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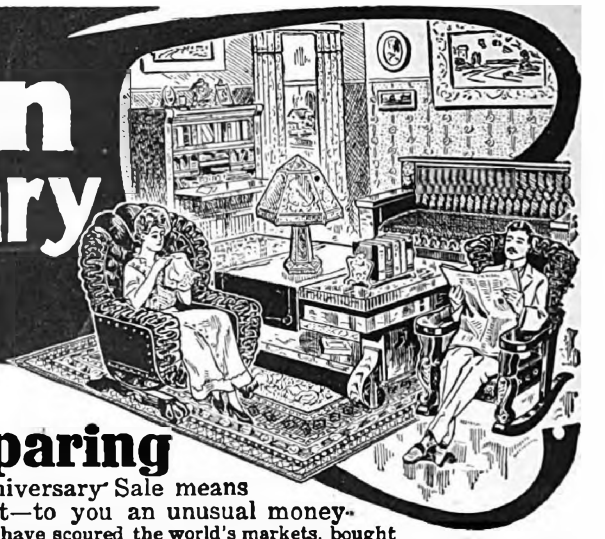
ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Cyrus Townsend Brady's

Custer of the Cavalry

A Novel of the Little Big Horn

The Great Hartman 60th Anniversary Sale



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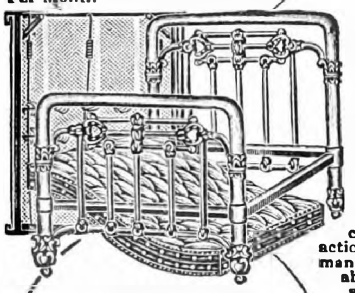

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ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXVI CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 26, 1914 No. 4

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

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

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ISSUED WEEKLY.

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The Merger of East and West

"But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!"
—KIPLING.

In the "Ballad of East and West," Kipling tells the story of an Indian border bandit pursued to his hiding place in the hills by an English colonel's son.

These men were of different races and represented widely different ideas of life. But, as they came face to face, each found in the other elements of character which made them friends.

In this country, before the days of the telephone, infrequent and indirect communication tended to keep the people of the various sections separated and apart.

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ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXVI SEPTEMBER 26, 1914 No. 4

Custer of the Cavalry

by Cyrus Townsend Brady

Author of "The Sword Hand of Napoleon," "The Eagle of the Empire," etc.

A Romance of the Little Big Horn

CHAPTER I.

The Old Scout Brings Great News.

IT was much too cold for conversation in that high latitude; even at that season of the year the temperature constantly trembled around the zero mark. There was a fierce wind blowing, and the light snow cut the face like needle-points; but the hardy troopers, wrapped in their buffalo overcoats, were warm and fairly comfortable.

There was a spice of excitement, a flavor of danger, about their errand which made the enterprise a welcome break in the monotony of winter life at the post.

These two troops of cavalry would be the envy of their less favored comrades in the famous regiment as soon as those left behind learned the purpose of this assignment, although it involved long, hard riding in the cold.

The men were all eager for the undertaking because of the passionate hatred the regiment bore toward the object of their quest. They had marched under sealed orders for forty miles, but so soon as he had opened the sealed letter that had been given him, their commander had given the officers and men the fullest information as to their errand. And they were filled with joy accordingly.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The experienced reader does not need to be reminded that troops O and N had no place on the roster of the Seventh Cavalry or on that of any other regiment in the United States service. And the author hopes it will not be necessary to apologize for attaching them to that famous command. The author frankly admits that in the interest of unity he has compressed widely separated historic incidents within the compass of a few months, and that he has taken the liberty to alter topographical and other details to suit the situations.

For the rest he humbly maintains that such portions of this story as deal with serious history have been carefully studied and are truthfully set down. Especially in view of its apparent incredibility he avouches that the most incredible episode of Britton's letter is abundantly paralleled by facts.

There was no love lost between the Sioux and the soldiers in the old days in the Northwest. They hated one another with a good, vigorous, all-pervading antagonism.

Each side respected the other as a fighting force, but comity stopped there. The rights and wrongs of the quarrel between white men and red had long since been lost sight of by all but the most thoughtful of the army, certainly by the rank and file.

Many of the Dakotan Indians were at least outwardly peaceable and submissive, but the bulk of the Sioux nation and their allies, the fierce and haughty Cheyennes, continued to be rebellious.

The issue between the invaders and the aborigines was still undetermined. Much blood of red men and white men would be poured out before the question was finally settled.

With their pride of race, the soldiers felt that if they could only come to a hand grapple with the Indians in some decisive way, the matter would easily be decided out of hand.

The Indians, with their pride of race also, and perhaps with some apprehension of such a contest, were content to wear away their enemy by the slow attrition of constant small affairs, in which they exhibited all the savage cruelty of their nature, and so blinded men to the substantial justice of their cause.

These petty engagements only served to increase the irritation and bitterness of troops and settlers. Indeed, these things filled them with an exasperation which sometimes amounted to madness, and which served completely to befog the actual cause for which they fought.

Two of the most popular men in the Seventh Cavalry — a regiment organized after the Civil War for just such frontier service — had wandered away from the main body on an exploring expedition, the year before, along the Yellowstone River.

When the little command to which they were attached—the one as veterinary surgeon, the other, who was the sutler of the regiment, more as a volunteer—had moved out that morning, they had not suspected that there had been a hostile Indian within miles of them, and these two men had actually stopped at a spring to pick some flowers while they watered and rested their horses.

Well, they were dead and frightfully mutilated when the troops searching for them, after an all-day fight with a big war party of Sioux and Cheyennes, found them that evening.

Surgeon Honzinger had been shot and his head crushed, while Mr. Baliran, the sutler, also appeared to have been shot and finally beaten to death with war clubs.

Both bodies were full of arrows; and but for the fact that one was bald and the other wore his hair close cropped, they would have been scalped as well.

Fervent and bitter were the vows of vengeance of the soldiers to whom the pleasant, mild-mannered veterinarian who cared for their beloved horses, and the honest and even generous storekeeper, had been especially dear.

They had registered a solemn oath if they ever found out the particular savage who had done this—the keen-eyed scouts declared it the work of one man—that they would get him at whatever cost, in which event he would receive short shrift indeed.

Now they knew him and were *en route* to catch him. And so they rode gladly and with light hearts.

In the post had come, the day before, one Meekins, a famous scout and frontiersman of the Northwest. He had accompanied General Custer and the Seventh Cavalry on several expeditions, and was well known, highly respected, and thoroughly liked by everybody from the general down to the humblest private.

When he presented himself at headquarters and sent in his name by the orderly, Custer had given order for his instant admittance. The men clasped hands, equally glad to meet again.

Old Meekins, the scout, the pioneer, the hunter, was typical of the frontier and the Northwest. He was a short, squat, broad-shouldered man, grizzled and weather-beaten and long past the prime of life.

He looked what he was, a man of great physical power, wide experience of life in the open; shrewd, cunning, crafty, dependable, and as brave and honest as the man he faced, who looked pleasantly down upon him.

There were few men upon whom the famous George Armstrong Custer could not look down in more ways than one. He was the exact opposite to the old scout.

Tall, over six feet high, in the prime of life, of spare but powerful frame, vigorous, well built, with not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his lean, wire-strung body, he yet might have contended on equal terms physically with the rougher fibered man before him.

