set to work tinkering at an electric light bracket.

The houseman, detailed thereto by the butler, was at his heels and stood watching him at work with a stolid suspicion.

This mildly annoyed Brenner. He knew he should have to get rid of the fellow. And he knew this would be no easy task. For he recognized the type of human bulldog, not overclever, but vigilant and innately suspicious of every middle-class stranger who chanced to enter his employer's house.

The obvious plan of knocking the houseman in the head and thus, for a time, causing his guardian interest to flag, incurred too much danger, for there might still be people in that part of the house.

Indeed, even as he dismissed such an idea, Brenner heard the swish of a woman's skirt crossing a near-by room.

The temporary "inspector" had some general idea as to electricity. With great show of competence he proceeded to dismantle the bracket-light and to examine its wiring.

Meantime he furtively used his eyes. Not in search of the rug he sought. He had discovered that the moment he entered the foyer.

He was in a wing of the house apparently devoted to the quarterings of such superior employees as housekeeper, household secretary, governess, and trained nurse. The servants' quarters, he had learned, were on the floor above.

The foyer in which Brenner was working was fitted up as a lounging-room. Its furnishings were tasteful, even in a way luxurious. The Irwins evidently believed in making their "upper staff" comfortable.

From the foyer opened several adjacent rooms, presumably bedrooms. It was in one of these that Brenner had heard the woman moving about.

The rug he sought lay before a wide table at one end of the foyer. The table itself was littered with several neatly tied packages and with a quantity of loose wrapping-paper and string.

"Queer time of year for putting up Christmas presents," he observed, with labored jocularity, to the houseman. "It's a real privilege to see how rich people do their Christmas shopping early.

"H-m!" grunted the houseman.

"It's some months before Christmas," went on Brenner, his tone shifting adroitly from badinage to stupid curiosity. "I s'pose at this rate, by the time Christmas comes, that table will be piled up pretty near to the ceiling. Or maybe millionaires celebrate Christmas *earlier* than other folks."

As he had hoped, the glum houseman fell into the trap baited with the love of displaying superior knowledge.

"Those ain't Christmas presents, you simp!" he scoffed. "They're birthday presents."

"No?" exclaimed Brenner, his mouth agape with wonder. "Do rich folks celebrate all their birthdays at the same time? Gee, but I'm learning a lot, trailing along with a live wire like you, sir!"

"Mr. Irwin," corrected the houseman, obviously pleased with the other's admiration—"Mr. Irwin's birthday is to-morrow. Every year, on his birthday, he sends a present to each of his twenty-year employees down on Broad Street. The secretary's been putting them up this afternoon. They go by parcel post to-night. Now, suppose you go ahead with your work? I can't have my dinner till you go."

Brenner bent once more to his inspection of the wires. The houseman, frittering around impatiently, chanced to pick up the kit-bag Brenner had left on the table.

"Pretty light," he commented.

"It's empty," replied Brenner. "I brought it on from the last house I went to. I used up the last wire coil there."

"Brought it empty, hey? Well, I'll just dip into it when you go out to make sure you carry it away empty, too. No offense. I'm responsible. The butler put it up to me."

"Sure!" agreed Brenner. "And when I go you can frisk my clothes, too, in case you think I've palmed a grand piano or a mahogany sideboard and slipped it under my vest."

He spoke as lightly as though every atom of his superalert brain were not at that instant strained to the utmost in readjusting his plans to meet this new difficulty.

A summons from below stairs forced the reluctant houseman out of the room. On departing he ostentatiously locked behind him every door leading into the foyer and pocketed the keys.

"No offense," he repeated as he did so.

"None at all!" laughed Brenner. "It's your job."

"I'll be back in a minute," mumbled the half-ashamed man. "They only want me to—"

He was gone, leaving Brenner snugly locked in.

Before he was half-way down the first flight Brenner was at the package-laden table. He snatched up the rug and a big sheet of wrapping-paper.

Deftly and with the furtive speed of the light-fingered, he wrapped the rug in a neat parcel. With his fountain pen he scribbled on it his own name and address in a fair imitation of the housekeeper's flowing, public-school chirography on the other bundles.

Returning footsteps warned him his time was short. He had barely time to thrust the package (address side down) among the others on the table and step back to the wires, when the houseman reappeared.

"Say," Brenner greeted him sourly, "I've been thinking it over, and I'll not stick on a job where I'm taken for a thief—see? The company can send somebody else. Search the bag and be damned to you! And let me out o' here."

CHAPTER XIV.

Treasure Trove.

WHEN Galvin Brenner went downstairs to breakfast at his boarding-house next morning he found in the lower hall a bulky parcel-post package addressed to him.

It was the rug from the Irwin mansion.

Carrying it to his room, he undid it, glanced it over to make certain of its identity, put it in a satchel, and proceeded to address an envelope to "Gen. Irwin, Irwin Building, 9999 Broad Street, New York City."

Into the envelope he placed a blank sheet of paper and three five-dollar bills. He mailed it at the corner before going back to breakfast.

An hour later he walked into Ulrich Laing's office, drew out the rug from the satchel, and laid it on the desk.

Whereupon the portly and dignified Mr. Ulrich did a right unseemly thing.

After one look at the rug spread before him he emitted a whoop that resounded through the whole building.

He followed this with a war-dance all around the room, capering from end to end of the office with the dreamy, sensuous grace of an ice-wagon that has lost a left front wheel.

He wound up the performance by hurling both arms around the dumfounded Brenner's neck and bestowing upon that disgusted young man a genuine bear hug.

"Why in blazes do you drink so early in the morning?" snorted Brenner, forcibly disengaging himself. "Or is it acute mania?"

"It's neither, my dear boy!" exulted Laing, seizing the rug and gloating over it—after the fashion made popular by Gaspard the miser. "It's neither. I'm the happiest man in all this little old burg. You see this rug? Well, it spells '*T-r-e-a-s-u-r-e*' to me. We've won, lad! We've *won!*

"Oh, I knew I was making no mistake in giving you a crack at the job! No, nor in following my hunch in hiring you in the first place. Something told me to. I have few hunches. But they never fail me!'

"Mr. Laing," cautioned Brenner, half contemptuously, "if the sight of the seventh missing rug affects you this way I'm afraid by the time I bring in the twelfth you'll—"

"The twelfth!" scoffed Laing. "Son, your quest is over. Let the rest of 'em slide. I've got what I wanted. I—"

"You mean to say you aren't going to bother about recovering five rugs, each of them worth more than a thousand dollars?" cried the amazed Brenner. "You're content to lose more than five thousand dollars, and—"

"Five thousand cork legs!" chuckled Laing. "Brenner, my lad, none of those rugs were worth more than about twenty-five dollars at the outside. A hundred dollars would cover the lot. And I'll square that by tacking it on to my bill. Yes, and I'll give you a thousand-dollar bonus for myself. And you'll start here to-day on a salary of forty dollars a week.

"You're a valuable man. I'll find other delicate bits of work for you to do as time goes on."

"One moment, please!" interposed Brenner, a steely glint beginning to show in his eyes. "There are one or two things I don't clearly understand. You told me once that those rugs were worth more than a thousand dollars apiece. And now you say—"

"So they were, Brenner. So they were. But they aren't any more."

"The rug market surely couldn't fluctuate enough in that short time to lower values by ninety-seven and a half per cent."

"Clever chap! But you're mistaken. It could. It has. That bundle of forty rugs, as it reached me, was worth not forty thousand dollars, but more than one hundred and forty thousand. Minus one certain rug it was worth less than one thousand. And this is the 'one certain rug.' See the idea? And, now that I have this, the others can be used as floor-cloths, for all I care."

"If you had told me," began Brenner coldly, "that there was only one rug you wanted back—"

"You'd have gathered the idea that it was a treasure and bolted with it the second you could lay hands on it. There, there, man! Keep your collar on! I didn't mean to offend you. I only meant I couldn't take chances when a thing was so precious. So I worked it out a safer way. Don't be hurt. I apologize for doubting you. It won't happen again."

Brenner stood looking at the rug king in angry indecision. Laing, uncomfortable at the possible menace in his employee's scowl, hastened to change the topic.

"You've told me some mighty entertaining stories of your adventures lately," said he. "Now it's my turn. And, after all you've done for me, it's only fair you should know the whole affair. I think it will interest you."

CHAPTER XV.

The Story of the Amina.

BRENNER hesitated. Then, curiosity getting the better of pique, he sat down.

After his many conjectures and perplexities on the subject it would be interesting to have the mystery cleared and to learn the cause of his stolid employer's wild excitement on losing and on recovering the rug.

Laing settled back in his desk-chair, the treasured bit of oriental carpeting across his knees.

"This," he said, stroking it lovingly, "is the Amina rug."

He made the announcement as though he were exhibiting the Koh-i-noor at the very least. To Brenner the words meant nothing.

Laing, noting his hearer's blank and unimpressed look, frowned.

"I forgot," he snapped. "I forgot I was talking to an ignoramus in rugs. Any one in the trade — and any collector—would have been thunderstruck at what I've just told you. But then any such person would have recognized the Amina at a glance from its pictures just as easily as the man in the street would recognize Theodore Roosevelt."

"Quite so," retorted Brenner. "We'll admit my blank ignorance. Go ahead."

"Though you may not remember hearing of the Amina rug," resumed Laing with the air of an indulgent teacher coaching a mental defective, "you'll have no trouble tracing the origin of its name by the fact that it's called 'Amina.'"

"Oh, of course!" answered Brenner, irritated. "Amina of course—Amina. How silly of me not to have thought! Good old Amina!

"And while we're on the subject suppose you tell me whether an Amina is a dog or a bird or a patent medicine. Or is he a celebrity over in the East? Maybe over there they name their rugs as we name our five-cent cigars?"

Ulrich Laing held up both fat hands as though at gross sacrilege.

"Amina," he said in stern reproof, "was the mother of the prophet. I thought every one—"

"What profit?"

"The Prophet Mohammed."

"Oh! And they named this brand of rugs after her?"

"*Brand* of rugs?" gasped Laing. "Mr. Brenner, there is no duplicate anywhere of the Amina rug. It rested under the head of the prophet's mother during her last illness—"

"I hope she didn't have anything contagious," muttered Brenner, moving back a little.

"And ever since," continued Laing, "it has been the highest object of veneration in the mosque of Ali at Teheran in Persia. Apart from its history, its workmanship is a miracle of art. It is the finest example of 'single weave' in all the Hegira epoch. The secret of that warp was lost centuries ago. It—"

"Yes?" said Brenner, to whom much of this glowing description was mere jargon. "But why didn't you tell me all this at the start? You needn't have been afraid of my stealing it, as you so tactfully hinted, just now.

"For, if the rug's appearance is so familiar to every dealer and collector, the theft could have been traced at once. A stolen rug isn't like a stolen diamond. It can't be cut up or reset.

"If you'd told me and shown a picture of this rug I could have made the rounds, simply looking at each, without trying to take it till I came to the right one. It would have averted a lot of danger and saved a lot of time."

"I know," admitted Laing, "I know. It was a mistake. I see it now. By the way, where did you get it?"

"Among the names on the delivery list was Mrs. Howson, on Fifth Avenue," answered Brenner. "I looked her up and found she was housekeeper in a big Wall Street man's family. People of that class don't send their housekeepers to choose the furnishings for their homes. Only for the 'below-stairs' region.

"The rug was too costly for the servants' rooms, so I knew it must be meant for the housekeeper's own quarters or the quarter allotted to the upper employees of the family. That's where I looked, and that's where I found it."

"Clever boy! And the man who footed the bill never guessed what a treasure his housekeeper had bought for him!"

"Naturally not. I don't suppose he would potter around the servants' quarters, taking inventories of the furniture. A man like General Irwin doesn't waste much time on—"

A veritable howl of amazement and mirth from Laing interrupted him.

The rug king rocked back and forth, purple of face, doubled up with Homeric laughter, slapping his fat knees and stamping. He looked helplessly up at Brenner with convulsed face and streaming eyes.

"Oh!" he squeaked breathlessly. "You'll be the death of me yet!"

And off he went into another paroxysm.

"I see," observed Brenner, battling with a yearning to take Laing over his knee and spank him, "I see I have missed my vocation. In vaudeville I should have made a fortune. I must be what is known as an unconscious humorist."

"Irwin!" wheezed the apoplectic Laing, "Irwin! Irwin, of all men! Oh!"

A joke is one of the few good things in life that even the most selfish man is always eager to share with the whole world. And presently Laing choked back his spasms of merriment, wiped his trickling eyes and continued pantingly:

"Listen, my friend, you must hear the rest of the Amina rug's history."

"Thanks. It doesn't interest me."

"But it *will*. Wait till you hear the point. Just listen:

"For centuries the Amina has been the cynosure of every rug-lover's eye. Thousands of collectors have made the long journey to Teheran for no other reason than to feast their eyes on it. To—"

"On that dull-looking scrap of carpet? Well, every man to his own taste. Go on."

"The Persian government has been offered unbelievable sums for it. Millionaires, grand dukes, museums—all have made enormous bids for it. But religious relics are the only things that a Moslem holds more sacred than money. The Amina is one of the most precious relics in the East, and Persia regarded all offers for its sale as dire insults."

"I don't wonder."

"Since it was found no money could buy the treasure," went on Laing, "the most daring efforts have been made from time to time to get it by other means."

"To steal it?"

"If one puts it in that brutal way. But it can scarcely be called 'stealing' to remove a wonderful object of art from a set of bigoted Mohammedans and giving its hidden beauty to the world."

"I see," dryly commented Brenner. "Most dips and yeggs feel that way about your rich men's cash. Well, if the rug wasn't for sale, and—"

"It was guarded like crown jewels," said Laing. "Every effort to get it was blocked. More than one plucky adventurer has lost his life trying to—"

"But why? What would be the sense of stealing a thing that was so well known? The thief or the man who bought it from him wouldn't dare to boast that he had it. He'd have to keep it hidden or show it only to a few friends he could trust."

"Brenner," smiled Laing, "I'm afraid you don't quite understand the 'collector's spirit'—the spirit that makes a man pay a fortune for an object of art, just for the bliss of knowing that it belongs to *him*. But that spirit exists in hundreds of collectors. How else account for the vanishing of the 'Gainsborough,' the 'Mona Lisa,' the—"

"I know," rejoined Brenner, "I had the collector's spirit myself once. So have lots of Americans who aren't millionaires. They have a club for such men, called Sing Sing. And another at Auburn. And another—"

"A dozen schemes have been set afoot," continued Laing, unheeding, "to get hold of the Amina. Several rich men have had standing offers out for the rug. This year one of those schemers succeeded. The rug was won. Right under the noses of its guardians."

"Stolen?"

"Captured. It was brought to my agent in Teheran. He knew I had been on the lookout for it for the past ten years. Not for myself, of course. But because a New York patron of arts made me a standing offer of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the Amina if I could get it for him."

"But—"

"I cabled cipher instructions to my agent over there the minute I got the word from him. And I notified the New Yorker who stood ready to buy it. The rug was wrapped up in my regular monthly consignment from Teheran and sent to me openly.

"The open way was the only safe way. The customs people at both ends—there and Persia—are used to handling my rugs. In all my business career I've never tried to smuggle anything. And they know it."

"So they don't examine my stuff overclosely. I pay a regular yearly sum in Persia not to have my rugs mauled over or roughly handled.

"No one would suspect the missing Amina was in a bundle that any one could open or loot. It was a good idea.

"I went in person to the dock to get the rugs. But, as I told you, the boat arrived an hour ahead of schedule. Caton knew nothing of my big deal. So he got the consignment through the custom-house and shipped it up here, where you sold a dozen of

the rugs. The Amina was among them.

"Now you can see why I was a bit excited. The buyer waiting, wild to get his treasure and pay me my one hundred and fifty thousand dollars and expenses. The rug gone. It was enough to rattle any man.

"Here comes the joke—the cream of all the jokes ever heard. The New York man commissioned me to get the Amina for him and who was wild over the delay was—*General Irwin!* And for a week or two the priceless rug was kicking about his own house, till you took it from there last night. Catch the point? He had it all the time—for fifteen dollars! The wonderful Amina!"

Again Laing exploded into laughter. Looking across to meet Brenner's grin of appreciation, the rug king suddenly stopped laughing.

For Galvin Brenner's face was gray and tense. His lips were set in a white line. From his eyes blazed the very devil of murder.

Laing scrambled to his feet, aghast. And for an instant the sudden fear of death seemed to leap into his plump face.

"Brenner!" he gasped. "What is it, man? What is it?"

CHAPTER XVI.

Thief and Thief.

FOR a moment Brenner made no reply. He stood, clenching and unclenching his hands, the hot glow of his eyes fairly searing the discomfited man before him.

Then the white lips parted and speech came—words thick with anger, at first almost incoherent.

"You crook!" snarled Galvin Brenner. "You *crook!* You've stolen—not the rug, but my honor—my honesty—my reform!"

"Wha'—what are you talking about?" bleated Laing, his hand on the bell. "Are you crazy?"

"Take your hand off that bell!" ordered Brenner, his voice little above a whisper. "You'll hear what I have to say. Take your hand off that bell, I tell you, or whoever answers it will find a dead man at your desk."

Laing withdrew his hand and essayed a laugh. It was not a success.

"You'll hear what I have to say," repeated Brenner. "I came to you for a chance to live square. To clean up the past. To be a decent man. I held back nothing of my past life from you. I asked you to give me a chance. I offered to work for next to nothing; to do anything that would give me the right to look decent men in the face."

"If this is a sermon—"

"It isn't. Be quiet. I made a blunder here. I sold a batch of rugs at the wrong time. I offered you every cent I had in the world to atone for that blunder. According to your own estimate, three hundred dollars would have more than paid the rugs' actual value.

"You lied to me. To make me recover the Amina rug for you you played on the fact that I was trying to be square, and you set me to work getting back the rug for you."

"Business, my boy! Business!" chuckled Laing, with a weak attempt at jauntiness.

"Business!" repeated Brenner. "Not a professional crook in all New York would have stooped to such 'business.' It had to be thought out by a reputable member of society—a rich, respected merchant! You tried to make me steal back those rugs. When you found I wouldn't, you eased my conscience by letting me pay for them—with my own cash."

"I offered—"

"And all the time," burst forth Brenner, his voice rumbling in his throat like the growl of an angry dog, "all the time you were making a thief of me! A *thief!* Laughing to yourself to think how you were

using my strength for honesty to help you win back a treasure that you'd worse than stolen!"

"My dear boy! We—"

"I was trying to live square, and what have you tricked me into doing? You have made me a party to a bigger, more outrageous theft than all I ever committed in my whole career as a crook. You made me help steal a treasure worth one hundred and fifty thousand dollars! To help you defraud a church—"

"A mosque," feebly corrected Laing. "It isn't like a—"

"It is the same thing. You made me help in the theft of something that millions of people regard as holy.

"It was stolen from a Mohammedan place of worship. That is the kind of theft that mighty few folk of the underworld would soil their hands with. You've used me in getting back that rug, so that you might sell it to a fellow thief—a receiver of stolen goods. And you think it a fine joke!"

"I—I was—"

"A fine joke to thrust back into the slime a man who was trying to crawl out onto firm ground and look his fellow man in the face once more. To make him share in a crime worse than any he had ever committed at his very worst.

"And because my wit has won you back your church-stolen plunder, you offer me forty dollars a week and one thousand dollars bonus! The price of smashed honor has boomed vastly since the primitive days of the thirty pieces."

"You are discharged!" blustered Laing. "No man is going to compare me to Judas Iscariot and get away with it. I—"

"With Judas?" mocked Brenner. "I didn't honor you by comparing you to him. Judas, as far as I know, dragged no one else into his crime. He soiled no hands but his own.

"You don't know," he went on, a little catch in his throat, "what my hopes of a straight life meant to me. And now—the whole dreary climb must begin all over again."

"I'm sorry you take this so hard," observed Laing, recovering his courage as the cold fury died out of Brenner's face and voice. "But after what you've said to me to-day of course I can't keep you in my employ; I am very busy. Good day."

He turned to his desk and reached once more toward his bell.

The next instant he was whirling across the room, through no volition of his own, and brought up against the farther wall with a thump that completely knocked the breath out of his body.

Before he could cry out a handkerchief was thrust deftly into his open mouth and his hands were pinioned behind his back.

Brenner, gripping both the struggling, imprisoned wrists in his own left hand, ripped from the wall a shimmering antique rug. Putting one end of this under his heel he rent the rug into several long strips.

With these costly bonds he proceeded to tie the wriggling Ulrich Laing hand and foot, and to fasten a shorter strip around his head to keep the handkerchief gag in place.

"It's dangerous to have dealings with a former crook," observed Brenner grimly as he gazed down at the prisoner who writhed helplessly on the rug-strewn floor.

"But it is ten times more dangerous to try to double-cross him. You'll stay where you are till some one comes in to untie you. It won't be especially comfortable, but it is a lot more comfortable than jail — where you belong."

Brenner adjusted his tie which had been twisted during the brief scuffle. Then once more he addressed the gurgling Laing.

"You won't tell about this," announced Brenner, "because you can't without telling your own share in it. And that would mean prison for you and probably for Irwin as well. I'm

quite safe from pursuit, so far as you are concerned. Good-by."

Brenner picked up the Amina rug from the desk, folded it neatly, put it back in the satchel and marched unconcernedly out of the office with it.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Amateur and the Diplomat.

TUFIK ALI AKBAR KHAN, *chargé d'affaires* in the United States for the serene and ancient sun-kingdom of Persia, was dressing in his Washington home for a White-House dinner.

His valet had arranged the last touches of his master's evening toilet and had left the room. The *chargé d'affaires* glanced at himself in the pier glass, lighted a cigarette, and prepared to descend to his waiting car.

But before he could reach the door leading from his dressing-room the door was opened and a man quietly stepped in.

The newcomer was in morning costume and carried a hand-bag. He had not troubled to knock on entering the room.

But now, as he closed the door behind him, he bowed and stood for an instant facing the amazed diplomat.

"Who are you?" demanded Tufik, somewhat sharply, "and who admitted you?"

"I was not admitted," answered the other. "In fact, I was told you could not receive me this evening and that you are leaving Washington for several days, the first thing in the morning. So I came in without permission."

"My servants—"

"Your servants are not to blame. They don't know I got in."

"Please go at once," requested Tufik, who scented a crank, a concession seeker, or a better-class mendicant. "My business hours are—"

"Are too far away to be of any use to me. Moreover, my errand is private. It concerns your country—"

"My business hours," repeated the *chargé d'affaires,* "are—"

"It also concerns the Amina rug."

Tufik halted abruptly on his journey to the door. His dark face was suddenly alert.

But diplomat fashion he masked any show of interest and merely strolled back toward his visitor.

"Who are you?" he asked, "and what do you wish to know about the Amina rug? The encyclopedia will tell—"

"That it was stolen recently from the great mosque at Teheran? I think not. Not even the newspapers seem to know it. Your government has evidently kept the matter quiet."

"Who are *you?*"

"My name is Brenner. And I've brought back the Amina rug. Will you take it and give me a receipt?"

Tufik looked blankly at the strange guest—at the man who spoke thus familiarly of a theft which had stirred the very throne of Persia to the foundation; and which had been thus far kept as official secret, even from the Moslem world, lest wholesale riot and perchance even a holy war should result.

The loss of the sacred Amina rug from the great mosque had been cabled in cipher to all of Persia's foreign representations; and fortunes had been spent in hiring detectives in every port of Europe and America to trace it.

Yet, up to now, the secret had remained close guarded from the public.

Even in Teheran the faithful were told that the Amina had been placed in the royal treasury and hidden for a time from the public gaze of devotees in order to avert a sacreligious plot of Russian emissaries to steal or deface it.

As a result, popular indignation against Russia boiled to white heat—which the Persian government de-

sired it should—and the day of reckoning was for a spell delayed.

Yet, in private, the wheels of influence, of money, of private information, all over the world were turned by diplomatic zeal to discover the whereabouts of the stolen rug. Police agents of every land, dazzled by the enormous rewards offered, were scouring the underworld, putting known crooks through the third degree, following up a thousand clues.

And, after all this covert turmoil, a complete stranger dropped from nowhere into the dressing-room of Persia's *chargé d'affaires* at Washington and coolly offered to return the rug.

Much as he might have brought back a strayed dog!

Small wonder that even a veteran diplomat and Oriental like Tufik Khan was startled out of his perfect calm.

Meantime, Galvin Brenner had unfastened the clasps of the satchel and with profaning touch was hauling out of it, hand over hand, the holy rug.

It needed but a glance to tell Tufik that the rug was the lost and sacred Amina.

At the careless handling it was receiving from this infidel the Persian drew his breath quickly between set teeth. And his fingers itched.

But his were the breeding and the self-control that only the East can produce. And he stood inert while the sacrilege went on. He even forced a polite smile to his full lips.

Brenner, pleasantly unaware of the anguish he was evoking, pulled the rug from the bag, straightened it out and laid it on the polished floor.

"There you are!" he observed. "Good as new."

The Persian eyed him keenly, waiting the next move.

Here was a type that even a diplomat could not understand. If the fellow were the Amina's robber, why had he not sent emissaries to make terms and to demand a guarantee of immunity?

If he were not the thief but merely an intermediary, why did he bring the rug in person and lay it carelessly there at the feet of Persia's Washington representative?

The whole thing—from a commonsense as well as a diplomatic standpoint—was unintelligible. And, diplomatlike, Tufik waited for his adversary to make the next move.

"This is the rug, all right, isn't it?" queried Brenner, puzzled by his host's silence.

"It *is* the holy Amina," gravely assented Tufik with an inclination of the head.

"And you represent Persia in the United States just now, don't you?" continued Brenner. "I got here from New York half an hour ago. I called up a Washington man I know and he told me there's no Persian minister here at present and that you are the man in authority, so I came direct to you. You *are* at the head of the Persian Embassy in the United States, aren't you?"

"I am."

"Good. Then that's settled," answered Brenner, closing and clasping the satchel again. "I've brought the rug to the right place. I thought, first, of turning it over to the Persian consul-general in New York. His office is somewhere on Fifth Avenue, I believe. But I make it a rule always to deal direct. It's best to go straight to headquarters. So I came here. Now, if you'll give me a receipt—"

"A receipt?" asked the Persian.

"Yes. In case I'm suspected of having kept the Amina myself I want something to clear me."

"But," babbled Tufik, utterly out of his depth, "the reward—"

"What reward?"

Again Tufik felt he had run, head on, into a stone wall.

It was inconceivable that a man would have stolen or received the stolen Amina without also having learned or guessed that a princely reward awaited its restoration. And

yet, any cub *attaché* could have seen this man was sincere in his perplexity at the mention of payment.

Tufik tried another trick. He met simplicity with still greater simplicity.

"When it was learned that the holy rug was gone from the mosque," he explained, "His Serene Majesty the Shah—on whom be peace!—offered a large sum of money as a reward for its return. You have returned it, and—"

"Oh!" laughed Brenner, "I see, I get the idea. Well, I'm not in the reward-hunting profession. I don't want any reward. Just a line from you, saying I brought the rug to you, as Persia's local representative, safely and in good shape."

Tufik Khan rang a bell. To the valet who appeared in answer to it—and who gazed in bewilderment at the presence of a stranger and a foreigner in his master's dressing-room—the *chargé d'affaires* gave an order in Persian. The valet bowed and withdrew.

A moment later a young Persian in European evening dress appeared on the threshold. At sight of the Amina rug on the floor in front of him he gave a cry of wonder and made as though to prostrate himself before it. Then, catching his chief's eye, he straightened himself and stood meekly with folded arms.

"Abou Nassar," said the *chargé d'affaires,* still speaking in English, "write."

The youth bowed, seated himself at a little table, and drew forth pad-block and fountain pen.

"Dictate to my secretary," said Tufik to the waiting Brenner, "the form of receipt you desire."

"Received from Galvin Brenner, in good condition, the original Amina rug," dictated Brenner.

"Sign it with my name and affix to it the embassy seal," Tufik commanded the secretary, adding to himself:

"If this man erases the rest of the writing and forges a draft with my name at the foot, the name in Halil's handwriting shall avail him little at the banks."

Brenner took the sealed receipt from the secretary's hand, folded it, and put it in his pocket.

"That's all," he said briskly. "I hope I haven't kept you too long and made you late for your appointment, whatever it is. I'll have just time to catch the 8.30 for New York."

The secretary, at a sign from Tufik, had reverently picked up the rug, and now bore it from the room.

Nor did the eye of a foreigner again rest upon the Amina until, a month later, it was restored to its place of honor in the great mosque.

The treasure safe, Tufik Khan turned his fuller attention to the strange American who had still more strangely delivered the rug to him. The Persian's curiosity was whetted to razor edge.

"Will you not tell me," he asked courteously, "how you chanced to—to find the Amina?"

"My friend," countered Brenner with equal suavity, "when you are a guest at a well-appointed dinner, do you ask your host how he chanced to find the money to pay for it? You wanted the rug. I brought it to you. That is all. Make for yourself what capital you choose out of the recovery when you send it back to your government. My part of the show is over."

"But there are rewards—honors—preferments—for the—"

"For the man who wants them. I don't care to profit by the return of stolen goods."

"But an explanation surely is due."

"It will stay overdue, then. Of course you might detain me on some such charge as housebreaking and try to get the facts that way. But you'll hardly do it. Too much would have to be made public. Good night."

Before the dumfounded Persian could frame a new question Brenner had bowed, turned on his heel, and passed out.

"I think," he mused as he went, "that closes the incident."

But, oddly enough, it did not.

CHAPTER XVIII.

One More Bargain.

GALVIN BRENNER, Esq.
SIR:

If you will call upon me at the above address to-morrow morning, between 9 and 9.15, it may be to your advantage.

Very truly, CLYDE IRWIN.
(Per P. H.)

The "above address" was General Irwin's house, not his office. And the note was lying beside Brenner's plate when he came down to a somewhat late breakfast at his boarding-house on the morning after his return from Washington.

He read the brief epistle, looked at his watch, saw that the hour was 8.30, then settled back to a leisurely breakfast.

He felt there was no need of haste.

Indeed, he was of two minds whether or not to obey the summons. He could not see how it would be of advantage to himself in any way.

He knew perfectly well why the great financier had sent for him. Also how Irwin chanced to know his name and address.

Ulrich Laing, in reporting failure to deliver the rug, had of course told the general the whole story. And Irwin, supposing Brenner was holding the rug as a personal speculation, was probably sending for him with an idea of making terms.

Though there was no longer anything over which such terms could be made, yet a spirit of mischief at length decided Brenner to accede to the demand for an interview.

It might prove amusing. And it would not long detain him from his quest for a new job.

He had already resolved to devote the day—and so many more days as it might require—to finding work. The restoration of the rug, he told himself, had done much to wipe clean his past misdeeds.

It was nearly half past nine when Brenner reached General Clyde Irwin's big house in "Millionaires' Row."

This time he rang at the front door instead of at the servants' entrance. And no less personage than the butler answered the bell.

That portly functionary fairly swelled with indignant superiority as he recognized the former "electric light inspector."

Brenner cut short any hesitancy by presenting General Irwin's note. The butler read it superciliously and, deigning no comment, led the way into the house and into a small reception-room. Then he vanished, to return in a minute with the lofty tidings:

"General Irwin will see you in the library."

He led the way once more, this time up a flight of stairs and to an open, portiered door.

Drawing aside the curtain, he announced:

"Mr. Brenner!"

He managing to instil into his perfectly and tonelessly correct voice a world of covert disdain.

Brenner walked into a high wainscoted room, rich, dark, and very simple in its general effect.

In a leather chair near a bay window sat a tall, lean man whose head was crowned by a veritable mop of snow-white hair. The face beneath was keen, strong, almost expressionless.

From dozens of newspaper pictures Brenner at once recognized the tall man as General Clyde Irwin—mighty power on Wall Street and international finance, and well known as one of America's most notable art collectors.

Brenner stepped into the room and came to a stop near the door. Irwin raised a pair of tired, heavy-lidded eyes at the other's advent.

He cast a single slow, appraising glance at Brenner, then turned as if not at all interested in what he saw,

and resumed his reading of the morning paper.

Brenner noted the studied slight, and he flushed. But he said quietly:

"I am Galvin Brenner. You wrote that you wished to see me this morning."

"Between 9 and 9.15," rasped the general. "It is now half past nine. I am not used to being kept waiting like an errand boy. I don't think I care to see you to-day."

"As you like," pleasantly assented Brenner, turning to walk out.

"Wait!" called Irwin in some surprise. "Come back. Why weren't you here when I told you to be?"

"First, because I got back very late from Washington and overslept. Second, because I am not under your orders."

There was neither flippancy nor ill-temper in the tone of the retort.

Irwin looked a second time from under his heavy-lidded eyes at the man who so unconcernedly refused to cringe, as did most of the general's humble associates.

"Sit down," he grunted.

Brenner chose a comfortable chair and seated himself—not on its edge, but far back in it.

"Where's the Amina?" demanded Irwin.

"With the people it belongs to," was the quiet response.

"Didn't bring it along, eh?"

"Obviously not."

There was a little pause. Then Irwin said, coming hard to the point.

"Laing told me all about it yesterday afternoon. Said you'd gotten the rug back, then overpowered him when you learned how valuable the Amina is, and ran away with it."

"Quite true."

"You must be courting another term in state prison."

"I have never been in state prison," corrected Brenner gently, "any more than you have. Perhaps we've both been lucky beyond our deserts; you in high finance, I in pettier theft.

"And this time I'm not going to prison, either. For if I did I might have to take with me two men whom society could ill spare."

"Laing tells me you're a crook. A common thief."

"Except for a mistake in tense, he is right. I *was* a crook. But a rather uncommon thief. I am neither any more."

"The whining penitent, eh?"

"If you like," acquiesced Brenner with no shadow of offense at the slur.

"You seem to be making several false starts."

"I may in future. Up to now I've made but one. And last night I retrieved that."

"I want the Amina rug."

"So Mr. Laing told me," said Brenner, "but I'm afraid you'll never get it."

"Money will buy most things."

"It will buy a large assortment," answered Brenner, "but I'm afraid that rug is no longer on the list."

"Good!" grudgingly assented the general. "I was afraid you were going to make the canting speech of the reformed about money not buying peace of mind."

"I've had too little experience with either to know which will buy which," laughed Brenner. "As to the rug—"

"What's your price?" snapped Irwin.

"I haven't the rug."

"Don't lie to me. You took it from Laing yesterday."

"Lying is not one of my pretty tricks, general. But I beg you won't keep me remembering all the time that you are an old man and that I am not.

"It is true I took the rug from Mr. Laing, to prevent him from selling it to you, after he and you had had it stolen from a place of worship and I had been made a catspaw to steal it again. I took it. And I had it sent back to Persia."

"*What?*" roared the incredulous general.

For answer Brenner drew out the

receipt signed by Tufik Khan's secretary and handed it to Irwin.

The general took it, read it, wide-eyed, then read it over again and turned it sidewise to examine the seal.

After which the document fluttered to the floor and the old man stared agape at Brenner.

"You're more than a crook," he vouchsafed at last. "You're a financier. You found the reward offered by Persia was bigger than my price. But you might have made still more by giving me another chance to bid."

"I didn't ask for a reward. I didn't get one."

"Don't carry a joke too far!" scoffed Irwin.

Brenner shrugged his shoulders. And Irwin, scanning his face, exclaimed:

"Lord! The man's telling the truth!"

"A habit I picked up as a boy," apologized Brenner.

General Irwin did not answer. He was still eying the younger man with a curious intentness. And into the shrewd old face had crept a kindlier, more human light.

After a long silence the general said in a new voice:

"Do you mind telling me the whole story? From your first visit to Laing up to the way you got the receipt from the Persian *chargé d'affaires?* And, first, will you accept my apology for speaking to you as I did? I am sorry."