Custer's every movement was naturally graceful, not only on horseback, when he was a perfect centaur, but afoot as well—which was unusual for a cavalryman. His air and bearing were dignified, easy, and as of one assured of himself and accustomed to large responsibility and high command.

The general's face also showed the effects of weather, of ceaseless campaigning winter and summer both in the valleys of Virginia, where he had won his great fame as one of the *beaux sabreurs* of the Union cavalry under Sheridan, and on the plains of the great West, where his exploits had not diminished the fame or tarnished the glory gained in larger fields.

But beneath the bronze of exposure the color came and went easily in his face. His eyes were of the bright, clear blue color characteristic of the fighting, masterful race. His look was piercing, keen, watchful, observant on occasion.

They were full of a pleasant humor that morning as they gazed on the frontiersman, but there were not a few soldiers and civilians who could testify to the fierce intensity with which they could fasten on wrong, injustice, and oppression. And no one who had ever seen them alight with battle fire in the mad rush of the charge, his long, bright golden hair streaming in the wind, would ever forget it—a viking of old, a knight of ancient and chivalric days reincarnated then!

His soldiers adored him. His superiors trusted him. The men, women, and children of the frontier looked to him for protection. The Indians respected him for his impartial justice, his outspoken honesty, as they feared him for his persistence, his soldierly ability, and his magnificent courage.

"Gener'l," began the old man, "I hope I sees you well."

"You will see me better, Meekins," returned Custer, "when the weather opens up and we get a chance to move at the Indians."

The general threw his hands up over his head in a gesture expressive of impatience. "This inaction is certainly killing. How are you?"

"Wall, I'm gittin' a leetle oldish; kind a stiff an' rheumatic, more an' more inclined to lay abed mornin's, not quite so wishful to straddle a hoss."

"Get out," said the general, laughing. "You're as young as anybody. Ah," he said, turning to the mess-boy who had been summoned and who now arrived with the necessary liquid accompaniments to such an interview.

"Here's something that will keep you going a little longer," he continued, handing Meekins a glass and telling him to help himself to what he liked best from the bottles on the tray; he was generous in his hospitality, though he himself drank nothing but water, and deprecated and fought against the deep drinking which was the curse of the frontier and the army.

"I reckon I come on a welcome errand then," said the old scout, pouring liberally and doing his duty by his drink like a man and a frontiersman.

"Whatever brought you here, you are welcome," said the general, who

had a warm spot in his heart for these hunters and scouts.

He knew their value. He treated them as many officers did not know how to do, and consequently he got out of them splendid service and received their ungrudging admiration and affection in return.

The general had that quality of a born leader of men which prevented him from despising any instrument, however humble, and which somehow managed to summon the best out of those with whom he came in contact. It had stood him in good stead in the past, and he unconsciously counted upon it in whatever enterprise he attempted—and rightly!

"You was wishful for somethin' to do jest now. I'm a goin' to give you a prime object in life. You remember that there hoss-medicine man an' that drink-an'-truck dispenser of yourn?"

"Dr. Honzinger and Mr. Baliran? Of course I remember them, poor fellows. I will never forget how they looked after we came back, and I will never forget the feelings of the men when we found them."

"Wall, I know who done it."

"Who?"

"A Unkpapa Sioux named Itiomagaju."

"Let me see," said Custer reflectively. "That means Rain—"

"Rain-in-the-Face; you got it, gener'l," said old Meekins.

"Ah, he belongs to Iron Horn's band of Unkpapas, doesn't he?"

"He does that."

"And they are Reservation Indians, are they not?"

"They are, but Rain-in-the-Face says he ain't."

"I don't care what he says. He's got to go with the band. The killing of those men was murder, therefore not an act of war, and if I get him I'll turn him over to the civil authorities to be tried and hanged as he deserves."

"Sure thing. He ain't a head chief, but he's next thing to it. From our p'int of view he's a bad Injun, about the nastiest brute in the hull Sioux nation, but from theirn he's a hero. They jest idolizes him. It seems he was in love with some squaw, an' she ta'nted him an' he up an' done this jest to show her what kind of a man he was."

"How did you find it out?"

"I heared him a braggin' about havin' done it. He was takin' part in some kind o' war council or other, an' when them Injuns git to dancin', they gits to chatterin' like childern. I surmised that he was boastin' how he done it, as I seen him makin' signs.

"An' when he swung a gold watch-chain in the air I knowed it. He said they was mountin' their hosses at the spring after that flower-pickin' expedition of theirn which I 'lows no man has got a right to pick flowers when Injuns is 'round.

"Rain-in-the-Face he shot the vet'inarian from his hoss an' filled him full of arrers, an' Mr. Baliran was throwed off his, the hoss bein' natur'lly startled by the shot, an' him bein' a storekeeper an' no good at ridin'.

"An' afore the old man could git up this yere Rain that done it runs up an' beats him to death with his war club. You see, he was a fixin' for his recognition as a full-fledged brave, an' to come back to the lodge an' tell how he'd killed two white men was a pretty fine card for him."

"Yes," said the general grimly, his lips pressed in a firm, straight line, his blue eyes flashing. "He may find before he gets through that it is not so fine a card as he thinks. Dr. Honzinger never harmed a child. He was as gentle as a woman, and Baliran was a square man. Although he was a sutler, he sold things at a fair price, and the men liked him. We all did. I shall remember the name of Rain-in-the-Face. You think there is no doubt about it?"

"None whatsomever. Most Injuns will lie; that is, to the white men, but them high-grade chiefs has got their own notions of honor an' you kin trust

'em. Besides, he was crazy with the excitement of the dance, an' the truth come out. There was other Injuns there, heaps on 'em, an' they heared him, an' nobody made no contradiction to him, which they would have done if it hadn't bin so, 'cause from their p'int of view it 'was a glorious exploit."

"I see. Well, some day we will catch this man, and then—"

"You kin catch him now if you want to."

"What!"

"That's what I come to tell you."

"That band of Unkpapas have come into the Agency and accepted the situation. But he wouldn't be fool enough to—"

"That's jest what he done. He's a daredevil, all right. There ain't no braver man in the hull Sioux nation, an' you kin throw in the Cheyennes to boot, than that same Rain-in-the-Face. He was up at Standin' Rock when I left there, an' jest as soon as I learned it I come right down yere knowin' how you fellers feel about it, an' I thought prob'ly you'd never git sich a chance as this agin.

"You see, he ain't afeared of nothin', an' in a spirit of brayvaydo he has mingled with them Reservation an' Agency Injuns, an' if he hadn't got to dancin' nobody would 'a' bin the wiser. There ain't many as can understand the chatterin' of them Unkpapa Sioux like me. It was just chance or good luck that I was minglin' with 'em."

"Well, I will send up there and get him," said the general promptly. He turned about and called: "Orderly!"

When the soldier presented himself and saluted, he said: "Ask Captain Yates to report to me at once."

"Beggin' your pardon, gener'l, but if an old friend an' admirer mought take the liberty, what are you—"

"I am going to send Yates up there with two troops of cavalry to seize the man and bring him here. Then we are going to try him for murder."

"It is a operation of consider'ble danger."

"That makes no difference. George Yates isn't afraid of anything on earth. I've fought by his side often enough to know that. And as for the men, they are so infuriated against that Indian that I would almost be afraid to trust them under any other commander. They would kill him before they got him down here."

"There must be two or three thousand Injuns up there, an' while all but a sprinklin' of 'em is Agency Injuns an' all that, I wouldn't count on 'em if it came to a show-down. This big buck is mighty pop'lar. He's a big man. It is more'n probable that they'd make an effort to rescue him, an' it mought bring on a pretty lively little row an' somebody mought git hurt."

"I could send a battalion," said the general reflectively.

"I wouldn't advise that," said the old scout. "Too many would frighten off the bird. Two troops is enough if it's goin' to be done at all. Now if—"

The old scout, who was thinking deeply, was interrupted by the arrival of the summoned officer.

Yates was the commander of F troop, known throughout the service for its dapper efficiency and careful attention to dress and equipment as "The Band-box Troop." He was a veteran of the Civil War although still a young man.

He was a tall, powerful, dashing officer with gray-blue eyes and hair scarcely less gold than Custer's. He was beloved by the men like the general, with whom he was deservedly a great favorite. They had been comrades on Pleasanton's staff in many a hot battle and dashing onfall in Virginia.

"You sent for me, general?" began Yates formally, as this was a duty call, evidently, as he stopped, stood attention, and saluted.

"I did. Our friend Meekins has brought us splendid news," said the

general. "He has discovered that the man who killed Honzinger and Baliran was an Unkpapa Sioux named Rain-in-the-Face."

"Good! That's a bit of knowledge we have all been yearning for," said Yates.

"Wall, that ain't all my news, either," continued Meekins, presuming on Custer's indulgence as to an old friend and greatly enjoying himself.

"This same Rain-in-the-Face is up at Standin' Rock Agency, or he was when I come from there, an' I rode that sixty miles jest as fast as my hoss could bring me, knowin' how pleased an' anxious you all would be."

"General!" exclaimed Yates, turning toward his commander, his eyes shining, his color coming, at the thought that sprang into his brain.

"Yes," said the general, "take your troop, pick up fifty more men at Fort Rice, where you will stop for the night, and go down there and get him."

"Have you any orders?"

"You will march under sealed orders," answered the general. "Say nothing to any one until you have got far enough from the post to have shaken off any Sioux spies that may be hanging around, say forty miles away."

"Very good, sir. They'll never suspect fifty men."

"No. Take any two officers you wish."

"I'll take Tom and Tony Britton."

"An excellent selection, even if one is my brother," said the general, smiling his gratification and approval.

Tom Custer was one of the brightest, lightest-hearted, most genial young officers in the famous regiment. He was somewhat smaller than his more famous older brother, but he had the same characteristics; the same blue eyes, the same bright hair—only his was straight while the general's was curly—and fair complexion.

He had been shot through both cheeks in the Civil War and the bullet had left two permanent dimples which added to his pleasant looks and gave occasion to much good-humored chaffing.

The Indians sometimes called him "Little Hair" to distinguish him from his brother, who was known as "Long Hair," or "Long Yellow Hair."

And young Tony Britton, another first lieutenant, although recently promoted to that rank and therefore one of the junior officers without any Civil War experience, was a fit companion for the other two.

"Anything more?"

"No. He is up there. You must get him. I don't want any bloodshed if it is possible to avoid it."

"It's goin' to be a matter of some difficulty to do that," said old Meekins. "There are sever'l thousand Injuns up there, an' unless you're mighty sharp an' smart about it, they won't 'low Rain-in-the-Face to be tuck without makin' some objections."

"I will see to that," said Yates briefly. "Am I to go now, sir?"

"Immediately," said the general, and then he turned and looked inquiringly at the old scout.

"Oh, I'm goin' with 'em. I wouldn't miss the fun for anythin' on this yearth," said the old man. "I reckoned that this would be about what you'd do, an' I want to see the hull thing carried through to a finish."

"I am glad that you are going with them, Meekins. You know the Indians as few men do, the Sioux especially. I am sure you can give them wise counsel."

"I am delighted to have you with my command, old man," said Yates heartily. "And if you are ready, we will start at once. It is still early; we'll pass the night at Rice, pick up another fifty there, and be at the Agency to-morrow. I hope he's still there."

"I reckon he'll stay as long as he's got anythin' to trade in for fire-water," said Meekins encouragingly.

"Yates," said the general, "you know what these youngsters are. I

put you in command because you are a cool-headed veteran and I can depend upon you. I want that Indian brought back alive, too, and I order you to bring him back no matter what it costs. But at the same time, I don't want you to get into any unnecessary fighting. I expect you to take a good deal before you answer back, as it were. Understand? To swallow everything so long as you bring back your man."

"But if we can't without fighting?"

"Use your discretion then. Only remember that the man has got to be brought back."

"I'll bring him back, sir."

"Another thing," said Custer. "The men will be pretty hot against that Indian when they learn who he is and what he did. Don't let them get out of hand. I don't want him shot accidentally or otherwise by some of our own soldiers. You will see that he is guarded by men you can trust."

"I will look out for that, sir."

"Go, then. Good luck. Good-by."

"Good-by, sir."

Yates went from the room with a light heart indeed. It was a duty that every officer and man in the regiment would have begged for. He counted himself a lucky man indeed as he despatched messengers to Tom Custer and Tony Britton and bade his first sergeant turn out the troop.

CHAPTER II.

Tony Britton Promises Two Women.

OVER at the quarters of Captain Jack Eversly of N Troop another kind of campaign was in swift progress.

In no respects did Barbara Manning suggest Rain-in-the-Face, but she was, nevertheless, the object of an eager and interested pursuit. First Lieutenant Tony Britton of N Troop was the commander of the expedition. He was also the whole expeditionary force. And he was exercising every particle of a strategy by no means inefficient.

Miss Manning had but recently come to the post to visit her brother-in-law and his wife. Mrs. Eversly could not be considered an ally of young Britton's. In fact, she had to be ranked definitely with the opposition.

"Now I warn you, Babs," she had said, "that you had better look out for Tony Britton."

"What's the matter with him? He dances well, he talks intelligently, he rides better than anybody in the post, he is as full of fun as—"

"Yes, yes, I know all that. He is the most popular man in the regiment, unless it is Tom Custer or the general himself, but—"

"But what?"

"I hate to say it, Barbara dear, but in a way he is preempted."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it is only regimental gossip, and I hate that. Mrs. Custer doesn't tolerate it. She says the general declares that it does more to impair regimental efficiency than anything else. So we of the Seventh don't indulge in it very much, but I can't bear to see you get so interested in—"

"What makes you think I am interested at all?"

"What other inference could anybody draw from your glib catalog of our young friend's attractions? 'Dances well, talks well, rides well—'"

"Oh, spare me," said the young lady, putting up her hand. "I only spoke casually. If there is anything wrong with him, why did you bring him here and—"

"He's Jack's first lieutenant, and of course he had to be welcomed and introduced even if we did not like him so much. And there is nothing wrong exactly. That is, nothing we can put our finger on."

"Anne Eversly, will you tell me what you are driving at?" asked her younger sister directly, more perturbed than she was willing to show. "You said he was preempted. Who preempted him?"

"Barbara, how you do run on. I sha'n't tell you anything."

"Yes, you will, and immediately. Who has preempted Tony Britton?"

"Well, it is quite evident that he is very much interested in — Frances Granson, if you must know it," was the somewhat reluctant answer.

"Oh."