There was something in Irwin's tone or words that struck close to Brenner's heart and that loosened his tongue.

Briefly, concisely, yet with a vividness that was unconscious, he told his story.

He sketched his early career, his longing for a clean life, his experience with Laing and the forty Ali Babas, the finding of the Amina at Irwin's own house, and the later scene in Laing's office.

Then he went on to tell of his visit to Washington.

General Irwin did not interrupt. His face did not change, nor did his eyes once leave the speaker's.

And when the brief tale was done he spoke no word.

"That is all," finished Brenner, getting to his feet, "I am afraid I have taken far too much of a busy man's time with my rambling yarn. And now I must go."

"Where?"

"This is my job-hunting day."

"This is your job-finding day, if you choose to make it so. Do you want to come to work for me, Mr. Brenner? A comfortable living wage at the start? Then advancement as fast as you make good — and from what I know of you, I think you'll waste mighty little time in making good."

"But," stammered Brenner, "I know nothing of finance: I should be a bad investment for you. I've had no training along that line."

"You've had a lifelong training along certain popular branches of that line," corrected Irwin, smiling a little.

Then, more seriously, the general went on.

"In Wall Street — in the railroad world—in the world of strong men, and hard battle—there is one type of employee for whom the demand always so far exceeds the supply that such an employee can command big pay from the very start.

"I refer to the man who is alert, resourceful, tireless, free from fear or favor, and who dares to be honest even to his own hurt and will risk loss for the sake of his principles. The man whose soul the fire has tempered, not withered. The employer who gets that type of man is getting a treasure better than any Amina rug.

"And *you* are such a man, Mr. Galvin Brenner. Will you come to work for me—to-day?"

"Yes!" cried Brenner. "*Yes!*"

(The end.)

Aboard the Amos R.

by Forrest Halsey

IF a man proposes to a woman and then discovers that she and he are utterly unsuited for the same boat, can't tow at all in the same harness, does it take more courage to marry her or to tell her you won't?

On the whole, it is better to run away than to try and answer questions like that.

But suppose that one can't run away? Suppose that the place where you work is drawn right by the house where she lives regularly once a week by two mules that can't be either hurried or hid?

The whole trouble started when Captain Bill, of the Amos R. Hendricks, went to the widow Tubbs for a bucket of water. The back garden of the widow Tubbs fronted on the canal.

It was only a step or two from the tow-path to the well. But by the well was the widow.

"In my opinion"—thus the lady lock-keeper of Cheeping Falls, commenting on what subsequently happened—"she was fishing for him, and she got him. Captain Bill is too good-natured. He never could say no to nobody.

"And you bet that boy will have a time to get along with her. She's awful set against boys. She had Timmy Larkin, of the Polly T. Paterson, arrested just for pulling some of her flowers. Captain Bill and that kid has my pity."

On the deck of the Amos R. Hendricks a small boy sat in a sullen heap regarding with awful hate a small house in a neat garden which flowered right down to the tow-path. Hitched to the neat fence of the little house two mules drowsed and switched flies.

From the cubby of the Amos R. came the sound of a brush on leather. Captain Bill was *shining* his *shoes!*

When the captain of a canal-boat shines his shoes he is either going to court or going courting.

"I'd just like to know," said the small boy savagely to the small house, "I'd just like to know what he's goin' to do it for."

This remark was not original with the small boy. The lady lock-keeper at Cheeping Falls had made it first. The canal, from the basin to "Mortans Slide," had echoed it.

"If he is thinkin' of marryin', why don't he git a girl from the canal?" the lady lock-keeper had said.

There was deep wisdom in the remark of the lady laborer of Cheeping Falls. A wife who is not accustomed to a home which is towed from the bay to the mountains, who has never cooked dinner in one county and served it in another, is apt to be set

in her ways and unable to get into the swim of canal society.

And if she refuses to follow her husband aboard his boat, but lives ashore—well! She can't sink any lower in the opinion of the Erie Basin.

"Dog take it! What did he want to do it for?" demanded the small boy of the small house.

The small house, which had two little windows like eyes on each side of a low door like a mouth, said nothing. But the expression on the face of the small house was rather like that of a white cat who has been hunting on the tow-path and captured a fish.

"Dave!" The call came from the cabin of the Amos R.

The small boy hunched his back, lowered his head between his shoulders, wiggled his toes, and said nothing.

"You Dave!"

"Watcherwant?"

"You come an' git dressed."

Dave was completely dressed in overalls and shirt. What more does any boy need?

"Dave."

"Yes."

"You hear me?"

Dave heard him. His scowl gave proof of that, but Dave did not move. The time had come to make a stand, and he knew it.

If the captain wanted to make a fool of himself, all right. Dave was not going to join him.

The mules flapped the flies. The little house grinned across the neat rows of flowers. Mutiny—silent, furious, deadly—was on the Amos R.

The sound of shoe-polishing ceased. Out into the sunlight, which pitilessly revealed his shame to the eyes of the crew, came the captain.

The signs of the shame were: a hard pink shirt blazing with the shine put on it by the Chinese laundry at Garrisonville; a pair of trousers with two rigid, contempt inspiring creases down their front; a brown face, shaved, *clean shaved* on a *Tuesday*.

Green socks filled with large feet hesitated on the deck. A shoe, on which was a dull, black blush, clothed one large hand. The once admired captain of the Amos R. was a sight for gods, men, and small boys, as a man generally is when he is to be a sight for women.

"What's the matter with you, Dave?"

The voice was not at all the kind to be expected from a captain addressing a crew in mutiny; pleading, propitiation, pathos—all were mingled in the tones.

"Nothin'," said the crew, not one of the three p's registering.

When a small boy says "Nothin'," with a certain kind of expression, it means much and more to come.

"Awh, Dave!" thus mildly and uncertainly from the pink-shirted, green-socked giant to the small blue huddle on the deck.

Nothing from the blue huddle—that is, nothing in words, words being not necessary in some cases.

"Looka here, Dave"—the captain advanced the boot with the dull black blush in pleading—"you gota get dressed. We can't keep Mrs. Tubbs waitin'. It's most time for dinner now. She's a cookin' it." This last had reference to a thin curl of smoke from the chimney of the little house.

"I don't need womenfolks to cook my dinner. I can do it myself," said the crew, which was true.

"But she wants to see you, Dave," implored the captain.

From under the brim of the straw hat one eye filled with deadly scorn was shifted from the little house to the big captain.

"I seen her, that's enough," said the crew, echoing the remark of the lady laborer of Cheeping Falls.

A lover would have resented this remark, but the question that the canal was asking was, if Captain Bill

was one? Captain Bill was a bachelor. The Amos R. and the mules had been sole and satisfactory consorts up to the time when the crew had added itself unto them.

The crew had come aboard one night when the harbor police had been poking under the docks with searchlights. It came aboard very unobtrusively, and Captain Bill had never discovered the fact until near Newark, when the smell of dinner had brought the crew out of hiding.

It was a miserable, half-starved little crew, and instead of calling the law to relieve him of the stowaway Captain Bill had signed it on.

The crew had proved itself an able seaman when it came to navigating the mules; furthermore, the crew had taken to the canal as though born on it. All had gone well for two years.

Captain and crew had fitted together like two peas in a pod, or like two congenial, hard-working, and sober men until the dark day when the captain had gone to the widow's well and come back with a hook in his gills.

"That ain't the way to talk, Dave," protested the captain. "You'll get on fine with her when you know her. She likes little boys."

Now, the crew was a kid and not a "little boy." Never in the two years that they had been comrades had the captain insulted him like that before. It was clearly the influence of "that there" woman.

"I ain't goin'," growled Dave, taking a tighter clutch on his knees.

"But she told me to bring you," timidly explained the captain. "She —she says she'll be a mother to you."

"Awh"—a snarl—"what do I want wit' a mother? I had one onct" —very much in the manner of a gentleman who says he has had an unfortunate experience and is not going to be fool enough to repeat it.

Truth forces the confession, the crew's experience of mothers had been a painful one, ending invariably in personal violence, when the pilfering from the docks could not defray the maternal desire for liquor.

The large captain looked helplessly at the small crew. He wanted the kid to make a good impression up at the little house. Something told him that it behooved the crew of the Amos R. to stand well with the new owner.

He was very fond of his crew, was Captain Bill.

"Don't talk like that, Dave," he persuaded, "we need a woman to look out for us. Every boat had ought to have a woman aboard."

This a canal axiom.

"Say"—the crew gave the captain a new attention—"is that why you are gittin' married?" The tone was that of one man to another, their usual manner of conversation.

Before the captain could answer the door of the little house was thrown open, and a lady in a white apron appeared and rang a dinner-bell.

"Great Scott," cried the concerned captain, "we are late as all get out! Come, hustle, kid."

But the crew in flat mutiny squatted in a small blue bunch on the deck, hands locked about knees.

"Not me," snarled the crew.

The bell rang steadily, authority in every stroke.

"Yes, you are!" cried the captain.

Reaching down, he secured the crew and carried it down the deck, a hanging bundle of protest, skidding on bare, stubborn heels.

In the cabin the mutiny must have continued, because the captain's voice issued from thence in growing exasperation and authority. Finally the voice ceased and sounds as of vigorous applause took its place, echoing through the drowsy quiet of the sunny day.

In due time a small mutineer in the punishment irons of clean collar and shoes followed the captain up the walk to the little house.

"Well, I declare," said Mrs. Tubbs

in affability and a false front, viewing the washed, brushed, and ominously silent crew, "so this is little Davie!"

"Davie!" It took a woman and one who wanted to be a mother to invent that insult.

"Sit right down, little boy, and enjoy yourself," said Mrs. Tubbs, helping the stew.

"Sit down and enjoy yourself!"

Ah! That remark had given the mean old woman dead away. She'd been listening. She knew what had happened in the cabin.

"Sit down and enjoy yourself!"

He'd fix her. He—well, he did not know what he *would* do just yet; but *he'd do it.* She'd *better* wait. He'd show her.

"Little boy—Davie!" He wished he could meet her on the docks some dark night. Her fate was sealed. He would croak her. *Then* he'd forgive Captain Bill, and things would be all right aboard the Amos R.

"I declare, ain't he got beautiful eyes?" said Mrs. Tubbs, scooping potatoes.

"Yessum!" gulped Captain Bill, holding the end of his necktie under his cup, so as to drop nothing on the appallingly clean cloth.

Of course there were napkins on the table, but they were spread out like fans in the tumblers, and obviously to both Dave and the captain were to be part of the table decorations.

"Beautiful eyes!" Croakin' was *too good* for her. She should die a long, lingering death. Dave knew what he would do. He'd lead her up behind old White Face, and then tickle his leg. Old White Face would fix the rest for him.

She handed him the potatoes—nice, big, round ones.

He took one and began to eat it the way any man would, gripping it firmly, an elbow on the table so that it could not slip. Dave knew his manners. That cloth was perfectly safe.

"Why, Davie," cried Mrs. Tubbs, "don't eat with your fingers!"

Captain Bill and the crew both blushed violently. The captain's fingers clutched a fork. Spearing a potato, he rested an elbow on the table and elegantly bit off hunks of mealy sustenance.

"I guess I ain't taught him his manners," said the captain.

"Oh, I'll attend to that! Tuck your napkin under your chin, Davie."

Hurriedly the captain laid hold of a table decoration and tucked it under *his* chin also.

The two males, confronted with good food and enmeshed in fine manners, which prevented their enjoying it, confronted each other across the appalling table.

The table deserved that word — it was so clean—everything on it shone with so much unnecessary appetite-destroying polish and glitter.

Glasses and knives and forks without number cluttered together, giving no room for elbows. And in the center was a red glass dish of *flowers.* Could foolishness go farther?

"It was a weddin' present from Uncle Henry" (thus the widow explained the dish). "I ain't set it out since Hen died. Ain't had the heart to. I declare it does seem *good* to see a man enjoying his victuals again. You ain't got no idea how lonely I get at meals, Willie."

"Willie," she said it—just like that *"Willie!"*

The eyes of the dumfounded crew were fixed on his hero. Was he going to stand for that? Had Captain Bill arisen and felled the widow with one blow of his mighty fist Dave would not have been surprised.

"Yes, mum," said the captain.

The world crumbled beneath Dave. If the captain would stand for *that,* all was over between them. Oh, well!

He knew from the first that all was ended. That woman hated him. He could see that by the way she picked on him from the first.

Well, the captain had gone back on him.

He'd clear out. He could have her. He was only in the way, anyhow, and the captain had taken him here just to show him.

He'd—he'd go *somewhere*. Perhaps some day the captain, when "that there woman" had made his life a misery, would wish he hadn't gone back on him. He'd get out—a hint was as good as a kick to him—he'd—

But he had entirely underrated the effect on himself of his self-pity.

It shut his throat and caused him to swallow a huge piece of huckleberry pie the wrong way, and he had the coffee-cup in his hand to wash down that pie. His eyes bulged out and he began to choke, coffee slopping on the spotless cloth.

The captain did the proper thing under the circumstances—hit him violently on the back.

Straight as a Johnson could have thrown it went the coffee-cup from his hand at the glass dish. There was a crash and the dish was done with life as a dish. Over the white cloth streamed the coffee.

"I declare," wailed the widow—"oh, ain't that terrible? Poor Uncle Henry's dish has went!"

Stifled with shame and pie, choking, gasping, the crew of the Amos R. went, too, as fast as feet could take it. Old White Face backed in a startled manner against his buddy and hitched up his rear as the small figure darted out of the widow's garden and flew aboard the Amos R.

Down into the cabin dived the crew. Its mind was made up.

It would desert then and there. No use of hoping for anything after that catastrophe of the glass dish. And when a captain goes back on his crew, why, the only thing for the crew to do is to pack and git. And yet—and yet—

Well, we hate to confess it, but the crew was certainly crying.

You see, the captain had been a good captain.

The crew began to pack. It took a fish-pole, a mouth-organ, and was collecting the marvelously colored pebbles abstracted from a cargo intended for the new road at Boonton when—

But the "when" requires another paragraph for its importance.

Some one had *washed* the dishes.

Yes, sir, there they were all piled and scoured and shining. Every tin face had a broad, clean grin. What is more, somebody had swept the floor—somebody who evidently did not know that they were going to unload coal at the next stop.

Think of sweeping a floor before you unload coal!

"Dog-gone it," cried the crew in high excitement, "there has been a crook aboard of us!" To be sure, crooks hardly wash dishes and sweep floors, yet what right had anybody else to take those liberties aboard the Amos R.?

And then the crew was aware of an eye regarding it from around behind the flour-barrel.

Above the eye was a forehead surmounted by hair dragged asunder in a painful part. "I ain't a crook," said a small voice. "You—you come out from there," said the crew with a valiant quaver. "I see you—an' Captain Bill is right outside. He'll tear you right in two if—if— Oh, gee!" (This last in tones of intense disgust.)

From behind the flour-barrel a figure not much taller than his own, clad in blue gingham of the severest cut and most unemotional hue, had risen to confront him.

"Looka here, kid," said the crew with recovered nerves and brutal scorn, "what you doin' hiding in our cabin?"

"You scart me," said the "kid." "I thought you was the constable."

"Say! you get right offen this boat. We ain't got no use for women on this boat. Beat it, or I'll make you."

The crew had evidently forgotten that it, too, had now no right on the Amos R.

"You will, will you?" The tone was full of dogged courage and determination. "How you goin' to do it?"

Evidently the new arrival had a mind of her own.

"How'm I goin' to do it? Never you mind how I'm goin' to do it. You beat it."

"I won't. I'm goin' to stay right on this boat an' ast the captain to take me as a hired girl. He needs one. A more awful dirty place I never see."

"You—you—" Astonished rage tied the words tight. "Awh!"

"I know all about Captain Bill," continued the blue gingham sternly. "The woman at Belleville Lock told me. She said he needed a woman on board the Amos R., so I cum."

At this reiteration of doom the crew could do nothing but quiver like a fox terrier at the sight of a rat.

"I know what you are," cried Dave at last, light bursting on him. "You're one of the town's poor at Belleville. I've seen you walking out in lines all dressed up like that. Git offen this boat. We ain't got no use for town's poor."

"I won't. You ain't Captain Bill."

This plainly was a case for action—quick action. The crew advanced to repel boarders. The blue gingham stiffened. Eyes of stern fighting light burned upon the other sex.

"Say—" the crew hesitated.

The situation was unique. The male sex has to battle with a thousand years of civilization before it can lay violent hands upon the female.

"Say, you'd better beat it. Captain Bill, if he sees you, he'll just tear you in pieces. He's awful sore on women. Iffen he gets one aboard he just twists their necks and throws 'em into the canal."

This shot told with the intruder. Her face whitened.

"Yes, sir. He just throws a fit when he sees one, an' nothin' but their blood will suit him."

"I ain't goin' back to that poorhouse, anyway," said the intruder, stamping her foot so that the dust of many a weary mile flew again.

"You'll get some other place sure." The crew, having removed the danger, was inclined to sympathy. "You'd hate it here. It takes an awful brave man to stand up to Captain Bill."

"Gimme your hand; it's only a step up, Mrs. Tubbs," said a voice outside.

She was there—the woman whose dish he had broken! She was coming for revenge. Nothing could be plainer.

He was there—the awful captain who twisted the necks of women and threw them into the canal! Even a poorhouse neck has its value—to its owner.

"I wanta go home; I wanta go home," wailed the poorhouse girl, wiggling her hands in awful helplessness before the crisis.

"Shut up!" hissed the white-faced crew. "We gotta hide. Our lives may depend onto it."

"I wanta go home."

"Git under that bunk. Scrooge close against the wall, so as I can have room, too. An' don't you breathe too loud, neither," commanded the crew.

When the Widow Tubbs, followed by the captain, entered the cabin of the Amos R., nothing but inanimate objects were visible.

"This is the cabin—Ella," explained the captain when they were well in it.

"Ain't it small?" said the widow. "Land sakes, ain't it hot?"

"Yessum," agreed the captain eagerly. "It's a wonder we don't git heat prostrated. Most people do when they ain't used to it."

"Well," said the widow, with a firm gleam in her eye, "you'll be all the gladder to git back to a nice, cool house Saturdays and Sundays."

"Yessum," said the captain in a faint voice. So she was not going to live aboard the boat! What would people say?

"I must say you keep it nice and clean," said the widow. "Them dish-

es, now, is washed like they ought to be. I never could stand messes. You wouldn't believe the way I work cleanin' up. It near kills me in hot weather, but I keep at it."

The captain tried to conceal his astonishment at what he saw in the cabin.

It was real thoughtful of the kid to clean up the place. That boy had a head on him. He had realized that the widow might want to come aboard.

"Yessum," said the captain, referring to her remarks about messes. "I can't stand them, either."

"I'm glad of that, because then you and me will fit in."

The captain shuddered. Somehow he felt that he would not fit in.

"Where is that there boy?" demanded the widow. "I don't feel as if I could get over Uncle Henry's dish."

"I guess he's hidin', poor little tyke," said the captain.

The widow straightened up and fixed him with her eyes.

"There's one thing certain, Willie," said the widow. "That there boy will learn some manners or he won't live with me."

"Yessum."

"I never have had a boy in the house, and it's only my love for you that makes me think onto the idea. But he's gotta behave."

"Yessum."

"All right, then. When you come back from Boonton we'll be married. I wisht we had been married to-day; then I could have gave that boy something to remember Uncle Henry's dish by."

"Yessum," said the craven captain. Really, the widow looked quite capable of giving even a husband something to remember if his memory was at fault.

"Kerchoo," came from under the bunk where the dust had been swept.

"For the land's sakes!" cried the widow. "It's that boy. I see his legs. Willie, he's been listin' to our love-makin'."

The captain investigated and dragged out the crew.

"Great day!" cried the widow, bending double. "There is another one. I see more legs."

And then the captain dragged out the boarder. When the boarder found herself in the clutch of the twister of necks she screamed, tore herself loose, and threw herself on the widow.

"Oh, don't let him kill me," wailed the boarder.

The crew said nothing, but sidled against the captain's leg and took enough of trousers in a small hand to indicate that he had anchored for protection near his buddy.

"Hush, honey," soothed the widow, patting the tight hair with the painful part. "Nobody ain't goin' to hurt you with me around. Ain't you ashamed, William Furst, to scare a little girl like that?"

"What have I done to her?" protested the captain. "I ain't never seen her before."

"He's awful cruel to women—he throws them into the canal." The words came through strangled sobs of fright.

The widow sat bolt upright. "Who said so?"

"I heared people sayin' it. One of the first laws of the poorhouse is not to tell tales on a comrade."

"Aw, now, little girl," pleaded the captain. He took a step toward her, with the kindest of intentions.

"Don't let him git me," screamed the blue gingham, misreading the intentions.

"Git way from her. You'd oughter be ashamed of yourself," said the widow. "How'd you come to git here, honey?" she asked of the suppliant clutching her.

"I heared the lady that keeps the lock say after she let the Amos R. through this morning that it was a shame that Captain Bill was takin' the woman he was—that he didn't want

her—that she would never fit onto a boat. So I thought I would come and see if he wanted me, because I'm sick of that poorhouse. He wasn't here, so I just give him a sample of my work by cleanin' up."

"Did you sweep this floor?" demanded the widow.

"Yessum."

"And wash them plates?"

"Yessum."

"Then," with an affectionate light in her eyes, the widow stood up and took the small, rough hand, "you come home with me. You sha'n't go back to that poorhouse, honey."

She went toward the door, the boarder clinging hopefully to her. At the door she fronted the captain.

"I've come to the conclusion that I don't know enough about your habits to marry you," she said firmly. And: "You tell that there woman at Belleville Lock, the next time you go through, that I don't want you, anyway, and just took you' outer pity; and, furthermore, if that there boy as much as ever touches one of my flowers like I seen him do sometimes, I'll have the constable arrest you both. In my opinion you are a pair."

If the opinion of the world counts for anything, the two females who went briskly up the walk to the little house were also a pair—a most congenial pair.

The captain waited until he was sure that the little house had hidden its own. Then he tore off coat, collar, and shoes.

"Dave," said the captain, with a huge sigh of relief, as he reached for his overalls, "get offen that collar and them shoes and let's get to work."

The crew took a mouth-organ from a pocket and slung it on the bunk. "Say, let's have something to eat first. I'm hungry."

The Driver of the Delia

By Bradford Burnham

THERE was never a more surprised man in Jacksonville than the skipper of the big tug Sir Francis Drake when he read the telegram stating that the Delia had passed in the Virginia Capes and was safely at anchor in Hampton Roads.

Sixty hours before she had trailed down the St. John's at the end of his hawser, and out into the surcharged murk of an oncoming storm of West Indian manufacture and West Indian efficiency.

The wind was splintering tons of water every second on the jagged rocks of the south jetty as they had left its protecting arm close aboard, and savage flame-colored bolts were

scampering over the surface of a cloud-bank of jet which was climbing rapidly toward the zenith.

Hardly had they cleared the bar when complete, consuming blackness had engulfed the Delia. The skipper remembered signaling blindly for her to cast off. How feeble the powerful whistle had seemed with the shriek of the gale mocking derisively!

He had no idea where the Delia was or what had become of her when the donkey-engine pulled in the ragged end of a parted hawser. The business of keeping the Sir Francis Drake afloat had absorbed his whole attention for the next twenty-four hours, as he lay to in the most dangerous quarter of the hurricane.

Little did the towboat skipper dream at the time that the master of the Delia had been piling on canvas after canvas insanely, in a wild fury to keep ahead of the storm center and leap up the coast before it.

He had sensed dully that his tow must have gone down with all on board, and he had half-masted his flag when he steamed slowly back to port after it was all over.

A vessel does not overrun her tug every time she puts to sea, and it was chiefly due to this time when Daniel Lykes pulled the Delia M. Sanderson away from her tow-boat and snatched her out of the maw of a hurricane that he became known from Portland to Key West as the Driver.

"But 'twarn't nothin', that," he would sputter after joyfully recounting the incident to some pilot, mate, or harbor-master. "The bloomin' Drake was in me way. Seein's how I was bound for Norfolk, I sort o' wanted to *get* there, not fool away sloppin' 'round in that bang-up little breeze a tied to thet there miserable little floatin' choo-choo. Why, say, hev ye ever heared me remark about the time I was kotched off Nantucket in the big blizzard? I had the old Jennie H. Smith then. Well, ye see—"

And getting there was what the Driver always did.

He had gained that reputation long before the Drake incident. Once the hatches were closed, the deck-load lashed, and the harbor cleared, he seemed demonized by the passion.

Saving time was saving money fast nowadays, he figured, with the steam and gasoline doing their best to oust the sailing coaster entirely.

He scorned the counsel of the prudent, and laughed at the government weather forecasts, frequently going out when the storm warning signals were flying. He had even put to sea when the two black-centered red flags denoting that a hurricane was expected were floating gloomily from the custom-house staff.

Housing topsails was worse than poison to the Driver; slatting around in a calm, worse than death.

Yet sailors feared not to sign with him. Defy the elements as he might; fling caution and prudence to one side; he invariably slammed her through, exulting wildly in his reckless strength. The Driver would get there.

They had much in common, the Driver and his Delia. Both were still young; both found in Maine their birth. The men of Bath, when they designed and built the Delia, had her future master well in mind.

A skeleton of flawless strength; planking of native pine far thicker than common; four giant sticks of soundest spruce, with virile lesser sticks for topmasts, bowsprit, booms, and gaffs—all were selected with minutest care to withstand the strains, the struggles, and the stress of the fierce battle-service which the Driver would impose.

His third interest in her, they knew, would but serve to make him drive the harder.

And she had stood the test.

The forests of her native State had given of their best. The men of Bath had given of their best. And in

command the ablest master of the coast, in spite of youth and rashness, walked her quarter-deck.

Reared within constant sound of the Atlantic surf; hardened quickly to a life which early brings the hair of strength upon the chest of man, he seemed to be a very part of the vessel he commanded.

She first went out with fertilizer.

That had been a blow, but it had been a valuable charter, too. Stiff and unyielding as a maiden ship that has not yet found herself, the Driver stood by the wheel as she passed down the East River under tow, the glittering truck at the maintopmast head being swept to the deck by the Brooklyn Bridge.

She had returned with sweet yellow pine, which had removed the stench of her outward cargo.

Then followed charters to many ports.

Once she strayed as far as Pointe-à-Pitre for a rich cargo of rum and chocolate. Another cruise was to Porto Rico. But usually she carried pine lumber and naval stores up the coast, with a frequent southward charter of general merchandise between ports.

Whenever the Driver touched at Charleston he went to see Milly.

It was humiliating to be in love with a little wisplike slip of a girl who could walk under his clumsily outstretched arms, but who never would walk into them. It was humiliating to a Yankee skipper to be in love with a Southerner.

Well, in fact, it was humiliating for a skipper to be in love at all.

A skipper's life was big enough without it. His vessel should be his wife. In her eager response to another sail broken out; in her quick understanding of a fractional turn of the wheel; in her ready sympathy toward weathering crested seas most easily, and in her patience and fidelity in sharing with him the struggles and the victories with elements worth fighting, he should find satisfaction and completeness.

His faith in her; her devotion to him; should not this be sufficient?

All the same, the Driver had insisted on the mahogany finish to his cabin, on the hot and cold water fittings, and on the piano bolted to the wall.

Milly liked such things, and even slatting around in a dead calm wouldn't be so bad with her holding on to the stool with her feet in a big ground-swell and getting the real stuff out of that piano.

The Delia's was better than her little, scratched affair in Charleston.

Sometimes when the tug had snugly berthed the Delia at one of the dilapidated wharfs of the proud Southern town, and he had made his way by a jerky trolley and numberless crooked streets to the little gabled house where Milly lived, the strains of "Sailing Down the Chesapeake Bay" would not be heard.

Instead, he would find Tim Moran sharing the sitting-room with Milly, who would be dressed all in white and wearing a silly string of coral beads. He hated those coral beads; perhaps because they were made of the substance which had once torn two planks from the Delia on the reef off Boca Chica; perhaps because Tim had given them to her.

Such evenings were not altogether pleasant.

Fear was something whose definition was strange to the Driver, at least when he had ten fathoms beneath him. But when he called and found Tim with Milly he would discover within him a queer compound made up of the elements of hate, dread, and love, which the chemist would have labeled jealousy in red letters.

Milly's tactics, then, would be precisely like those of a little girl the Driver had once seen petting a small kitten to bring a growl from the collie.

"Nice kitty," her dancing eyes would seem to say to Tim, at the same time throwing a sidelong glance toward the Driver's corner, where the uncomfortable sailing-master was sitting doggedly, determined to stay out that fool Moran if it took till eight bells.

And then Milly would give him a look which sent his pulses bounding, and kept them so while he lay in his bunk the rest of the night.

They were not altogether unlike the kitten and the collie either, for Moran was a slender little shrimp compared with the Driver's burly form. And whenever the Driver saw him he wore a catlike expression of superiority, which made the Driver rage.

Moran had the advantage of frequency, for he was in Charleston twice each week.

Ever since the Trans-Virginian had stretched an antenna down to the seaport, spanning the river with a big drawbridge to place a terminal in the city's heart, Moran had guided No. 222 between Norfolk and Charleston. During the lie-over he boarded next door to Milly's.

To the Driver's bitter jealousy toward the freight engineer was added the seaman's inveterate contempt for the railroad and all employed by it.

How a sensible girl like Milly could even endure the attentions of a sooty, greasy engineer who boasted that he hailed from County Kerry, when he, the master of the Delia, stood ready to offer her the romance, the poetry, and the imagination of the sea, was beyond his comprehension. But so was Milly.

It was all blame foolishness, he thought, as the Delia curtsied past Charleston light-vessel, and a sailor fixed the union jack at the foremasthead as a signal for the compulsory pilot.

It had gone on long enough. He wouldn't tell her of the time he had seen Tim thrown out of a Norfolk café, but— Well, they'd lay the cards on the table that very night.

When he got to Milly's house, however, he was informed that she'd just gone out to the movies with "Mr. Moran." He pounded the irregular pavements back to the water-front, and sulked in his cabin the rest of the time they lay at Charleston.

One afternoon, a month later, the Driver turned a corner in Norfolk and met Timothy Moran, Esq., head on.

The Irishman applied the air and shunted to a convenient siding to avoid collision, but the coasting-master luffed a couple of points and bore down upon the red-faced engineer till his sea-tanned bowsprit towered above his rival.

The latter inaugurated preliminary pugilistic preparations, but was disarmed by the voice of the Driver, who spoke with forbidding friendliness.

"Tim, you 'n' me hev met consid'able o' late. Let's step across to the Ace of Hearts where we can have a chin real comfortable." He led the way. "What 'll ye hev?"

His cordiality was alarming. The Irishman was still on the lookout for signs of physical advance.

But they talked over their bootlegs of dark beer for an hour, disturbing the bartender with no hostile overtures. The Driver did the talking. He began at the beginning, recounting impressively his meeting Milly when her father, a shipping clerk in the Clyde office, had invited him to dinner.

He spoke of the smile she had given him that night when his horny hand closed over her soft white fingers as they parted. He spoke of their friendship through the intervening years, of occasional letters at far-distant ports, and of infrequent calls at the little home whenever the Delia was in Charleston.

He warmed to his theme, telling of the necessity he felt in going slow

and not frightening the little girl to death.

He pointed out the importance of keeping the harmony of her life, logically embracing a love marriage with him, free from any disturbing outside influence.

"Manin' me, I dedooce," sputtered Tim. "Well, now, git wise to this, yer great big—"

"Wait!" bellowed the Driver in tones loud enough to be heard at Old Point Comfort. "Will you do me the kindness to wait till I conclude?"

He resumed, repeating emphatically that Milly's happiness depended upon his elimination from the scene. It was out of the question, anyway, for the daughter of a respectable shipping clerk to marry a mere locomotive engineer.

This gave him the opportunity for a glowing peroration on the glory and bigness of the sea as contrasted with the sordid prose of the railroad, and on the vast superiority of the sailing vessel as a carrier of merchandise.

There was method in his calmness—a calmness foreign to his nature or present inward feelings. The engineer must withdraw without violence. A brawl would be unbecoming to him and distasteful to his sweetheart, should she hear of it.

He did not see that there was no diplomacy in his tactics.

"T'ell wid yez bloomin' smooth tongue," cried the exicted Irishman, who had been holding the table with both hands for the last five minutes to keep himself on his side of it.

"It's you they calls the Driver, ain't it? Well, I'm a driver, too, and by St. Patrick, as good a one as you. Callin' the gre-a-test of hooman transportation facilities undagnified names, will yez? I guess I gota right t' see that colleen 'smuch as you. If she ever-loves you, 'stead o' me, 'twon't be 'cause I ain't game. Ye can stick that in yez pipe an' smoke it.

"Yes, I'm a driver, too," he repeated. "And I drive somethin' that 'll travel, not a-goin' wanderin' all over the face of the arth a-geein' an' a-hawin' before gettin' there. Why, see here, yez bloomin' withered up young sea-fossil.

"Yez could lave here now with yez ancient wash-tub an' drive yez durnedest, while I lie a snoozin' an' thinkin' about Milly real comfortable till I pull out to-morrow night, an' aven then I'd hav my black iron beauty aslape in the Charleston roundhouse before yez see Fort Soomter wid yez spy-glass. Driver, are yez? I'd like t' see yez drive, then, the likes o' you!"

The driver started from his seat.

The reference to Milly had been unpleasant enough, but it was the slur on the nautical profession as a whole and upon his reputation as a driver of vessels that made his anger wax. Nobody but a landsman would have made the last-named implication.

Then into the flow of his wrath came a reflection on the challenge in the little upstart's speech.

He got up silently and went out, while the other began cooling off with another bootleg. From force of habit the skipper looked skyward.

Funny, he thought, how he was again bound for Charleston, and that Moran would pull out the following night. Moran couldn't have known where she was bound for. The thought of another evening at Milly's with that Irish fellow there was out of the question.

Again he looked skyward.

A thin haze paled the blueness and lessened the brilliancy of the afternoon sun. He lumbered down to the end of a dock where he could get a view of the horizon. Off toward the Chesapeake the haze was denser.

A few cirrus clouds streaked the zenith. The grain elevators over at Newport News loomed up clearly in spite of the haze, looking very near and very large. There was no wind blowing.

He noted the symptoms carefully

and recrossed the street, glancing at a barometer in a small ship-chandler's store. A crafty look came into his eyes.

"Norther comin'," he muttered. "H'm. She'll strike inside of six hours. Outside, mebbe an hour sooner." He tossed a careless glance over his shoulder at the custom house. From its flagstaff a square red flag with a black center floated, while above it a red pennant waved listlessly.

"How'd they guess it?" he ejaculated, and returned to the Ace of Hearts.

Timothy Moran, Esq., was still there. The Driver addressed him anew, beginning where the conversation had broken off quarter of an hour before.

"And if you *should* happen to find the Delia at Charleston when you pulled your little steam wagon and cars across the bridge there, would you remove yourself to other ports and leave my girl to me? Would you, Timothy?"

"Shure!" The little engineer's face wore a contemptuous sneer. His face, too, then slowly assumed a crafty look. The Driver had trapped himself! He couldn't back out now.

"An' if *yez* ain't there, will *yez* bate it?"

The Irishism passed over the Driver, who quietly opened the door again, and a third time looked skyward. A faintly perceptible breeze was blowing light dust down the street.

He banged the door shut and strode over to the bewildered engineer.

"Yes, I will," he shouted with all his might. "But the Delia *will* be there. I'll have afternoon tea ready for ye, understand. You hear me?"

His mouth was not four inches from the top of the little fellow's head.

"And I'll not only have sighted Sumter with my spy-glass, as ye say in your fool ignorance, but I'll see the fort over my poop deck. *The Delia M. Sanderson, Daniel Lykes, master, will pass through the swinging draw of the bridge before your engine and cars move over it.* If ye think I ain't got nerve I'll drive her through something that 'll make even a fool landlubber like you believe me. That's conclusive. Understand?"