"Yes. We are all interested in Frances Granson," went on Mrs. Eversly. "And what she has had to endure from that brute, her husband, is unthinkable and certainly unspeakable, but—"

"Well, doesn't everybody sympathize with Mrs. Granson; and isn't every officer kind to her, and wouldn't any of them do anything on earth short of killing him to get Granson out and free Mrs. Granson? Why, I like her myself. I—"

"Everything you say is true, but Tony Britton is too young for such an association, and his sympathy seems to some of us to pass reasonable bounds. It has been noticed and commented upon quietly among those who like him. His devotion is—er—just a little too pronounced. I guess if the truth must be known, everybody in the regiment knows it and has known it except Captain Granson himself. And when he finds it out—"

"What difference would it make to him? He doesn't care for her; he hates her."

"My dear, love does not enter into a nature like his; but he would be just as mad at her unfaithfulness as Jack Eversly would be if I—"

"Unfaithfulness!" exclaimed Barbara, seizing upon the damning word. "Do you mean to tell me that Tony Britton—"

"My dear girl, I don't want to tell you anything. Of course, I didn't quite mean that either. And even if Tony is as innocent as a dove, which give me leave to doubt, Mrs. Granson finds him a very congenial companion when the captain neglects her.

"In short, Tony has been seen with her entirely too much for her reputation and his, although, of course, a man is different from a woman. It has got so bad that Captain Eversly has about made up his mind that the youngster's got to be spoken to.

"He is hesitating between doing that himself and going to the general and having him talk to the boy, which would probably be more effectual."

"I call it a mean shame," said Barbara Manning, her face flushing. "All this gossip and—"

"Yes, it is," admitted her sister. "There may be nothing at all in it. I hope not, but— Well, the men are beginning to talk about it. The whole thing is bad. Everybody dislikes Granson, and Britton hates him. He doesn't disguise it, either.

"He was in Granson's troop, O Troop, you know, and things got so bad that the general had to transfer him to Jack's command, and I tell you he had to use all the authority he had to get Jack's first lieutenant to exchange. It was only by appealing to him for the honor of the regiment because there was such bad blood between the two men that it seemed impossible to avoid an outbreak, that he got him to do it, and we all thought it very brave and manly of him.

"Tony Britton is young, and he had more opportunities of seeing how the captain treated Frances Granson. His sympathies were engaged. I don't really think there is anything wrong with either of them, though I wouldn't put it beyond Tony. He's only a man."

"Well, then," said Barbara Manning calmly, "I don't see why I shouldn't enjoy myself with Lieutenant Britton if it pleases me to do so."

"Oh, certainly; by all means have all the fun you want with him, but don't let your affections become—"

"Now don't fear for me, Anne. I have no desire to cut out Frances Granson. Really, if I believed anything more was in it than regimental gossip, I would not have anything more to do

with him. I hate men who hang around married women."

"I only wanted to warn you."

"Thank you for the warning, but I met men before I came out to this post. You know I am twenty-two—almost an old maid," she laughed, "and I have been out for two years. Tony Britton isn't the only man who said he loved—"

"Barbara Manning, has it got that far?"

"Well, yes," answered Barbara, smiling. "I didn't mean to tell you that, but—"

"And Captain Phillips and Lieutenant Morrison—I suppose they, too?"

"Yes, they, too. In fact, Anne, pretty much all the unmarried men of the regiment. You know, in the country of the blind the one-eyed are kings, and being the only woman here, I am in that situation," went on Miss Manning with a delightful mixture of metaphors.

"I see, of course."

"If only the unmarried girls out East could know what a paradise of opportunity a military post is you would be overwhelmed with self-invited guests of the female sex."

"There is some truth in what you say, Babs," laughed her sister; "but as a matter of fact, a girl has to have some charm."

"Yes, but mighty little goes a long way when there is only one."

"You can say that easily," returned Mrs. Eversly admiringly, "because you have so much."

"Nonsense," laughed Barbara Manning, shaking her pretty head, but not ill-pleased by the well-deserved compliment nevertheless.

"Why, Tony Britton said you were the prettiest—" began Mrs. Eversly, then she stopped suddenly. "Gracious, I am adding fuel to the fire," she continued.

"There is no fire," said Barbara, although the flush in her cheek deepened at that unguarded and revealing speech.

"Well, I have warned you," said Mrs. Eversly, "and as you say you are not without experience, and having been given the facts, you can take care of yourself."

"Please, ma'am," said the servant, a luxury which Eversly, who possessed an income beyond his pay, provided for his wife, "Leftenant Britton is at the door and he wants to see Miss Barbara."

"Show him in, Jane," said Mrs. Eversly, taking her departure so as to leave an open field to the newcomer.

And thus it was that another stage of the campaign began. Britton had never found Barbara Manning so fascinating and yet so elusive as that morning.

His every effort at what she characterized as sentimentality, but what he fondly thought was sentiment, was met and parried deftly. His tender insinuations were demolished by laughter.

He had been an ardent wooer for some days—days counted as weeks in an army post—and he had congratulated himself that he had made some progress, but on that day he found himself relegated to his first position. In fact, driven further to the rear than the point from which he had made his first attack.

He had been slow in entering the running. Phillips, the youthful captain of P Troop, and Morrison, a supernumerary subaltern, had attacked boldly from the very first. Compunctions of conscience and other engagements had kept Britton from entering the race until his rivals had made great progress. Once committed to a course, however, the lieutenant had made up for his tardiness by the fervor and ardor of his wooing.

He was a splendid match for Barbara Manning because he was so different. She was taller than most women, but slender, dark-eyed, dark-haired.

Britton was taller than most men, and therefore overtowered her suffi-

ciently, and his blue eyes and light, blond hair and ruddy cheeks were a delightful complement to her own paler and more delicate beauty.

"What's the matter?" at last said the young officer with a sort of peremptory and not unbecoming bluntness. "Last night at the little dance over at the general's you were kindness itself. Poor Bill Morrison nearly chewed his long mustache off because you gave me four dances to his two, and Phillips was like a mad man, he was so crazy with jealousy. And when I told you how much I cared for you after that last divine waltz—"

"You do dance well; I'll say that for you," interrupted the young lady with a reflective and detached air of appraisement that was most irritating.

"Never mind my dancing," he retorted impatiently. "I'm thinking of how you acted when—"

"Well, how did I act, pray?" asked Barbara Manning.

"You—you listened at least," he answered, rather lamely, after all. "You didn't say 'no' or turn me down when I told you I loved you and asked you—"

"Perhaps last night I believed that you did," said the girl softly.

"And don't you believe it now?"

"I don't care whether you do or not now. I have been hearing so much about you that I—"

"What have you been hearing?"

"I have been advised that you belonged to somebody, that you are private property."

"I demand to know who told you that!" asked Britton severely.

"And are you under the impression that I am a private in your troop," asked the girl saucily, "that you conjugate yourself in this imperative mood?"

"No, but I beg you to tell me," he went on with more humility. "This means so much to me— It couldn't be Phillips or Bill Morrison."

"Do you suppose any man would talk to me about you?"

"It was a woman, then?"

"Yes," admitted Barbara reluctantly, this being an inference which she could not now deny.

"What woman? Was it Frances—" began the lieutenant after a moment of thought.

"Frances who?" exclaimed Barbara Manning, now really angry and also jealous.

Conscious that he had made a fearful blunder, Britton sought to recover himself.

"I don't know what kind of gossip you have heard," he began earnestly, "but whatever it is, it isn't true. Whatever I may have done in the past amounts to nothing now. Ever since I have seen you, I have—"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," said the maid, coming in at this most inopportune moment, for Barbara Manning, hurt and outraged by that slip of the lieutenant, was most anxious indeed to hear him in his justification and what he had begun to say no less than his serious manner had moved her strangely.

"There's a soldier outside, an orderly to see Mr. Britton, with Captain Yates's compliments. And he says that the captain is in a great hurry and will Mr. Britton come without delay."

"Oh, of course," said Britton impatiently. "Please believe nothing against me, Miss Barbara, until I have a chance to explain further. Promise me that."

"I promise," she said, extending her hand after a moment of hesitation.

"I will be back just as soon as I get away from him and—"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," interrupted the orderly, himself venturing into the room, "but the cap'n's in a tearin' hurry, an'—"

"All right, orderly, I am coming at once. Good-by."

Yates was certainly in a tearing hurry, but he greeted Britton calmly enough.

"Mr. Britton," he said formally, "I am leaving the post at once under sealed orders on some important duty. General Custer allows me to choose my subordinates. Tom Custer is one. If you care to go, you will be the other. We shall be gone several days and may see a little fighting."

"Delighted to go anywhere with you, sir, and thank you very much indeed for giving me the chance," said the hugely elated young man.

"Better hurry. We are ready to march now."

"It won't take me five minutes to shift into service uniform. You need not wait for me. You can't get far enough away from the post in five minutes for me not to see you, and I will overtake you at once."

As he ran toward his quarters Britton's mind work swiftly. Really, if he were put to it and if Larry Corcoran, his striker, were on hand, which he happened to be, he could dress in two and one-half minutes, and that would give him two and a half minutes to see Barbara Manning again.

As he figured, it so happened. Dashing up to Eversly's quarters on his horse, he threw open the door and, feeling that the shortness of time at his disposal would warrant him in a summary entrance, he rushed into the living-room.

Mrs. Eversly and Barbara Manning were both there and Eversly was with them. They had been staring out of the window at the troops moving away.

Eversly had just come in from the adjutant's office, and although neither he nor any one knew what the object of the expedition was, he, with every other officer of the regiment, was disappointed that he had not been chosen.

"I have just got two and a half minutes before I go," began Britton. "Yates asked for me. Isn't it fine? I don't know where we're going or what for, but—"

"There will be danger," said Barbara Manning, turning pale. "You may be killed."

"No chance of that," laughed Britton. "With Yates and Tom Custer and F troop we could ride through the whole Sioux nation," he said, echoing a prevalent opinion.

"You will be careful?" said the girl.

"Careful," laughed the soldier, his heart throbbing with pleasure at her solicitude. "Why do you—"

"I don't want any of my friends to get hurt," she said, striving to cover up her admission.

"I'll do my best to take care of this one, if I may be counted in the group."

"And meanwhile I won't believe anything against you."

"Thank you. Good-by."

"Good-by and good luck," said Captain Eversly, and in a moment he was gone.

As he sprang to his horse and trotted down the street he was stopped by a woman on the sidewalk. At other times and under other circumstances the sight of that woman would have set his pulses dancing and his heart beating, and it was not without its power to move him now, but there was some little annoyance in his mind as well.

In the first place, he was in plain view of the window of Eversly's living-room, from which he was morally certain that Barbara Manning was watching him. And this, taken together with his betrayal of his interest in Frances Granson by his impulsive use of her name, and the gossip which had been poured into her ear by some one, her sister, probably, the lieutenant felt would not do him any particular good.

Nevertheless, he reined in his horse promptly and leaped to the ground like the courteous gentleman he was.

She was small and blond and blue-eyed and red-cheeked and beautiful, but there was a sadness in her face and bearing, strangely out of place

in one so young and fair. Notwithstanding, her countenance lighted and changed when she saw the young man.

"Tony, you are going away?" said the young woman.

"Yes. Yates is giving me this chance. Something's up, though I don't know what exactly."

"You'll be careful of yourself, won't you, dear boy?" she asked. "For my sake?" she added tenderly. "You know, without you I would—I can't stand—"

"What's he been doing?" asked Tony, forgetting for the moment Barbara Manning.

After all, this woman was very appealing, very beautiful, and there was that between them which he could not forget or overlook. Perhaps he did not want to in her presence.

"Oh, nothing unusual. Just full enough to be ugly, yet not drunk enough to be court-martialed. Sneers—jeers—a blow—"

"A blow! Frances! Impossible!" he cried.

"Look at that," she said suddenly.

She turned down her glove and pulled up her sleeve. Her pretty white arm was black and blue.

"I would like to kill him," gritted out Britton. "Why don't you let me tell General Custer the whole story?"

"He would only be dismissed and take me away from"—she looked up—"from you," she said softly. "You are all I have, Tony. I couldn't bear to—"

"Yes, yes," said the man. "I must go now, Frances."

"I know," said the woman. "You must take care of yourself for my sake."

"I don't think there is any danger," he said, promising a second time. "Good-by," he continued, turning to his horse, leaping into the saddle and galloping away, leaving two women staring after him until he disappeared beyond the houses in the wake of the detachment.

Both of them watched him with an intensity of feeling which one at least was fain not to admit and which was coupled in her case with a great jealousy of the other woman, who was quite unconscious of it, too.

CHAPTER III.

When the Blanket Fell.

THE sudden and unexpected arrival of over one hundred heavily armed troopers at the Standing Rock Agency created a great commotion.

The suspicions of the Indians, who numbered at least two thousand, were at once awakened. As Yates and his men trotted into the square in front of the agency buildings and the sutler's store, their usual taciturnity was forgotten.

The Indians crowded about the soldiers in great excitement, giving vent to exclamations of surprise and menace and asking many questions.

In the main these Indians were considered peaceful and law-abiding. Their chiefs had signed a peace treaty and they were under agreement to live quietly on designated reservations under strict regulation.

In consideration of their complaisance, and especially since their opportunities for good hunting had become so limited, the government furnished them with an abundance of rations for their families and themselves.

The general distribution was made twice a month at the agency. This was the occasion of the bi-monthly allotment.

Many Indian tribes which had refused to sign treaties through their chiefs were still at large and, of course, had to support themselves by their own hunting, which in general they were glad to do.

The United States was preparing to deal with them in the spring. Their freedom to rove anywhere and keep vast sections of good land unsettled was to be denied them. In case of

final refusal the recalcitrant were to be constrained to obey.

Iron Horse's band of Unkpapas were in the reservation class. Rain-in-the-Face, having fought the soldiers, although his brother and chief had made submission for him, was in the outlaw class. And as he had become a reservation Indian his killing of Honzinger and Baliran was not war, but murder, as Custer had said. That he appeared at the reservation at all under the circumstances was an unimpeachable proof of his high courage, and that he recklessly boasted of his deeds against the soldiers was added evidence of it.

Although the Indians at the agency had signed treaties and were ostensibly peaceful, they were very suspicious of the soldiers.

It was only with the greatest difficulty that they had been induced to sign the treaties, and the best-informed army officers and civilian officials were fearful that the slightest strain or temptation would cause the savages to break the treaties and join their fiercer and more independent brethren, who lost no opportunity to taunt them, to shame them and humiliate them for what they believed was a cowardly surrender of their rights; a belief which, save for the charge of cowardice, was more or less true.

No attempt had yet been made to disarm even the treaty Indians, so that, although they had to pay exorbitant prices for guns and cartridges, they were all well provided with much better ammunition and weapons than those issued to the army!

Those present were all armed, as a matter of course, and they could have made short work of the few score of men Yates commanded.