Before the astounded Irishman could collect his wits the door banged again with the Driver outside.

He noticed joyfully as he hurried to the towing office that the wind had freshened and was blowing from north by east. It was not yet sundown. No. 222, with Tim Moran in the cab, would leave at ten the following evening. The Delia had finished loading before noon, and was resting in the Roads in company with a fleet of eight or ten other schooners waiting for the norther to blow itself out.

They thought he'd lost his head when the Driver shouted his intentions, but they gave him their prize tug, and under forced draft sped down the Elizabeth River.

Half an hour later the tug had set the skipper aboard, passed a heavy hawser to the Delia, and to the amazement of the storm-bound fleet began towing her seaward.

The Driver smiled a little as he noted the fair tide and the increasing strength of the wind. Even before they had passed the Rip Raps and had the Tail of the Horseshoe abeam did he begin piling the canvas on the Delia.

The motor hoists quickly hauled in the steel halyards of the big four-master, and as the giant mainsail caught the sweep of wind rushing out of Chesapeake Bay and filled, the Delia heeled over gracefully and began to bruise the water splendidly.

The hawser to the tug sagged and it became a race—a hopeless one for the towboat, for the Driver had begun to drive. Long before Cape Henry was abeam she gave up, and as her admiring skipper pulled a farewell salute on his whistle cord, he

wondered if this time the Driver had not really gone mad.

Outside the Capes the force of the gathering norther developed rapidly, as the master set his course for the Diamond Shoal light-vessel off Hatteras. The gale was almost directly aft, which the skipper had expected, and two of the great booms stretched out far over the starboard rail, while the main and spanker swung to port.

The Delia was almost on an even keel, but it was a supreme test for the four great spruce trees and the men of Bath.

Night settled down, and while Tim Moran was comfortably snoozing in a Norfolk lodging-house, the Delia was rushing southward through the gale-swept seas, with the Driver, sleepless, exultant, feeling the thrill of life through her whole keel, and handling her superbly. The wind increased steadily, but it was a dry norther and blew evenly, without gusts.

The Driver understood it and ate up the parallels.

Off to starboard he glimpsed at times, the powerful lights of Currituck and then of Bodie Island, but dawn broke long before he sighted the thin masts of the lightship.

They rang the bell for the mad Driver as he scudded past, but he only smiled with satisfaction as he ported his helm and straightened out southwest by west 'fourth west for Charleston lightship two hundred and sixty-four miles away.

The wind, still north by east, could not have been more favorable — nor stronger.

Under the water as much as over it the Delia rushed on the wings of the howling norther. A collier, laboring up the coast in the teeth of the gale, rose above the horizon, grew bigger, passed abeam, and dropped astern.

Then another steamer, also laden heavily, was sighted from the cross trees and later from the deck. More slowly did the Delia gain this time, but the freighter steadily grew larger till it, too, passed abeam. The Driver noted that she was on the same course as himself. This time he laughed aloud, wildly.

Toward noon she dashed by Lookout, well outside the little lightship, which was bucking and rearing like a bronco being broken as she lay off the edge of the perilous shoals. The Driver would not leave the wheel.

The black doctor, custodian of the galley, scarce could make him swallow his black coffee. Aloft he kept his eyes, seldom glancing in the binnacle; aloft, where like fire-horses every sail was pulling.

That night the lookout on Frying Pan, on the watch for the rockets of vessels in distress, saw or thought he saw the ghostlike apparition of a ship under full sail fly past through the deep blackness, the huge white canvas and white smother of foam along the water-line being all that was visible. He shook his head wonderingly and looked again. But it was gone.

Still riveted to the spokes, the Driver's smarting eyes at last caught the far-off light on Cape Romaine, and felt better. The first faint gleams of the second dawn were paling the two white lights of Charleston lightship when the Delia bore down upon them.

She cut inside the pitching vessel and made in for the jetties. A sailor appeared with the jack and asked if he should set the pilot signal. The Driver turned on him and thundered, "No."

The pilots had already seen him, and even now the pilot ship was between the jetties struggling out to meet him. Twenty minutes later and he dashed by them, heading straight for the narrow entrance.

Their wonder changed to fear for the runaway ship, as she seemed to be, and they came about with difficulty in the great seas and hurried back.

For forty years no vessel even half

the size of the Delia had entered Charleston harbor under sail without pilot.

But straight as an arrow midway between the jetties she shot, the unabated gale full upon her starboard quarter and a flood tide pulling hard. Clean over the weather jetty the water spouted, hurling spray and spoondrift onto the Delia's sharply listed deck.

The Driver sent a man below to relight his coal-black pipe, and thought grimly of the pleasure the underwriters would find in learning that he had taken on no pilot before he piled the Delia up.

The sun was gathering strength as the Delia dashed up the main channel, the tower on Sumter and the spire of St. Philip's in range line. The red buoys jumped by to starboard, and the black-can buoys to port.

Right over a turning buoy he rode, to shorten his course a hairbreadth, the bobstay hitting it and throwing it crunching sharply beneath the planks of pine with the purling, boiling water.

The inner harbor was now near.

The crew, squareheads all, gathered at the rail in silent terror. Even the mate dared speak no word after looking at the frenzied face of his chief.

"Axes!" yelled the Driver suddenly.

A moment, and a man was by each straining sheet, ax in hand. The mate was ready at the hoists should the Driver order the halyards let go. Not a sail had been shifted since they left Cape Henry.

And not a sail had started, either. The sailmakers of Bath, as well as the shipbuilders of Bath, had done their work well.

People gathered at the Battery, along the hurricane-scarred waterfront, to see the strange and terrible sight, the huge four-master rushing to almost sure destruction.

She sheered a bit and turned her mighty bowsprit straight for the center of the Trans-Virginian's thread of iron, blue-black in the morning sunlight.

The Driver threw back a quick glance at Sumter over his poop deck and smiled grimly, then settled back into the state of semiunconsciousness which his thirst for speed had thrown him into.

It was the nearness of the bridge which finally roused him. He ordered the signal early, in hoarse tones. Immediately the four raucous blasts of the horn broke feebly out, and he cursed, longing for a big steam whistle. Well, he could hold on a trifle longer, and might be able to wear ship if they did not open.

Could he get through if they did open?

The draw was one hundred and twenty feet wide on either side the draw-pier. Plenty of room if he estimated his leeway accurately. Still he didn't house his topsails. The Delia rushed on. The axes were ready if necessary at the last moment, but her headway would carry far on that tide.

His eye ran over the quickly shortening line he would follow to the center of the side of the draw which swung upstream and away from him.

It was the west side he remembered. They were only an eighth of a mile away now. It was high time the bridge began to open. What was the matter with Jim Haley, the head bridge-tender?

Why wasn't he on the job? He looked for the white jets of steam from the stationary engine in the center of the draw-pier. When he saw that he'd know she had begun to swing.

But she didn't swing.

The captain of a big paintless tramp near by excitedly blew the bridge signal with his stentorian steam voice. The Delia's little foghorn was signalling constantly. Yet no movement of the draw. No white jets from its vitals.

He would have to bring the Delia

about—or try to. There wasn't an instant to lose. But, he'd wait thirty seconds more. The horn signaled wildly.

Seemingly in reply came to the Driver's ears the two long and two short blasts of a locomotive whistling for a crossing. They came across the marshes from northeastward, carried far by the gale. No. 222 was coming!

Jim Haley was holding the draw!

The freight was not yet within the home block, but Jim Haley was holding the draw. Yes, there was the shrill falsetto of the little bridge whistle now, frantically piping the short, quick notes which meant the bridge would not open for a train was coming.

Jim Haley was holding the draw.

'Twas a ridiculous little whistle that, the Driver thought, yet it seemed to say plainly, "You've lost, you've lost, you've lost!" He looked eastward, swiftly. He saw the white steam of 222's engine now, though it was still quite far away.

Then the Driver bit his pipestem clean through. Jim Haley was holding the draw. Would he keep *on* holding it? The Driver knew his rights.

"No navigable river can be obstructed by a private or quasi-public corporation." The words throbbed in his ears. Long ago the Delia had shown her desire to go through the draw. The train should wait.

Jim Haley was holding the draw, was he? He'd show him he could drive. He'd show them all.

He could see Haley now, for they were only a couple of cable-lengths away. He was waving his arms about frantically, and running up and down his little platform. A ridiculous figure the Driver thought, dully, and was sorry for him.

Then Haley was seen to stop running and to move some levers wildly. From the mechanism of the pivot little white steam jets now issued. The span trembled, quivered, and began leisurely to swing.

At that moment 222 entered the home block.

"Aft, come aft, all o' ye!" roared the Driver. "Come aft, and lie flat!" He braced himself with all his might and hurled his 1,700 ton vessel, his pride and all but his all, into the steel jaws.

"I'll show ye how to open your damned bridge," he bellowed, as they closed in.

Over at the east end of the bridge the brakes of 222 were sending out sheets of solid flame.

There was only a distance of inches between the stationary pier and the jagged, protruding rails of the swinging draw when the bowsprit of the Delia, at eleven knots, smashed in like a tremendous battering ram.

Some say that it was the sprit that caught the nearer of the two big I-beams squarely amidships and pushed the obstruction out of the way.

Others maintain that the great foremast was what did it. Nobody knows. The main thing was that the giant stick was still standing when the ship finally stopped above the bridge, though the topmast had gone through the deck.

A couple of hours later, after the Driver had examined the crumpled untidiness up forward and found that only one pump was needed to keep the Delia's head still high, he started back to find out whether Tim Moran was in eternity or a hospital.

But all that he found was the engine of 222 with her pilot and front wheels stopped just over the edge. He thought how funny the starboard anchor of the Delia looked in the twisted steel of the draw, and the ribbons of what had been the Delia's jib-topsail fastened to a rail end by what may have been the foretopmast stay.

He thought it all very funny as he made his way by the jerky trolley and number-crooked streets to the little gabled house where Milly lived.

HEART TO HEART TALKS

BY THE EDITOR

IT is not surprising, in this hour of war, that the people who are not at war should turn their attention to the issues of strife. It is a well-known fact that during the world's great struggles literature dealing with war is always in great demand. Combat seems to exert a powerful influence upon noncombatants, and peaceful nations take unto themselves an interest that could be accentuated only through participation.

Poems of battle, epics to war, novels of heroism, and short stories will be the product of the present conflict. Not only the wars of the day will be discussed, but wars of the past, causes of war, the history of war, the effects of war.

The ALL-STORY CAVALIER, conscious of this tendency, will offer its readers in the September 26 issue the first instalment of a great war novel founded on fact and enacted in our own country. It is by an author who is admirably fitted to deal with the subject. There are few bookshelves in this land that do not contain his volumes.

The title of the novel will be

CUSTER OF THE CAVALRY

BY CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

In all the history of mounted heroes, none more magnificent or daring than George Custer (Yellow-Hair) ever appeared upon the roster of any country. When he was swept to his death in the never-to-be-forgotten battle on the Little Big Horn, in which Sitting Bull took his terrible revenge, a brave heart ceased to beat, a great soldier sheathed his sword, and a picturesque American figure passed on to Valhalla.

Noted always for its reckless figures, the American cavalry never knew a more dashing leader than George Armstrong Custer, and in all its dramatic history the cavalry never had a battle climax more thrilling and soul-rending than Custer's last fight.

An ideal *beau sabreur,* George Armstrong Custer came out of the Civil War a brevet major-general of volunteers, and when the regular army was reorganized he was made lieutenant-colonel of the Seventh United States Cavalry, and practically organized the regiment.

Stationed in Dakota Territory with the northwest full of hostile Indians, the regiment was destined to take a leading part in the campaign against the Sioux. This is the setting in which Dr. Brady has laid a story of love and war, barbaric hatreds, and military life on the plains.

Love knows no barriers, but military rank has been known to block many a romance. The hero of the story is *Tony Britton,* a young lieutenant of Custer's command who lets an army career go by the board in order to protect a woman's honor.

Dr. Brady has so contrived his story that the battle on the Little Big Horn is the climax; but to the reader the solution of the love story of *Tony Britton* and *Barbara Manning* is of primal importance.

Just how Custer was cut down at the last minute no one seems to know, and the stories of the Indians at the fight are rather vague and unsatisfactory. Dr. Brady has combined the known things with his picture of the battle in such a way that we ride into the fight with the doomed squadron and see the braves of Gall and Crazy Horse circling in to the last charge that overwhelms the general and his little party on the crest of the hill that is holy ground to the army.

"CUSTER OF THE CAVALRY" will appear in five instalments. The author of "The Eagle of the Empire" has surpassed himself in this story.

Did you ever get married?

If you did, and you are a man, you will certainly not have forgotten how hideously nervous you were just before you started for the church.

(Of course, if you happen to belong to the other sex, you don't know anything about that nervousness, which is a man's prerogative.)

Well, anyhow,

DOUBLE TROUBLE

BY ALBERT M. TREYNOR

all happened because *Geoffrey Buckstaff* lived up to the traditions of his forefathers. He had come to New York presumably just a poor mining engineer to marry the girl of his choice—*Beryl Gardner*. She was an heiress, and he really had almost as much money as her father, although she didn't know it.

However, after ruining five separate and distinct white ties on the eve of his wedding, *Geoffrey* in desperation accepted a whopping big bracer from *Roger Greve*, cousin of his bride-to-be. *Greve* saw that he was dressed at last, had his ring and license where they would do the most good, and then hurried out for a taxi—

It might have been minutes or it might have been days later that *Geoffrey* sat up with a bright green taste in his mouth and a head like a gas-tank, to find it was broad daylight! He had missed the wedding!

He struggled down-stairs, nearly crazy with horror at his defection, picked up a newspaper and found staring at him in big head-lines *the description of his own wedding!*

You will find the continuation of these fireworks in next week's ALL-STORY CAVALIER.

"MY FRIEND PETERSSEN," by James B. Hendryx, is the story of a mathematical marvel. When the story opens *Peterssen* is at college taking a special course in several of the sciences and the higher mathematics.

When other students were playing baseball or going to dances, *Peterssen* was working out the Fourth Dimension. He could take a pencil and show you why it was foolish to go to horse-races unless all of the horses would come under the wire at the same time, and that the chance of three horses finishing nose and nose at precisely the same fraction of a second was only one in 4,444,444.

Furthermore, *Peterssen* would not go to football games, because he could prove by figures that the efforts of eleven men against eleven men to advance a certain object a given distance in a specified time could be much more practically demonstrated on paper. All you had to do was to take the total available energy of each team, plus their total available brain-power, finding the fixed ratio which these factors bore to the actual advance of the ball per foot per second, *et cetera, et cetera.*

Really, *Peterssen* was much more interesting than his mathematics make him appear. You will like *Peterssen*, and there is a huge joke at the end of the story.

"HIS HOUSE," by Harold Titus, is a story of a home, a man's home built with his own hands, and with the hope that some time the "only woman in the world" would share it with him. The man in the case was a Westerner, rough and unconventional, and yet of the kind which has hammered wonderful Western cities out of the soil.

Twice a year this man used to go to the big city to sell his cattle. At such times he would always visit a certain little restaurant and be waited on by a certain little girl. Each trip he told her about the house he was building.

She was interested from the start, and finally one day he said he had it completed and asked her if she was ready to start back with him.

The question took her off her feet. She

had not the least idea he was building it for her. However, she started with him; but what took place afterward is a story for you to read.

"BARBED-WIRE AND BUTTERMILK," by George Allan England, is polite vaudeville in magazine pages. This popular author, an author who searches for his wonderful tales into the unseen and the unknown, will surprise his legion of readers when he appears here in the garb of a humorist. But Mr. England has a right to a place in the laugh market as you will see when you read his story.

It begins with a steamer just coming into the dock. On the corner of the wharf stands a sleek and very elegant young man. A hawser is thrown to the dock, its loops embracing both a big pile and a full molasses-barrel. Then the cable draws steel-taut. "Something creaked stutteringly," says the author. "For an instant the stout oaken staves of the barrel resisted as the steamer slowed. Then—CRACK!

"Dark, saccharine, instantaneous, the molasses-geyser leaped into the ozone!

"A second later the cap'n and I glimpsed a figure remotely like that of a human being, stickily retreating along the dock—stickily, and with strange, blobby noises. Behind it copious sweets trailed. The elegant and blasé youth had instantly and entirely vanished."

A very sweet story, this!

FOND OF "DAD"

To the Editor:

I am in love with the All-Story Cavalier Weekly. Its staff of writers is unsurpassed by any other magazine. Keep up the good work.

More copies of the All-Story Cavalier are read in the Southwest than of any other magazine, which shows how the people know a good thing when they see it.

"Dad" was a fine story, and I hope Mr. Terhune will give us another one like it soon.

Your short stories are immense.

James Peters.

Carrizozo, New Mexico.

APPROVES OF THE POETRY

To the Editor:

Have never seen a letter from this city in print. Nevertheless the All-Story Cavalier is read every week by a large circle of people.

I have been a constant reader of this magazine for over a year and enjoy all the stories, my favorite writer being Fred Jackson. Some of the best recent stories, in my opinion, are "Beauty to Let," "A Self-Made Widow," "The Biggest Diamond," "The Quitter," "The In-Bad Man," and "The Crooked Stick."

A few words in regard to the poetry. I find it exceptionally good and like the idea of having it at the end of the stories.

Allow me to suggest one improvement. Could you not print pictures of the authors so that we readers could have pictures of our favorite All-Story Cavalier authors, the same as we have pictures of our favorite moving-picture actors and actresses?

All in all I think the magazine is the best weekly on the market.

A Constant Reader.

Helena, Arkansas.

INTERESTED IN THE BURROUGHS STORIES

To the Editor:

I have been a reader of *The Cavalier* and *The All-Story* for a number of years and never missed a copy.

I think "The Lone Star Rangers," by Zane Grey, was great. I also think the stories by Fred Jackson, George Allan England, Varick Vanardy, Perley Poore Sheehan, and Edgar Rice Burroughs are fine.