But Yates was a veteran of the Civil War, as was young Custer. He had seen lots of fighting and had been in many tight places. He faced odds gladly. He was as cool as the ice and snow upon which he rode.

He and his officers had consulted together on their long journey from the fort, especially at their halt for the night, and he had decided on several plans of action suited to different contingencies.

Meekins, who was of invaluable service, had ridden on ahead of the troop and entered the agency as circumspectly as possible, where he had mingled freely with the Indians, who were all friendly to him. It was his business to find out how the land lay and quietly to report to Yates on the latter's arrival.

It had been decided, in order to allay suspicion and to divert the attention of the Indians, that a sergeant and some twoscore men of Yates's troop F should be despatched northward seemingly to beat up villages which lay some ten miles away in which it was supposed that some Indians who had participated in a stock-raiding expedition and killed some men were concealed.

That the soldiers should weaken their forces by promptly sending so large a detachment away did much to convince the Indians that nothing covert was intended at the agency. Still their suspicions were not entirely abated and there was much uneasiness evident in the assemblage.

The troops were dismounted and allowed to mingle with the Indians in the square, although the greatest care was taken so to arrange matters that they could assemble and mount their horses, left in charge of a subaltern and a detachment, at the word of command.

They had all been instructed as to the parts they had to play and they carefully obeyed their orders.

Among the great crowd of Indians which surrounded the soldiers, some of them offering to trade, some of them begging for liquor, some of them exchanging sign talk with old friends, was Meekins, the old frontiersman.

He slowly made his way through the groups, chatting with one or an-

other carelessly, until he reached Yates and Tom Custer who stood apart with Tony Britton and some of the older and more trusted and experienced men. Loudly passing the time of day with this last group, Meekins whispered:

"Rain's in the sutler's store," and moved on.

None of the soldiers present had ever seen Rain-in-the-Face, but they had received excellent descriptions of him from Meekins who knew him well. He was a young man of magnificent physique, of unusual height and strength and build and with striking features. They felt it would not be difficult to identify him.

Yates nodded to Tom Custer and Britton. The two officers separated and slowly walked through the crowd in different directions.

They were in no hurry. They stopped to speak to the Indians, to say "How" to some big chief, to shake hands, to exchange ideas in the sign language, but all the while they kept steadily approaching the sutler's store.

A sergeant, a corporal, and three privates followed their example. Meanwhile Yates managed to attract the main attention of the great body of the Indians to himself, and his surroundings and the movements of Tom Custer and his little detachment were naturally unnoticed.

One by one they entered the store. This was a big, square, low, slab-sided building with counters along three sides with shelves back of them on the walls covered with such goods as the Indians were fond of buying.

On the other side there was a huge fireplace in which great logs were smoldering. The sutler whose name was Parkins had but one arm. Istokcha the Indians called him.

He was busy supervising the men who were conducting the trade. It would have been an amusing sight to a tenderfoot to see a big, six-foot, bewhiskered man, heavily armed, selling a yard of gaudy-colored calico to an Indian, but the newcomers were used to the sight, and they were there on other business.

The huge room was filled with Indians. There may have been perhaps a hundred of them, passing and repassing, pressing toward the counter, squabbling over prices, bargaining, making purchases, withdrawing to give place to others. They were all of them shrouded in blankets.

The weather outside was bitter cold. The constant opening of the door admitted the cold, as did every crack and cranny of the ill constructed, hastily put together building.

Most of the Indians had their blankets drawn across their mouths. They held them so until it became necessary to release them in order to pay for their purchases and to receive them from the traders; for which purpose they required free hands.

Under the circumstances, it was almost impossible to distinguish one Indian from another. The Sioux and Cheyennes who were represented were the finest specimens of Indian manhood on the continent. And many of them were above the usual height. The soldiers could not tell which was Rain-in-the-Face.

Now, Meekins had told Parkins, the storekeeper, the errand of the soldiers. The man knew Rain-in-the-Face perfectly well.

He did not dare to point him out, however, nor did he venture to betray any knowledge of Custer's business or interest in the movements of the little group of soldiers. To have done so would have been to incur the enmity of the Indians, who might have dealt hardly with him after the troopers had ridden away. He greeted them, therefore, carelessly, and without curiosity or even interest.

Nevertheless, he did one shrewd thing which was helpful, and to which no one could take issue. He called one of his men and bade him replenish the fire, to make the room as hot as possible.

The dry logs heaped on the embers soon kindled, and the fire threw out a fierce heat, under the influence of which many of the Indians began to loosen their blankets and uncover their faces.

Meanwhile Tom Custer and his men, without appearing too curious, passed in rapid review every man they could see in the crowded room.

The troopers had been provided with money by the officers, and they mingled freely with the Indians, going to the different counters and making little purchases to allay any suspicion.

Custer and Britton at last became satisfied that a certain stalwart savage who had taken little part in the trading was the man they sought. With certain others, he still kept his face covered, so they could not be quite sure.

They did not dare to ask the one-armed trader to identify him. They could only watch him without appearing to do so and wait their chance.

It seemed to the two officers that this Indian who had at last attracted their attention was bigger and fiercer looking than the rest. Outwardly, so far as the heavy and enshrouding blanket enabled them to guess at what was concealed, he fitted entirely to Meekins's description.

They would have given a good deal if the old scout could have been in there, but they had decided it would be best for him not to be openly concerned in the matter.

The soldiers lived in a regiment and kept together. Meekins lived alone, and his duties often brought him in close relationship with the hostiles. If they ever connected him with any mishap to so esteemed a warrior as Rain-in-the-Face, they would never rest until they got him. He would have to leave the country or die. Besides, he was too good a scout to be forced to undergo any risks. The soldiers would need his services later.

The Indian under observation had stood aloof from the rest. He had not done any trading, but he was yet treated with a certain deference by important Indians, who stopped to exchange a word or two with him.

It was that deference, perhaps, which had first caused the two officers to fix their attention on this man. While they waited, they themselves made some purchases, talking with the clerks, speaking to various Indians, and so, perhaps, spent half an hour.

One other thing made them the more certain in their suspicions. They had by this time passed nearly everybody else under review, and not one of them, they were sure, was their man.

They knew Meekins too well to suspect that he had been mistaken. It was this Indian or none, therefore. Just as Tom Custer had made up his mind to seize the man on the chance, the Indian suddenly awoke to action.

He elbowed his way rather imperiously through the press of people toward one of the counters, and the manner in which the others gave way before him as soon as they saw who was roughly shouldering them aside added to the conviction of the two officers.

Carelessly, yet quickly, they also moved, apparently in different directions, but every step brought them nearer to the unsuspicious savage.

The five soldiers in different parts of the room had also kept their officers under observation. Perfectly trained in their parts, without needing a word or gesture even, they, too, slowly began to concentrate on the tall figure of the still closely shrouded Indian.

The latter at length stopped before a counter where some attractive merchandise had caught his eye. Disdaining the clerk, he addressed a few words directly to the one-armed proprietor, who had drawn near. Parkins turned to the shelves, brought down the article toward which the Indian had nodded, and laid it out.

The excitement among the soldiers was tremendous. Even cool, light-hearted Tom Custer felt it; even the veteran sergeant and the steady troopers succumbed to it.

As for Britton, his heart was beating like a trip-hammer. The store was a scene of peaceful trade. In another moment it might present a picture of savage and bloody war. No one seemed to have suspected anything.

Britton, who was nearest the counter, leaned carelessly upon it. Tom Custer brought up just in rear of the Indian. The latter never looked at the soldier to his right. He was as oblivious to the man he could see as to those of whose approach he was yet ignorant, apparently.

His disdain and indifference were only equaled by his superb self-confidence. He hated the white men, the soldiers especially, and he would not recognize them save on the battle-field.

"How much?" came in muffled tones from beneath the blanket; the words being in the Siouan tongue.

Parkins was, of course, entirely familiar with it, and he promptly named the price. With a lofty scorn of bargaining which proclaimed his high position, the Indian released his blanket and reached out his hand for the goods.

As the blanket fell away, the countenance of the savage was clearly revealed. Charlie Reynolds, another famous scout who happened to be talking to the trader, nodded almost imperceptibly toward the man.

There could not be any doubt about it. It was Rain-in-the-Face!

CHAPTER IV.

The Getaway.

BRITTON, who stood to one side, thought he had never seen so splendid a looking savage — haughty, arrogant, high-spirited, fiery, brave. He had no time to reflect upon these things, for Tom Custer instantly sprang upon the utterly surprised Indian. He caught him around the back, pinning his arms to his sides with a grip of steel.

Rain-in-the-Face was taken at a frightful disadvantage. He was a bigger man than his captor and a stronger. He struggled tremendously to get loose, and in perfect silence, sweat from the violence of his exertions beaded his brows, his eyes blazed, his jaws locked as he strained and strained.

Only the initial advantage of the surprise enabled the young officer to keep the Indian from breaking away. But Custer held him with an iron grasp. He struggled in vain.

All this had occurred so quickly that for the moment nobody moved; they all just stared. The next instant the nearest soldier, the corporal, joined the captain.

But even the two of them had a hard time holding the struggling savage. Rain-in-the-Face was disdainfully silent still; but in an instant the room was filled with sounds, the other Indians yelling and shouting madly.

"Shall I—" began Britton quickly.

"We can hold him, all right!" gasped out Custer, now that one of the soldiers had come to his assistance. "Keep the others back till Yates comes."

In an instant Britton had his revolver out. To draw Tom Custer's also from its holster was the work of another second.

Fingers on triggers, he thrust them pointblank into the faces of the nearest Indians. Another second, and those in the front rank were thrown roughly aside.

The sergeant and the other three men ranged themselves alongside Britton, covering Rain-in-the-Face, who had never ceased to struggle, and the two soldiers. Their guns were up and pointed.

Of course, no five men that ever lived could have maintained that position in the face of a resolute assault from so many others.

There were other white men in the store—perhaps a dozen—employees of the agency. But it was not their business to interfere. In fact, under orders from Parkins, they got down behind the counters for safety.

The Indians were brave enough, too, but they were surprised; they lacked leadership. They moved forward slowly and uncertainly, their faces black with hatred, their weapons drawn. They were about to throw themselves upon the little group of white men, who, with their backs to the counter, were ready for a desperate defense.

"Steady, men," said Britton coolly. "Don't fire until they are touching the muzzles of your guns, and then blow 'em to—"

But there was to be no bloodshed in that sutler's store. At that instant the big door at the end of the room was thrown open and Yates, with the first platoon of his troop, burst into the room.

The Indians were taken at a disadvantage. They gave way before the impetuous onset of the white men, and in an instant Yates had driven them to a huddled mass at the far side of the store.

"Have you got him?"

"Yes," panted Custer; "but—"

"Here!" cried Yates.

Some of the soldiers had brought ropes with them, and Rain-in-the-Face was soon tightly bound—as to his arms, that is. So soon as he felt the ropes he ceased to struggle.

He recognized the futility of it, for one thing. It did not comport with his dignity for another. There was nothing to be gained by it. He was trapped.

Custer released him and stood smiling at him, his breast heaving, his breath coming shortly, for the struggle had really been terrific, as the corporal could also testify.

"I never could have held him a minute if I hadn't got the advantage of him on the jump, and it was hard work even for the two of us," he said, brushing his clothes and smoothing down his uniform.

"It was that, sir," panted the noncommissioned officer.

Rain-in-the-Face looked at Custer. There was no smile upon the Indian's countenance. Oblivious to the trooper, he fixed his gaze on the officer. He stared at him with baleful and envenomed glance. He said something, too.

"What's he saying, Parkins?" asked Custer curiously.

"Says he'll get even with you for this."

"He's welcome to try," laughed Custer lightly.

"We can't stay here," said Yates. "We must get him out of here as quickly as possible and away from the agency. They'll raise Cain outside when they see us."

"You're right," said Custer. "Well, give your orders."

No one had as yet left the sutler's store. The soldiers held the door still.

"Britton, you take position at the door with those four men of yours and shoot up the first man that moves," said Yates promptly. "Come on, Custer."

"Here's your revolver," said Britton, handing Tom Custer his weapon.

"Good. I may need it."

"We'll let you know when we're ready. Your horses will be with us," said Yates.

"Very well, sir."

And in an instant the platoon with the two officers and the prisoner moved out of the room.

"Parkins," said Britton as he lined his men up before the door.

"What is it?"

"Tell them that the first man that moves toward this door or lifts a weapon will get his right off the reel. Make it plain."

"I guess they don't need any telling," said Parkins, smiling grimly at the other's words. "They can see it, but here goes."

He spoke briefly in the Siouan tongue. The men nearest him in the front rank of the huddle of Indians in the rear nodded.

They did not really need any telling, as had been said. There was something in the sight of the presented weapons and the bearing of the men

by the door, which warned them it would not be safe to trifle.

Outside the store the square was now seething with excitement. The remaining platoon was surrounded. Just as soon as Yates had called the soldiers together, and just as soon as he had taken half of them into the store, every Indian knew that something had happened.

Just what, they could not tell. And when the troops appeared, dragging Rain-in-the-Face with them, a great roar rose from two thousand throats.

Blankets were dropped, and every Indian seized his rifle. But Yates was ready for them. The lieutenant in command of the second platoon had brought up all the horses. At a word of command his men faced about and confronted the infuriated Indians. Yates mounted his own horse. The soldiers were arranged in two ranks, their horses heel to heel, the prisoner in the midst.

Rain-in-the-Face, who made no resistance and who bore himself with contemptuous dignity, was directed to mount another. He was placed between the lines of troops where no one could get at him. His hands, of course, were still bound, and one of the soldiers tied his feet together beneath the belly of the horse.

Every rifle in the command was, of course, loaded and ready. The troopers fell into lines with beautiful precision. But again the odds were so overwhelming that if the Indians had assumed the offensive, they would have wiped out the soldiers. It was the coolness of the captain, the moral courage back of the whole situation, that dominated it and kept the Indians from firing.

Lieutenant Larned, who had led the other troop away on the deceiving errand, had evidently timed his movements with the utmost accuracy, for, having made a détour through the hills, he now appeared on the outskirts of the great mass of Indians, to the great relief of Yates and the others.

Shouting to them to give way, he came trotting through the unwilling crowd, reporting his arrival to the commander of the expedition.

"Take the horses of Mr. Britton and the four men over to the door of the store," said Yates, after a hearty word of praise. "Captain Custer, will you cover their mounting with your troop, and rejoin the command immediately?"

In a few moments the five men who had been holding the door, with the troop escorting them, reported to Yates.

Meanwhile the Indians had decided to try diplomacy. One of the old chiefs stepped forward and signified his desire for a powwow.

"Anybody here who can interpret?" cried Yates.