"Foolish Francesca," by Olive Wadsley, in this week's All-Story Cavalier was dandy.

Am interested to know what terrible tragedy has occurred in the life of *Tarzan*, and curious as to the fate of *David Innes*, in "At the Earth's Core." I am also glad to hear that we are going to have sequels to these stories.

(Miss) A. May Oppen.

406 Second Street, West,
Ashland, Wisconsin.

"THE QUITTER" UNEQUALED

To the Editor:

Enclosed you will find fourteen cents in stamps for which please send me the All-Story Cavalier for August 1. Please hurry it up, for I can hardly wait as "The Quitter" ends in that number.

Have Jacob Fisher give us some more on the North. I have been a constant reader of fiction since I have been able to read, but never have I read anything that equals "The Quitter."

Don't forget to send Zane Grey around.

again with his Texas Rangers, cowboys, and bad men. Have him give us something on the Northwestern Mounted Police, and he will beat anything ever written.

Wishing the ALL-STORY CAVALIER all the success possible,

FRANK HUGHES.

Mannering, West Virginia.

JACKSON STORY A "PEACHERINO"

TO THE EDITOR:

Have been buying a copy of the ALL-STORY CAVALIER every week, and must say that you publish in it some mighty fine stories. Cyrus Townsend Brady, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and Albert Payson Terhune are your best writers, though you have many others of fine caliber.

The story entitled "The Biggest Diamond," by Fred Jackson, is certainly a "peacherino," if there ever was one. Also the serial "The Quitter," by Jacob Fisher, is one of the best stories of its kind I have ever read. Hope to see more of his work in the near future. Just *make* him write something.

HARLEY R. AULT.

136 West South Street,
Hillsboro, Ohio.

A GOOD WORD FOR THE SHORTS

TO THE EDITOR:

Have read *The Cavalier* since "Darkness and Dawn" appeared.

"To the Victor," and "The Quitter," are the two best stories since the wedding of our brave *Cavalier* and *Miss All-Story*. Give us more stories like them.

The short stories are usually good.

But I must close. To-day is Friday, and I am hurrying down-town to buy the new issue.

W. M. HENDRIX.

615 South Arno Street,
Albuquerque, New Mexico.

ANOTHER NAPOLEON ADMIRER

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been reading your magazine for nearly a year and like it very much.

I thought "At the Earth's Core" was fine, and I hope to see a sequel to it soon. I think Mr. Burroughs is one of your best writers.

Give us another Civil War story like "Dad." I have not read the last part of that story as yet, but I am sure it is as good as the other three parts.

"The Eagle of the Empire" is one of the best stories I have ever read. I should like to see another Napoleonic story soon.

O. B. BERGA.

R. R. No. 2,
Chickasha, Oklahoma.

PLEASANT WORDS FROM PLEASANT-VILLE

TO THE EDITOR:

I want to congratulate you on your magazine. I have taken it for two years and consider it the best one going.

I enjoyed the story by Jackson Gregory called "The Outlaw." But it always seemed to me as if it needed a sequel. His characters are so good that I could go on reading about them indefinitely.

I like most of your stories and can say that, taken as a whole, I thoroughly approve of the ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY. May its shadow never grow less.

HATTIE L. BECKLEY.

Pleasantville, New Jersey.

"HIT THE SPOT"

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed please find two dollars, for which send me your interesting magazine for six months. Your stories certainly "hit the spot." With one or two exceptions I have never read better modern magazine stories.

Some one made the suggestion to have less crime committed in fiction. To that sentiment I heartily subscribe. "A Prize for Princes" was the most cold-blooded story it has been my ill-fortune to read. In that yarn there was not one main character that I could admire. That is the kind of story that leaves a bad taste in the mouth.

However, the great majority of your contributions are fine, and at the top stand are "The Lone Star Rangers" and "To the Victor." Some have asked for sequels to these, but I consider them well finished. It is best to "let well enough alone."

I hope we shall soon see sequels to some of Burroughs's stories. What became of "The Eternal Lover," "The Mad King," *et cetera?*

Just one thing more: The Heart to Heart Talks are too short. They are the first and the last things I read in the magazine. Publish another page or two of letters. We all like to discuss our favorites with others.

Victor, New York. HAROLD BURKE.

Some Surprise Finish

By Rutherford Davies

MAY 31, 1889, was the date on which big Jim Dunphy died in the swirling waters of the Johnstown flood.

The mad torrent that swept down the Conemaugh Valley from the burst dam at South Fork carried his body, with hundreds of others, past the very house where, but a few short hours before, he had tenderly kissed his young bride of six months, kissed her with more tenderness than was his wont, for she had whispered a great secret to him, and what she told him had made him very happy and very, very tender.

Four hours later he went bravely to his death in the deluge that placed that fateful date on over two thousand tombstones in the cemetery on the hill above Johnstown.

From the rugged hillside, where safety lay, a half-crazed woman watched the corpse-laden river carry her husband's body to oblivion.

When the baby came into the world the event had passed into history and was being rapidly forgotten, so swift is the march of time. But the memory of that day of terror had been imprinted upon little Jim by the hand of nature.

His mother had "marked" him with an inerradicable heritage. At sight of a swiftly flowing stream he would tremble with terror, and his hands would grow icy cold.

The old swimming-pool held no allurement for young Jim. He was never known even to wade in a shallow stream, and not the wealth of all the steel magnates of Cambria County would have induced him to dive into a pond.

One day his "gang" induced him to visit Slippery Elm Creek to watch them at play. It was young Reddy Gallagher who conceived the fiendish plan of breaking Jimmy of what, to them, was a senseless fear.

So, while some engaged his attention in front, four or five others stole up behind the unsuspecting boy and, seizing him, bodily hurled him into the water.

They brought him ashore unconscious, and it took Jimmy a month to get over the shock.

From that time on the boys realized that Jimmy was not like other lads so far as water was concerned; and especially did young Reddy Gallagher remember it, for Jimmy blacked both Reddy's eyes in exacting an apology.

At twenty Jimmy had never learned to swim, though in a measure he had overcome his antipathy for water in quantities greater than could be contained in a bathtub. Strangely enough,

he went into the plumbing business. But when a broken water-pipe emptied its contents over him one day he abruptly quit his job, and two days later found himself installed as property man in a local theater. A month later he had joined a vaudeville act, and considered himself a full-fledged actor.

It was only a sketch team in vaudeville, but Jimmy found a wonderful joy in knowing that, in the billing of Percival Warren & Co., eminent farceurs of refined comedy, he was the "Co." This was due to the fact that, in addition to handling the properties of the act, he played a very small but very important rôle.

The sketch was called "The Iceman and the Maid," and Jimmy was the Iceman's Assistant.

Jimmy didn't enter upon the scene of the play until the climax, when, upon the cue "Where the River Shannon Flows," Jimmy would appear, bearing in his hand a real iceman's ax, and make his ringing speech.

The importance of Jimmy's entrance had been so thoroughly impressed upon him that he always took his place just outside the set fully five minutes before his cue.

"Believe me," he said one day, "Nothin' short of an earthquake could make me miss that cue!"

Then one day the members of "The Iceman and the Maid" troupe found themselves in a middle West town, ready to open for an entire season on the famous Lyric Circuit.

It was with a feeling of suppressed excitement and curiosity that they halted in front of the first bill-board they encountered and scanned the names of the acts that, for the next thirty weeks, would comprise the road show, for under the system in operation on the Lyric Circuit the entire bill moved from town to town intact, instead of shifting the individual acts to various cities.

"Well, what do you know about that?" demanded Mr. Percival Warren indignantly, pointing to the billing. "The Great Allaire has the big type, and Brown told me I was to top the show."

"Of all the gall!" echoed Mrs. Warren. "And only last season they were doing four a day on a magic-lantern circuit down South! I'll bet he's kicking back a piece of change to some guy in the Putnam Building."

Then they read on.

HOOLEY AND DOOLEY

World's Premier Contortionists and Bar Specialists.

"Them guys was on wid us down in Montgomery," announced Jimmy with the air of one who had discovered something to be really proud of. Then, as neither Mr. Warren nor his wife evidenced any wild joy, Jimmy sought to recall Hooley and Dooley more vividly to their minds.

"Don't you remember the big guy with the comedy make-up that made that funny fall off'n the revolvin' ladder?"

But Mr. Warren's memory was not stirred by this additional information, and Mrs. Warren's sudden exclamation when she read the next feature on the bill effectually dismissed Hooley and Dooley from further consideration.

"Oh, gee!" she piped in a surprised way. "Saidee Glendale is to be on the bill with us. Don't you remember how she cleaned up at the Willard and the Wilson last winter? Wynn gave her a swell write-up."

"Ah!" contemptuously broke in Mr. Warren. "She put a hundred-dollar ad in the paper to land the big time. Why wouldn't he give her act a boost!"

"And pipe the feature act!" chortled Jimmy. "'The Seven Mermaids. A Septet of Youthful Water Nymphs in Fancy Diving and Aquatic Feats.' A tank act! Can you beat that?"

"I'll bet they're some chickens, too," ventured Mr. Warren slyly out the corner of his mouth for the sole in-

formation of young Mr. Dunphy; but Mrs. Warren, whose ears were always acute when she was not supposed to hear, caught the remark in all its significance. Jimmy was fond of the gentle sex, and she deemed it wise to utter a warning in advance.

She pointed her beringed fat finger at Jimmy.

"Now don't you get gay with these girls and spend all your salary on 'em, because if you haven't got a cent when the season closes the Warrens ain't goin' to stake you through the summer."

This warning was not given without reason, for Jimmy had engaged in a flirtation in the early part of the season with a young lady who sang illustrated songs in a theater down South. At the end of the week Jimmy was madly in love with her and squandered his salary with a prodigal hand, only to learn too late that the singer was married to an actor who threatened to reduce Jimmy's head to small fragments.

But Jimmy only laughed shamelessly, and announced in a blasé tone that he would give them the "once over" and see if they appealed to him.

When they reached the theater they found the stage littered with a chaotic mass of scenery, rigging, crates, drops, and vaudeville actors. Miss Saidee Glendale, Broadway's Favorite Singing Comedienne, was superintending the hanging of a big plush drop on which an ornate monogram in gold showed to striking advantage.

"Let down your long line," she called to an unseen flyman in the gallery above the stage, and promptly one side of the drop sagged about five feet.

"You big boob up there!" carolled the lady, "now take it up," and the drop responded accordingly.

At one side of the stage a dozen gaudily painted crates with wire-mesh fronts held the canine wonders of Signor Farel.

In private life Signor Farel was just plain Farrell. He used to book acts out of Cleveland until he attached the dog act for unpaid commissions, and then decided to go into the business himself.

The yelping of the dogs added to the general noise, but a girl, leaning over the footlights at a dangerous angle, sang "I'm on My Way to Mandalay" with as much unconcern as if she were alone in a studio. Concentration on one's own business is a striking necessity in vaudeville, and the lady was oblivious of everything about her except the leader of the orchestra.

Hooley and Dooley worked at their rigging, stringing guy-wires and tightening bolts and bars.

At the back of the stage five men wrestled with a huge contrivance that looked like a big aquarium. It was the plate-glass tank of the "Seven Mermaids" act.

A calm, stolid man, the owner of the act, gave directions to the perspiring stage-crew, and at his word of command they lifted the big plate-glass front of the tank into position and bolted it fast. Then they placed the spring-boards and a long white ladder with a tiny platform at its upper end from which one of the girls was to dive.

Jimmy watched the assembling of the tank incuriously, yet found time to ask how much water it held.

"Fifteen hundred gallons, son; fifteen hundred gallons. It's got to be deep so's the girls can dive."

Just how much fifteen hundred gallons of water was Jimmy had no definite idea, but he had a distinct feeling of uneasiness at the thought of so much water in his immediate neighborhood. He resolved to keep as far as possible from the tank, and turned away.

Then, for the first time, he saw the girl.

She was as dainty and chic as ever applied for a place in the chorus of a Follies Revue. Her trim figure was set off by a tailor-made serge suit that fitted her like a glove. Big, innocent

blue eyes looked out from the shadow of a straw sailor hat, and she smiled alluringly.

She was making her way toward Umholtz, the owner of the act, with the evident intention of speaking about something connected with dressing-rooms. She failed to see the tightly drawn guy wire that supported the rigging belonging to the acrobats. Her trim foot struck it and she pitched forward with a little scream.

At that instant Jimmy came out of the trance, and his strong young arm shot out and caught her as she fell.

She turned her big eyes on Jimmy and laughingly thanked him. Jimmy blushed fiery red, murmured something inarticulate, and touched his cap mechanically. Mr. Percival Warren, standing in the door of his stage dressing-room, took in the incident with his keen eye and gave Jimmy a meaning glance.

"Oh you Claude Eclaire!" he bantered. "Right there with the handy mitt to save the squab. I see *your* finish! You'll be daffy over that doll baby before we're through this tour."

The first show that afternoon went through with a wild hurrah. "The Iceman and the Maid" proved a laughing knockout. Jimmy's entrance at the climax, with the big ax in his hand, was the signal for a gale of applause and laughter, and four curtains attested the success of the sketch.

"Now let's see what the rest of them get," said Mr. Warren jealously. "See if they go over any better than we did."

Disregarding the signs that read: "Keep out of this entrance," and, "Artists will keep off the stage until called," they crowded into every point of vantage to watch the antics of Miss Saidee Glendale (*née* Horowitz) as she ragged the latest syncopated melodies from the Thirty-Ninth Street noise factories.

Saidee made four changes of costume, including her wop number. She sang of Antonio and his bambino and kissed her hands to the audience, flashing her diamonds in their eyes.

Mrs. Warren watched her superciliously, and cattishly declared that she "just stole them last two bows."

While Saidee cavorted in front of the big plush drop the stage was set for the act of "The Seven Mermaids." The tank itself, now filled with water, was too cumbersome to move from the place where it had been erected in the morning, for fifteen hundred gallons of water, plus one glass tank, run into a trifle of weight.

Jimmy watched the act with conflicting emotions. Fear of the water and admiration of the girls' prowess in the dreaded element struggled for mastery, and in a fascinated way he kept his eyes on Lily Dale, the girl whom he had saved that morning from a fall.

Lily was the star performer. All the startling and daring dives and tricks fell to her lot, and she proved her right to the distinction by her skill and fearlessness.

Like sleek black seals they cavorted in the water. Their shapely forms incased in tightly fitting black suits that showed every curve of their bodies, seemed to be carved from black marble, and not only Jimmy, but the stage hands as well, seemed to have taken root where they stood in open-mouthed admiration.

"That one on the spring-board now," whispered a familiar voice behind Jimmy, "has class, my son. See how she does that jack-knife dive. If the old woman caught me piping off this act, she'd make me cancel the tour."

"Betcher life," agreed Jimmy enthusiastically. "That baby has some class. That's the one I got the happy eye from this morning."

The music suddenly stopped, and Umholtz, looking like a well-fed drayhorse that had been forced into evening clothes, stepped upon the stage and announced in halting English,

with a strong touch of German to it, that Miss Lily Dale, "der champeen diver fon der vorld," would "dive from der top of a tventy-fife-foot ladder; a feat reqviring skill, daring, und courache."

Lily Dale, still dripping from her previous plunge into the tank, bowed and smiled, then turned and nimbly climbed the rungs of the ladder that extended even beyond the foliage borders that draped the set.

"Pull up your borders," commanded the stage manager, and up they went, leaving the proscenium arch alone to cut off further view. And still Lily Dale climbed, till finally she stood upon the foot-square platform at the top. Only her trim feet could be seen, the rest of her was hidden by the borders above.

"Are you r-r-ready?" called Umholtz.

"Yes," came the answer in a girlish voice.

"Den go!"

The trap drummer beat a crescendo roll upon his drum, and a black-clad form shot through the air. As she struck the water the cymbals clashed and the base drum boomed.

The audience, gasped, and the girl climbed out to receive the thunderous applause.

"I wouldn't do that for a million dollars!" gasped Jimmy. "That kid has some nerve."

"I'd do anything for a million," succinctly observed Mr. Warren.

"Except talk back to your wife," retorted Jimmy with a malicious gleam in his eye, and at that instant Mrs. Warren called sharply from the stage-door, demanding to know if her husband expected her to wait around all night.

Mr. Warren muttered something under his breath, and then called sweetly to his wife:

"Coming, dear. I'm just putting on my coat."

Lily Dale's beauty and daring completely enslaved Jimmy Dunphy's heart. Week after week he watched her make the thrilling dive, and week by week his love grew in great bounds.

That Miss Dale was not averse to Jimmy's attentions was manifest. She accepted his little gifts and knightly service with a simple, sweet manner, and Jimmy began to dream wonderful, rosy dreams.

Then one day, sitting in the back of a long day-coach that held only the members of the road show, most of whom were gathered forward watching a stiff game of poker, Jimmy asked her the great question. He clinched his plea by saying that "when a guy asks a girl to marry him, that's some thinkin'."

And having agreed that it was, she pressed his hand and gave him an answer that made him act foolishly for a week.

But it was to be kept secret. Umholtz wouldn't stand for any marrying in the troupe, because husbands always interfere; and then, kerfluey! goes the act.

So Jimmy crossed his heart and promised never to breathe a word of the plighted troth, not to show by his actions that he had a new and added interest in the girl.

One day he had told her in stumbling, halting words, the reason of his fear. It was a delicate thing for the boy to handle, but he looked upon her as his promised bride, one to whom must be confided everything that concerned him.

He did not know whether or not she would understand. He himself understood only in a vague way what his heritage was, and as delicately as he could, he explained the great mystery of prenatal influence to her, though "prenatal" was an unknown word to him, and he would not have known what it meant if he had heard it.

But the girl's mind was opening gradually to the mysteries of sex, and Saidee Glendale knew the rest. Saidee affected big, learned books and stories of sex problems.

So when Lily shyly asked her what it meant to be "marked" before birth, Saidee explained with the air of one who has delved into the secrets of biology.

Then Lily understood, and never spoke of Jimmy's fear again.

One night in April came a great change in the whole cosmic plan of the young lovers, and their affairs were hurled to a sudden fruition.

The girl had confided to him that she had thought out a new finish for the tank act.

Her dive from the ladder had been done by another girl who had preceded them the previous year, and the Western people refused to be thrilled. So a surprise finish was needed to arouse the audience. Something unexpected, something that was so startlingly daring that they would gasp at the very audacity of it.

And she, Lily Dale, had worked it out. What it was she wouldn't tell even Jimmy, "for," she laughed, "I want you to be as much surprised as any one."

One evening, a week or so later, Jimmy signaled for the rise of the curtain on "The Iceman and the Maid." He attended to the stage effects punctually, yet mechanically.

His mind was elsewhere. Back of the parlor set that represented the Vandergoold mansion, where the action of the sketch took place, was the big tank. The water was as clear as crystal. Jimmy could even see the bolts on the farther side of the tank through the shimmering depths of the water.

He had always kept a safe distance from the tank, and not even the coaxing of Lily could induce him to come closer than his position required for his entrance upon the scene of the sketch.

As he picked up the heavy ax, preparatory for his cue, which would soon be spoken by Percival Warren, he saw a girlish figure emerge from one of the dressing-rooms that opened on the stage. It was Lily, and she smiled sweetly on her lover as she threw off her bathrobe, revealing a svelt form in black tights.

Though he had seen her thus twice a day ever since the tour began, he felt a sense of proprietorship, and resented any one else gazing at the girl's form. A couple of stage hands stood by, openly admiring Lily Dale.

"No use flashing your shape before these guys until you have to," he growled ungraciously. But the girl laughed and started for the tank.

"I'm going to give you a special view of that trick," she whispered. "Nobody but you. Watch!"

The stage hands sauntered to the front entrance to attend to their work. Jimmy and the girl were left alone at the back of the stage.

She went up the ladder like a flash. For a second she poised on the tiny footrest, twenty-five feet in the air. Then she dived.

A triple somersault! That was to be the surprise. Once, twice, three times her lithe body turned over and over.

Then Jimmy's heart gave a great leap. She had miscalculated in the dim, uncertain light, and, with a thud, her head struck the edge of the tank.

He saw a dead white face turned toward him for an instant. Then Lily Dale's body sank into the depths of the tank.

And at that instant came his cue to enter upon the scene of the sketch. It seemed as if the words were shouted at him. They came with burning precision and directness, but they fell on unheeding ears.

In that instant the boy seemed to go mad.

The cue line was repeated, and, through months of training, it seemed like second nature for him to obey. But within his breast raged a fiercer, wilder call.

He dashed toward the tank.

And then the Fear laid upon him by his mother on that fateful day in 1889 asserted itself. Water, deep, cruel

water was before him, and the girl he loved was lying beneath its surface! He could see her white face through the glass; everything about him was raging in a mad whirl.

For the third time came the cue: "Where the River Shannon Flows." Warren's voice was filled with anger as he improvised lines until Jimmy should come upon the scene.

But he knew nothing of what was going on back there, with only a canvas barrier hiding the tragedy.

Suddenly Jimmy became conscious of the ax in his hand. He could not enter the water; but there was another way. To think was to act.

"To hell with the cue!" he screamed, and with all the strength of his lusty young arm he crashed the heavy ax against the plate-glass front of the tank.

With the roar of a Niagara, fifteen hundred gallons of water surged upon the stage.

The parlor set of the Vandergoold mansion went down like paper. Percival Warren was swept off his feet; likewise Mrs. Warren. Together they rode the crest of the waves, over the footlights, and into the orchestra pit. Mrs. Warren landed in the bass drum, feet first, and it acted as a life-preserver.

The audience screamed and clambered on their seats; the musicians gasped and abandoned everything in their mad struggle to escape.

Back on the stage, Jimmy Dunphy dived into the débris and snatched the girl in his arms.

"Oh, kid," he cried in anguish, "I had to do it to save you!"

They brought Lily Dale around after half an hour, and Jimmy sobbed his heart out over her. She patted him on the head and whispered: "Never mind, Jimmy; we'll go home to-morrow and we'll get married in the summer."

Even Umholtz gave them his blessing.

"Vot iss a tank und vot iss a theater ven a life iss at stake? But dot sure vas a surprise finish! Only I can't keep it in der act."

THE TRAMP

By Amanda Benjamin Hall

SHE gave him food and watched him while he ate,
And he in turn could glimpse her kitchen neat,
Replete with home sense, comforting and sweet,
Wherein she ruled in gentle, modest state.

The woman, with a secret wanderlust,
Was envying the tramp who knew no load,
Who answered to the challenge of the road,
And thought him splendid in his rags and dust!

So turned he from her door with wish to stay,
A sudden pang awakened in his breast,
The while her eyes—two enemies of rest—
Yearned after him upon the open way!

The Air Trail

by Alex Shell Briscoe

THE rickety little express wagon which rattled up the gravel drive leading from the main road disturbed a most interesting scene when it stopped beside the vine-screened porch of the big, comfortable-appearing house.

Betty Eberhard had been speaking, kindly but firmly, and Dewey Graves was dolefully regarding the tumbled ruins of what had been a most attractive air-castle. To be more explicit, Betty had rejected Dewey for about the twenty-fifth time.

It must be understood, however, that this estimate does not include several dozen casual proposals made by Dewey while at tennis or golf or out driving; but merely covers the regular, formal, well-considered declarations made by that persistent and much-enamored young man.

On the last occasion Betty was making a most thorough job of destroying Dewey's air-castle, breaching its walls with pitiless logic, tumbling its towers and battlements with chilly facts.

"No, Dewey," she said in conclusion. "I have no desire to be an interesting young widow—I never did look well in black—and I am rather certain of a period of mourning-veils in the near future if I listened to you. In college it was football, wasn't it? Then you took up polo. You grew a bit too heavy for your ponies, and since have devoted your attention to motoring.

"I've lost count of the times you have been in accidents, but I know of three cars you've smashed up in the last two years; and you nearly were killed once, while as for being arrested for speeding, why, I never seem to pick up a paper without reading an item about your being fined again."

"I'll give up the racing-car and hire a new chauffeur," Dewey pleaded. "I'll get a safe man and put him under bond not to go more than fifteen miles an hour. Why—"

"Certainly," she agreed, "and I believe you would keep your promise; but it soon would be something else just as dangerous. Nothing safe in the matter of amusement seems to interest you. You never go in for anything which is not risky; and I'm certainly not going to marry you and spend the rest of my life dreading to open a telegram or answer a telephone for fear of hearing of an accident."

Dewey started to reply, but checked himself, staring moodily at the tips of his tennis-shoes as he searched in vain for an additional argument; then the expressman stopped at the steps and approached the porch.

"Box for Mr. Eberhard," he said.

"I'll sign for it," Betty replied, stretching forth her hand for a book carried by the man; but he shook his head.

"Orders are to deliver to him in person," he said.

"What is it?" came from inside the house, and Frank Eberhard, Betty's brother, a gray-templed man in his early forties, stepped out on the porch.

The expressman thrust the book and a sealed envelope into his hand.

"Sign on that line," he said.

"Charges paid in advance. Where do you want the crate put?"

Eberhard was staring at the letter, surprise and curiosity on his face.

"Just a moment," he said as he scribbled his name in the book; "I may want to ask you about this."

Twice he turned the missive over before he opened it and glanced at the crate on the wagon.

The letter bore his name carefully spelled out in letters clipped from a book or newspaper and pasted on the envelope. The work had been done with extreme neatness, but despite the envelope's harmless appearance it was with a strange feeling of trepidation that Eberhard finally ripped it open.

Inside was a single sheet of heavy paper on which was a brief message framed of words and letters clipped and pasted as was the address. Eberhard read it almost at a glance, a look of horror dawning in his eyes, and his jaws closed with a snap.

For a moment he stood with the sheet of paper crushed in his hand, then stepped from the porch and hurried to the wagon, peering through the slats of the crate.

From inside came the rustle and crooning of a dozen pigeons—pink-footed, slate-colored birds, soft-eyed, and glossy of plumage. Eberhard stared at them stupidly, striving to realize the sinister import of their presence; then again he scanned the letter. It read:

MR. EBERHARD:

We have your daughter. The price for her return is twelve thousand dollars. Tie a one-thousand-dollar bill to the leg of each bird and turn them loose. Any fancier of homing-pigeons can show you how it is done. Trying to follow the birds will prove futile. You have until Friday to comply.

There was no signature. None was necessary.

The expressman still was waiting, and he shuffled his feet, glancing nervously toward the wagon as Eberhard turned a white, grim face toward him.

"Who gave you this letter?" Eberhard demanded harshly; and the man fumbled with his book as he explained that the crate and the missive had been turned over to him by two men who had hailed him on the street near the outskirts of the town of Scranton, a few miles away.

"Their horse had picked up a stone, and they paid me three dollars to bring the crates over here," he said.

Betty and Dewey, ignorant of the contents of the letter, listened with frank curiosity as Eberhard plied the man with questions; but there was little additional information to be obtained from him. He could give only a hazy description of the men who had given him the crate to deliver, and in the end he was dismissed after Eberhard had taken his name and address.

Eberhard watched the expressman until he turned out of the drive and started down the white road which wound down toward the distant town, then slowly he climbed the porch-steps. Betty uttered an exclamation on seeing her brother's white, drawn features; but he waved aside her questions, asking that she send for a man from the stables to care for the pigeons.

"See that they are fed and given water," he said, "and tell the men not to turn them loose. They are carriers, and will fly away."

Betty departed, and Eberhard turned to Graves. "Come inside, Dewey," he said; "I want to talk to you," and he led the way to his den, a cozily furnished room on the second floor of the house.

Eberhard was a tall man, wide of shoulder, gaunt of frame, with a fighting jaw and a mouth too wide to be handsome. Ordinarily self-contained, he now appeared shaken by strong emotion. Twice he paced the length of the room, working fingers and features contorted by anguish-drawn muscles evidencing his stress of mind; but his voice held a deadly

calmness when at last he thrust the letter into Graves's hand and said:

"Dewey, I'm afraid little Marjorie has been kidnaped!"

Graves uttered a startled exclamation, but the other checked him.

"Get some of the men from the stables and make a quiet search for her. She went out with her nurse early this afternoon. Don't say anything to my wife, and don't let any of the women hear—"

Eberhard stopped, for from a lower floor had come the wail of a woman, and he made a gesture of helplessness. "Too late," he said and stepped to the door.

Down the hall staggered Jeanette, the nurse who had cared for little Marjorie all her life. There was a red bruise on the woman's forehead, her clothing was disarranged and muddy. Betty and a maid plied her with questions as they hurried her toward Eberhard's den.

And after them came Alice, Eberhard's wife, a round, chubby-featured little woman in a much-beribboned house-gown. Her fear-widened eyes asked a mute question as she scanned the group, her gaze lingering a moment on the bruised face of the now hysterically sobbing nurse, then turning to her husband. In his haggard features she read confirmation of her worst fears, and with the sigh of a tired child she collapsed in his arms.

II.

Dewey Graves was a thick-set man of twenty-eight, with shoulders far too wide for his height and a yearly increasing tendency toward stoutness which worried him greatly. His face was round and boyish, his mouth had a whimsical twist, but there was a bulldog quality about his chin, and intelligence in his small, twinkling eyes.

Born wealthy, he never had found it necessary to work, but he had found many and varied activities.

In college he had made a name in athletics, and later had played on a championship polo team. He had hunted in every clime from the tropics to the arctic, had solved the mystery of rendering tractable the most complicated of motor-boat engines, and knew his automobile as a jeweler does a watch.

Above all things he loved his big racing-car, which generally assumed the appearance of a gay comet with a long tail of dust when its owner was at the wheel. The regularity with which he was forced to pay fines for speeding had become a joke among his friends, but had no appreciable effect on his mania for speed.

Dewey grinned affably at his ancient enemy, Chief Bent Morrissey, of the Scranton police force, when that official arrived with two of his men at the Eberhard home, for he held no grudge against the men who arrested him so frequently, and Morrissey greeted him cordially, there being no rancor on his part.

In the conference in Eberhard's den Dewey played the part of a listener while servants were questioned in the hope of discovering a clue to the kidnapers.

Detectives had been summoned from the city and already a search was on for miles around; but from the first the task of tracing the abductors seemed almost hopeless, the novel manner in which the money was to be delivered rendering futile the usual methods of the police in such cases.

Even the nurse who had been with the child when she was kidnaped was unable to give much information of value. She was an old and trusted employee of the family, and was as much attached to the little four-year-old pet of the household as her parents; so there was no ground for suspicion she was in league with the kidnapers.

Little Marjorie had been stolen hardly a quarter of a mile from the Eberhard home. The nurse told of passing a man in the road while walking with the child, and of being struck

down an instant later. She had recovered consciousness in a clump of bushes near the road an hour later, and had made her way back to the house as soon as she was able to walk.

She had seen an automobile standing a hundred yards away from where she was attacked, and it was evident that the car had been used to carry away the child, but there the trail was lost. Wheel-tracks showed the car had turned toward Scranton at a point a short distance from the scene of the kidnaping. No further trace of it could be found.

Search for the men who had turned the letter and the crate of pigeons over to the expressman also proved vain. The man's story was substantiated by persons who had seen the crate transferred from one wagon to the other, but none of these could give a good description of either the men or the vehicle.

Chief Morrissey was a capable man, trained in his work, and so were the detectives who had come from the city to aid in the search, but there was a decided lack of confidence among them when they talked the situation over.

"Looks like we're up against it, Mr. Eberhard," was Morrissey's verdict. "This business of having the money sent by carrier-pigeons is hard to beat. That's what stumps me, for I'd know what to do if they pulled the usual stuff.

"If it was a matter of hiding the coin under a rock in a graveyard, or of handing it to men who give a grip and a password, as it usually is, we could plant a dummy package and nab the man who came after it, or work some other scheme; but I can't figure out how we're going to trace those pigeons."

"We might turn one of the birds loose and watch the direction it goes," one of the detectives suggested, and Morrissey nodded. "Sure," he said; "but these carriers might be from four miles away or a hundred miles. There's no telling. Still, it's worth trying."

The others agreed, and next day one of the pigeons was freed, while men scattered about the place to observe the direction of its flight. A magnificent bird was selected, and a dozen pairs of eyes watched it mount in a fluttering circle, then swing away to the southwest straight as a bullet. In a brief interval it had disappeared, and Graves and Morrissey were eagerly studying a road map.

With a pencil the former drew a line across the map, indicating the route taken by the bird, and pointed to a half dozen small towns. Morrissey nodded. "That simplifies matters somewhat if that bird goes straight home," and he hastened to a telephone.

In half an hour the search was on along a line fifty miles long. Every known pigeon-loft was searched; every fancier questioned; but it all came to naught. With every report over the telephone Eberhard's face grew more strained, the chief's more gloomy, and Dewey's rounded features developed unwonted angles and lines.

The following morning a second pigeon was released and went in virtually the same direction as the first, but efforts to trace it were futile; and that afternoon an ultimatum was received from the kidnapers.

It came in the form of a letter similar to the first, and set forth that a second box containing pigeons would be found in a ravine half a mile from the Eberhard home. Full directions for finding the second crate were contained in the letter, which concluded:

> Our price now is twenty-four thousand dollars. You will send the money by Friday, else we will act. We have no desire to harm the child in order to bring you to time, but we are ready to go to that length even.

The threat sent a chill as keen as a knife-thrust to Eberhard's heart, and he arose, swaying uncertainly. Two days of anguish had broken him. Always in his mind was the thought that his child was in the hands of brutes;

ever in his ears rang the sobs of his wife.

"There is no chance, gentlemen," he said; "unless you find something definite by to-morrow I shall send the money they demand. I have hoped you would be able to discover a tangible clue, but I can wait no longer. I am not wealthy, but this sum will not break me; and even if it did, it would be nothing compared to Marjorie's safety."

"They wouldn't dare harm the girl," Morrissey began, but Eberhard turned away. "They might," he said; "and I'd rather lose every cent I've got than have anything happen to her."

Morrissey departed with the detectives to get the second box of pigeons, and to make an effort—which proved vain, however—to trace them, and Dewey had started to follow Eberhard to his den when the sound of some one crying checked him as he passed through the hall, and he stepped into the drawing-room. Betty Eberhard lay on a sofa, face buried in a pillow, her slender shoulders shuddering with sobs.

In the years he had wooed Betty, Dewey always had kept a discreet distance, but the sight of her distress moved him to boldness. A hand holding a very moist and crumpled handkerchief lay conveniently in reach, and he seized the opportunity—and the hand.

Betty lifted sorrow-flooded eyes, but made no protest; only again hid her face; and Dewey, taking courage, hitched his chair closer. Presently the sobs ceased and she turned her face, looking at him out of the corners of her eyes.

"It's just awful!" she began; then her lips trembled, and Dewey clumsily patted her hand, distress showing on his face.

"Alice cries all day and all night, and calls for Marjorie, while brother goes around looking like death. Oh, Dewey, if they don't find her soon I—I—"

Grief again overwhelmed her, and he valiantly took up the task of comforting her.

"It's just terrible!" came in muffled tones from the pillow. "We can't realize how fearful it is for Alice and Frank. Just think—if we ever should have a little girl—and some one should take her away—why, I—I—"

Dewey's mind, being that of a man, and slow moving in such matters, did not grasp the significance of her words until too late. He made a futile grab for her as she snatched away her hand and darted from the couch, then he went in pursuit.

Betty faced him in the center of the room, her tear-stained cheeks now a brilliant red, and halted his impetuous rush.

"You said—" he exulted, but she shook her head.

"I said nothing that means anything—now," she retorted; then: "Oh, Dewey, we've got to find little Marjorie. You *must!* I just know you can! You're the smartest man I know, and you're not afraid—no one could be afraid and do the things you do—and you've simply got to find Marjorie!"

She moved a step closer to him, her eyes searching his face. "Isn't there anything you can do?" she asked. "Is there no way of tracing those pigeons?"

Betty stopped, for a most marvelous change had come over the other's face. He was staring at her, his eyes round and blinking, like a man groping in the dark who suddenly is confronted by a bright light; then he caught her in his arms and swung her around the room in a dizzy dance of joy.

"I've got it!" he shouted gleefully. "that's the ticket! Great stuff! We'll land the kidnapers and have Marjorie back for lunch to-morrow."

Betty twisted herself from his grasp and looked at him with disapproval in her eyes; but he swiftly explained, and her face grew bright as she came to understand his plan.

A minute later the two had burst into Eberhard's den and Dewey was excitedly explaining the scheme inspired by Betty's remark, while that young woman listened with a glow of pride. Eberhard's quiet eyes were flaming when Dewey concluded, and he reached for a telephone.

"I believe it will work," he said. "Anyhow, there's no harm done if it fails."

III.

ALL night long at the Eberhard home and in a dozen towns telephone bells jangled, and messages went back and forth as the police net was spread for the kidnapers; and when dawn came all was ready. At a hundred crossroads and country stores stood automobiles filled with armed men, while others lingered near telephones, waiting for the word to start the hunt.

In front of the Eberhard home stood a big racing car, and at the gate in Dewey Graves's machine sat Chief Morrissey and four detectives. On the lawn were the crates of pigeons.

About them a group of men watched an expert handler of carrier-pigeons as he fastened a one-thousand-dollar bill to each bird. Each bill was carefully rolled into the smallest compass possible, then carefully bound to the leg of a bird under the wing.

A man had brought the money from town that morning, for Eberhard had decided to comply with the demands of the kidnapers. "If anything should go wrong, then Marjorie would be all right, anyhow," was his decision, and he had insisted on having his way; so that when the expert pigeon handler finished his task the birds carried a fortune.

All was ready for the release of the pigeons when a shout arose, and the eyes of all turned toward the west, where through the golden morning haze was seen a moving speck. Swiftly it approached until it was seen to be an aeroplane, which swung over the Eberhard home in a wide circle so close that the droning song of its engine could be heard.

Dewey Graves was at the controls, and beside him sat a mechanician who held a pair of field glasses. Aviation was one of the many dangerous sports Dewey delighted in, and he was an expert driver.

Over the house soared the biplane, and a handkerchief dropped, twisting and writhing in the wind. It was the signal agreed upon, and an instant later the crates were opened. With a whir and a flutter of wings the treasure-laden birds mounted in the air, feathers gleaming in the morning sun, and swept away to the southwest.

After the flock raced the aeroplane, Dewey adjusting his throttle to keep even with the birds, while the mechanician kept his eyes glued to the field glasses, and down the road toward the town roared the automobiles, drivers coaxing every ounce of power out of their engines in an effort to keep up.

Through the town the machines hurtled and out on the pike beyond.

The motor-cars were steadily falling behind, but at every crossroad and country store, at every village and hamlet, other machines took up the chase, while telephones flashed warnings ahead of the coming of the aeroplane, so that other machines would be ready.

Straight as an arrow was the flight of the pigeons, and ever just above them and a little behind was the winged thing of steel and wire and canvas, while below the automobiles swayed and bumped and thundered along roads which paralleled the route of the chase.

For thirty minutes Graves pursued the pigeons to the southwest.

He had dropped to a slightly lower level, for the flock had scattered somewhat, and it was harder to keep them in sight. They now were directly over a strip of road which lay like a white ribbon across the green countryside, and along this road long plumes or dust marked the rush of two motor-cars.

The mechanician was pumping lubricating oil with one hand, while he held the field glasses with the other, when he suddenly started and leaned farther over the side of the car. A wave of his hand and a shout hardly audible in the rush of the wind and the propeller's roar, and Dewey pointed the machine sharply toward the ground, swinging in a circle about a group of buildings which stood a hundred yards from the road. As he descended he saw specks hovering about a barn, and knew they were pigeons alighting.

Graves's exultant shout rang out clear as he shut off the motor for a volplane to the ground, and he was still yelling when the biplane came to a swaying, bumping pause in a field near the barn.

A swarthy, bearded man ran from the house as Dewey and his mechanician loosened the straps which fastened them to their seats. The sun gleamed on a weapon, and Graves fumbled for his revolver as he started forward.

A puff of white smoke appeared at the barn door, a bullet whined over Dewey's head, and he threw himself to the ground, shouting a warning to his companion.

"No use rushing them!" he yelled. "The fellows are coming from the other side."

The pur of motors as automobiles rushed up the driveway from the road was heard, and four men dashed out of the door of the barn. Dewey's automatic snarled, and the men sent a sputtering volley in reply; then from around the corners of the barn came armed men, and the fugitives, cornered, threw down their weapons.

In a room on the second floor of the farmhouse little Marjorie was found, and twenty minutes later she was in the arms of her father.

A dozen men were busy in the loft of the barn which was the goal of the pigeons, capturing the birds and stripping crisp, new one-thousand-dollar bills from their legs, while Chief Morrissey and the sheriff of the county were preparing to take four sullen prisoners to jail.

Graves had found a telephone, and had flashed word of the child's recovery to the Eberhard home. Betty had answered the phone, and when he had given a brief account of the finding of Marjorie and the capture of the kidnapers, Dewey wanted to talk of more personal matters.

Betty shut him off when he tried to exact a certain promise. "Not now, dear," she said; "but hurry back. Please don't come in that wicked old aeroplane, but hurry."

Dewey demurred. "I can't get there as quick any other way," he argued. "A car is too slow."

"Well," she agreed at last, "you can fly just this time. You're never to go up again—of course—I meant to all the time."

NEVER YET

By Howard C. Kegley

I ONCE saw an aged darky who did not turn pale with fright,
Even though his master sent him to a "haunted house" at night.
I have seen rank disbelievers who displayed no sign of fear,
Even though the doctor told them that the hour of death was near.
I have seen unshaken humans standing in the very path
Of flood and fire and cyclone, in defiance of their wrath.
But I've never seen a woman, close observer though I am,
Who could keep her hands from trembling when she got a telegram!

For the Flag

by

Wolcott LeCléar Beard

DRESSED in immaculate uniform, First Lieutenant John Reynolds of the regular army, who was to become lieutenant-colonel of the newly raised volunteer regiment, rose and prepared to go. He had come in only a few minutes before.

"Was there any one who called for me while I was out?" he asked.

"No one, Mr. Reynolds. At least, no one that I saw," the old captain replied.

He was not really a captain any more. He did not even use the title, for he was only a clerk, with a temporary position in a recruiting office such as the government will authorize when volunteers are called for.

"You'd have seen her all right if she had come," returned the younger man, with a proud though rather sheepish smile. "At least it seems to me that she's hardly the sort that any man would overlook, but perhaps I'm prejudiced. Such things do happen you know, colonel."

"They do," agreed the captain, with a grave smile of sympathy. "In this case, however, I have no doubt that the lady is as impossible to overlook as you think. But in calling me 'colonel' you do me too much honor, Mr. Reynolds. I have no claim to that title."

"Well, you ought to be a colonel, even if you aren't one," said young Reynolds, still smiling.

Ex-Captain Peter Brandford winced. The statement was true; he ought to have been a colonel by this time—had things been different. But young Reynolds knew nothing of this. His remark was one of idle kindliness, nothing more.

Just then a great limousine drew up before the door.

Young Reynolds searched wildly for his cap, for the moment mislaid. Peter Brandford glanced out of a window to find his eyes gazing straight into those of a young girl who leaned out of the car.. As for a moment their eyes held each other, he saw in her face a puzzled look of recognition.

At the time, however, he saw it subconsciously, for the sight of her had affected him like an actual, physical blow.

Then Reynolds came running across the pavement, and the old captain could see that she asked him a question. At the same time there came in the sound of the street traffic one of those familiar, unaccountable lulls. Thus it happened that every word of the young man's reply reached Peter Brandford's ears.

"I don't know anything about him, except that he's very evidently a gentleman," young Reynolds was saying. "When I took him on as my clerk I fancy he needed the job badly enough, poor old soul! D'you know, I'm beastly hungry! May I dine as I am? I'll change into 'cits' and join you and your people afterward. Where are we going?"

She mentioned a theater, and Reynolds called the name of a gilded hotel

to the chauffeur. Then he got into the limousine and slammed its door as the car moved smoothly away.

Taking his hat and his heavy stick with its battered, silver top, the old captain locked the office door behind him. At first force of habit took him toward the only place that he had a right to call home; then he altered his course.

The thought of that boarding-house dinner with its eternal, aimless chatter was utterly abhorrent to him. It was only action of some sort that could aid him in bringing his mind back to its accustomed discipline. What he needed was to walk.

Still, the sight of that face in the limousine had opened the gates of his mind, and, strive as he might to prevent them, a flood of memories came rushing through.

And every memory was woven around a girl—a girl of long ago, but with a face so like the one he had just seen that with all his might he endeavored to refuse belief in the existence of a resemblance so extraordinary. He now remembered that the girl had seemed to recognize him, and that in itself went to show what strange tricks one's imagination will sometimes play. That she ever could have known him was absolutely impossible—it was to the last degree improbable that she had even seen him before that evening.

Yet all his reasoning utterly failed to convince him; the impression had been too strong.

Impatient with his own obstinacy, he resolved to see this girl once more and decide just how great a part imagination played in the matter. She and her party would dine early if they were going to the play afterward, but by hurrying he might reach the hotel in time to see them as they left it for the theater.

So he did hurry, but was not in time; the limousine rolled away just before he reached it. Swinging along at two steps to the second, as the drill regulations require, Peter Brandford followed, glad rather than otherwise of the additional time given him in which to arrange his thoughts.

He wanted to be fair—fair to the memory of that long-ago girl. Fair even to himself. This last was by far his hardest task, though he did not know it.

The captain had met her—the girl—far from any army post. She was all that a man could desire, and he had loved her from the moment they met. It was she herself who had told him who her father was.

The occasion was her father's retirement from the army, and she told her lover with innocent pride and pleasure in the fact that he and the father whom she adored must have known each other.

They did, for her father was the seargeant-major of Peter Brandford's own squadron.

It needs a soldier fully to understand the invisible but impassable social barrier that always has, and in the nature of things always must stand between the officer and the enlisted man. She knew nothing of military rank nor military etiquette.

Carefully and most successfully she had been reared in ignorance of such knowledge. From childhood Brandford had been steeped in army lore and army prejudices. Neither could even approach the other's point of view.

Not that his love had faltered for an instant; Peter Brandford had not that for which to blame himself. On the contrary, he had done his awkward best; but nothing could have been worse than that best of his.

With blundering vehemence he had assured her that for him she was the only woman in the world, and that never, by the width of a razor's edge, would he allow her father's former station to influence him.

Not until long afterward did the captain come to understand that her

fierce resentment was prompted by outraged pride in her father.

Perhaps for that very reason the final parting came more quickly. Nothing that he could do or say would alter her decision. Nothing that her parents could do or say—and they both tried—altered it.

So Peter Brandford had been left with a sorrow that quenched all the brightness of his life, and the abiding sense of a crime against his love which, in truth, did not exist. It was in attempted expiation of this fancied crime that he had given up everything save his self-respect, and had become the human derelict that he now was.

Deep in his retrospect, Brandford was oblivious of all else until a crowd so dense as to be almost impassable blocked his way. As he paused a man in evening dress wormed his way out through the thicker part of the throng into its fringe, where the old captain was standing.

"Workers!" the stranger sputtered. "They call themselves workers! I'll bet there isn't one of that gang who has done a tap of real work for years—unless it was in the penitentiary!"

"Who are they, then?" asked the captain, bewildered, like one who is suddenly awakened. "What is the matter?"

"The International Workers' Peace Society is what they call themselves," was the reply. "As a matter of fact, they're a lot of cowards who are afraid that the government is going to start conscription. If they don't like the way this country is run why don't they stay—"

Sputtering still, the stranger passed out of hearing.

The captain laboriously made his way through the crowd until he reached a dense nucleus of strange, unwashed humanity, and there he paused again. Any diversion would be welcome after the companionship of his own thoughts.

Before him was a truck from which fluttered two flags; one the stars and stripes, the other plain red, like a danger signal.

Between them stood an emaciated man with disheveled hair and the burning eyes of a fanatic, who harangued the crowd. At that distance the captain could understand no word of the imperfect English in which the speech was couched. In order that he might understand he edged nearer, and kept on edging.

He was quite close to the truck when the crowd broke into wild cheers which rose to a frenzy as the speaker, plucking loose the American flag, first spat upon it, then trampled it under his feet.

A red mist seemed to spread itself before Peter Brandford's eyes!

With a savage oath he began to plow through the crowd as a steamer plows through a calm sea. As he reached the truck the speaker kicked at him, then screamed like a woman, for the captain's arms clasped his knees, lifted him high into the air and then threw him crashing to the pavement.

There was an instant of astonished pause.

Then, snarling like wolves, savage yet cowardly as wolves are, the crowd rushed at the old captain, each member of the pack borrowing courage from the presence of his neighbors. The captain had just time to tear the desecrated flag from its staff; then, still holding it in his left hand, he turned at bay.

As the human wolves came within reach the captain caught the gleam of a knife.

Whistling through the air, his stick fell upon the wrist that held that knife, sending it spinning and glittering through the air to clatter on the pavement. Another stooped to recover the weapon and dropped limply, concealing it with his body.

Peter Brandford once had been noted in the army as the best swordsman

that it contained. In the hands of such a man a heavy walking-stick is a lethal weapon. The crowd came to a pause.

A pistol shot reechoed from the house fronts. Brandford swayed for a moment, then stood firm once more. Again and yet again his stick sang through the air.

One man went down, and then another. Twice the stick licked forward like a snake's tongue. A third man staggered back, screaming, his hands held over his eyes. But the crowd did not stop again.

Some one plucked at the flag that the captain held behind him. He made a savage cut to the rear, but he knew that this was the beginning of the end, for he was surrounded. But still he fought on.

The fallen speaker tried feebly to wriggle away; the captain planted a foot on his breast, pining him fast. With a supreme effort he felled a man who rushed forward in an attempt at rescue. It used the last ounce of his strength.

The earth whirled around him, everything became fantastically unreal, and strange things happened swiftly.

With cries of dismay the crowd began to "mill," like wild cattle, newly penned. Then part of the crowd scattered, allowing two men to dash into view. One of them was young Reynolds, the other—what strange things a weakened brain will do—the other seemed to be Sergeant Terence Considine.

Older, stouter, and dressed to perfection, but Sergeant Considine still —her father.

Feeling as though he were somebody else, in whom he felt only the most casual interest, the captain stepped aside and pointed with his stick to the fallen speaker.

"Sergeant," he said, quite as he would have spoken in the old days, "have that man confined by my order." And, quite as he would have done in the old days, the sergeant saluted.

"Yes, sir," he said, and stooping, jerked the prisoner to his feet.

Then, quite suddenly, the crowd seemed to have changed its clothes, and now appeared in the blue coats and brass buttons of the police. One of these, wearing a captain's bars, laid a hand on Peter Brandford's shoulder. In the tone that formerly he would have used to a stupid recruit, Sergeant Terence Considine rasped out a warning.

The police captain dropped his hand and turned apologetically.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, Senator!" he cried. "I didn't know that he was a friend of yours."

"Never mind. Take this one instead —he insulted the flag. Now detail two of those fat cops to carry this gentleman to my car," commanded Sergeant—or was it Senator—Considine? There was a State Senator by that name. Still, it didn't matter. Nothing mattered.

The police captain did as he was told, and Peter Brandford was carried, it seemed to him, for many miles to the door of the limousine, before which the chauffeur stood on guard with a Stillson wrench in his hand for use in case of emergency.

And there, wonderful to relate, was the girl — no, two of her, different, and yet the same. One of them he could not see, for his head was resting on her breast. The other was crying, and talking between her sobs to young Reynolds, who sat by her.

"Then, when I saw him the second time, I knew he was the picture in mother's locket," she was saying. "Mother and he were engaged once. I don't know what happened; but she married my father, and grandfather hated him. So it was Captain Brandford who came all the way to Europe to keep my father—he was sick, and died soon afterward — out of prison.

"He—Captain Brandford—couldn't get leave to come, so he resigned his

commission. We never knew until afterward who had helped us — and then he had disappeared. Even before he grew rich grandfather tried everything, but never could find him. And now that he is found—"

"He'll live to command this fine regiment we're gettin' up so that Jack Reynolds can play at bein' a field officer," here interrupted the voice of Sergeant-Senator Considine. "And if God wills, I pray that he may live to find joy that'll pay him for part of what he lost!"

"Amen," responded another voice. It was the voice that for so many years Peter Brandford had longed to hear—that he thought that he never again should hear.

"Amen," he echoed weakly. Then a great wave of peace swept over him, bearing him away to tranquil sleep.

THE LITTLE KID ACROSS THE STREET

By Percy W. Reynolds

HE'S not more than five years old;
But such a wealth of gold
On his blessed little head of curly hair,
Two blue eyes brimful of joy—
Oh! he's a real, live boy;
But the folks who own him do not seem to care.

He comes dancing round the place,
Grubby paws and dirty face,
And I often watch him playing where I'm hid,
In my solitude and gloom;
From my lonely, darkened room
I've learned to love the happy little kid.

Once I had a spell of blues,
Held pessimistic views
Of life and every mortal on the earth,
When the little beggar smiled,
And I found a little child
Could teach the art of living with its mirth.

How I'd like to know the bliss
Of that kiddy's kindly kiss,
I would like to have him love me, hear his prayers;
For he's got a way divine
That has touched this heart of mine;
Got a way somehow of showing that he cares.

But the folks across the way,
They would have their say,
Though they do not seem to love him, they would be
Mighty angry if I did
Show affection for the kid—
The little kid—who's won the heart of me.

So I'll let the youngster play
In his happy, childish way,
And I'll watch him lest he come to any bad;
But he shall never see
That I'd give my all to be—
Give everything I own to be his dad.