"Guess I kin," answered old Meekins, who had kept carefully in the background, but who allowed nothing that had happened to escape him.

He came forward, nodded to the Indian, said something to him, and then listened attentively for a few moments. The old man ceased speaking. The frontiersman turned to Yates.

"He wants to know why you have come here among these peaceful Injuns, who have signed treaties with the great father, an' have seized one of their people."

"Tell him that this man is a bad Indian, that he has signed no treaty, and that he has killed two white men, that I am taking him to the post to be tried for murder. If innocent, he'll be released; if guilty, hanged."

A low growl of rage rose from the troopers, who clearly heard all that passed, and the sound was echoed by the Indians.

"Steady, men; steady," said Yates fiercely. "Remember that this man is a prisoner and—"

"He says," said Meekins, having translated Captain Pates's message and having received a reply, "that this is a big chief, a great man among the Unkpapas; that he is the brother of

Iron Horn, the head chief of that clan, and that they daren't let him go; that you will have to give him up."

"Tell him that I will not give him up, and that I don't care to talk with them any longer. Squadron, attention!"

"Wait a minute, captain," said Meekins. "It won't do no harm to hear what he's got to say."

"Not another minute," said Yates. "You see how they are crowding around us already."

"He says he will give two men for Rain-in-the-Face, three, four. He'll let you take your pick," said Meekins rapidly.

"Not for a million!"

"But, captain—"

"Squadron, forward march!" said Yates, riding to the head of the men.

They had their guns out and were ready to shoot. They wanted the chance, too. Meekins saw that he could do nothing more. He said so to the fierce old chief, who looked the hatred he felt.

"Let nobody fire until I say the word; but if I do, give it to them right and left," said the captain handling his own pistol.

But the Indians gave way sullenly before the forward movement of the soldiers. There was no great chief present.

If Iron Horn himself had been there, or Gall or Crow King or Crazy Horse, there might have been a battle. As it was, the soldiers got free.

The men in the rear platoon faced about from time to time, presenting their weapons, and thus they kept the crowding Indians back.

They retired in alternate sections, and finally succeeded in getting away without a shot being fired. It was a fine piece of work on the part of Yates, and much enhanced his reputation for dealing finely with difficult and dangerous situations.

Now was seen the wisdom of Parkins in not taking any part in the game, for if he had done so, when the soldiers had left the Indians would assuredly have killed him.

Indeed, he thought it best to shut up the store for that afternoon, and to summon his employees as a guard as a measure of precaution.

CHAPTER V.

The Red Heart.

MEEKINS joined the troops when they had got some distance across the prairie and the Indians had given over any pursuit.

"I tell you," said Meekins, riding with Yates and Tom Custer and the other officers at the head of the command, "that was handsomely done by both you gents. Mr. Britton has told me all about what went on in the store."

He looked admiringly at young Custer. "I didn't think you could have done it."

"I think we were fortunate to get away without a battle," said Yates.

"If there'd been a shot fired I'm thinkin' none of us would have got away at all," said Meekins gravely.

"Why, that brave could have eaten me up," said Custer, "if I hadn't caught him at such a disadvantage. Whew! My arms ache yet, and the corporal feels worse. I didn't believe a human being could put such a strain upon them. He could have got the better of the two of us in the end."

He looked back admiringly at the dark and saturnine prisoner who had so well showed them the quality of his strength and courage that it made them almost forget his crimes for the moment.

"You'll be a marked man, Cap'n Custer," said old Meekins gravely, following that look which again the Sioux returned with a bitter animosity he was at no pains to conceal.

"I 'vise you to watch out for him. That brute of a Sioux ain't goin' to forgit your part in the transaction. For that matter, he ain't goin' to for-

git any part you all played. I don't feel any too safe, myself. I wonder if he suspects me."

"Oh, I guess I can take care of myself," said Custer lightly.

"Don't worry about the rest of us, either, Meekins," said Yates coolly.

"Can't help it, gents," replied the scout.

"I was counted some catch-as-catch-can wrestler at the Point," broke in Britton, "but I'd hate to tackle our friend there."

"He said to me if it hadn't bin for you, Mr. Britton, an' the soldiers keepin' the others back, he could have got loose from 'Little Hair' and the other feller, which is the name he has for you, Cap'n Custer," said Meekins.

"I know," returned the captain. "It was fine work, Britton."

"Thank you."

"I'll see that the general gets a full report. I'm proud of you all," said Yates.

"And I guess he's got Mr. Britton marked down special, too," continued the old man.

"He'd better mark down the whole regiment," said Britton lightly. "We all hate him. Look at the men, they'd give their eyes for the pleasure of emptying their guns into him."

"He will. Them Injuns don't forgit. The Seventh Cavalry better look out."

"I guess the Seventh can take care of itself all right," said Yates, greatly amused at the old man's earnestness.

"I guess it kin if these two companies is a sample," admitted the scout.

"Well, we flatter ourselves that they are the two best companies in the regiment."

"Hold on," laughed Britton. "I put in a plea for mine."

"But you all jest look out for him. That there Crazy Horse is a gener'l, an' the biggest medicine man in the whole Northwest is Sittin' Bull. There's goin' to be hell to pay in the spring. An' this day's work ain't made your jobs any easier. This Injun counts for a heap, an' if he swings! Good Lordy!"

"Swing he will if there's any law in Dakota," said Yates grimly.

"For the sake of all consarned, I hopes not. Them Injuns hates being choked in a halter."

"Most men do," laughed Custer.

"This one's next thing to a big chief. Shows what kind the others are when Rain here ain't nothin' more'n a brave. Did you ever hear tell how he danced the Sun Dance?"

"No. How was it?" asked Yates.

"Well you know afore them Injuns is considered full-fledged braves, they got to take part in a Sun Dance. 'Tain't much of a dance for them that's bein' tried out for their courage. The rest of 'em does the dancin'.

"The victim, he jest hangs around an' looks on. The fellers that wants to be counted full growed men an' warriors, has slits cut in their breasts or backs, or anywheres else that the medicine man thinks is a good place, an' they passes a rawhide lariat through the slits an' hangs 'em up on a tree, an' they hangs there till they tears loose, all the rest of the warriors dancin' around an' yellin' an' carryin' on like mad so as to sort a console 'em."

"And drown their groans, I suppose," said Britton.

"Lord, no! None of 'em would groan. He'd die rather than do that. They'd kill 'em, they'd disgrace 'em if they give forth a sound."

"Don't they sometimes collapse under the pain?" asked Tom Custer.

"Not much. If they breaks or moans or gives any human sign of pain they're damned forever!"

"Do any of them ever faint?"

"Oh, yes, once in a while a man ain't got the nerve to endure it. He gives way an' then—"

"What happens?"

"They dress him like a squaw an' call him one for the rest of his life. He gener'lly leaves the tribe an' goes elsewhere."

"But to return to Rain-in-the Face?"

"Wall, I guess them that was charged with the conduct of the operations was a leetle too easy on him, for he dropped to the ground early in the game. Old Sittin' Bull was the chief medicine man."

"How do you know all this, Meekins?"

"I was there. 'Tain't often a white man gits a chance to see that, but I had bin of sarvice to 'em an' our relations was friendly, an' I got a chance so I seen it all myself."

"Well, what happened?"

"Old Sittin' Bull, he was as mad as he could be. He said it warn't no fair trial, it had to be done over, the test was unsatisfactory, it was too blame easy, that the man hadn't— What do you soldiers call it?"

"Won his spurs?" suggested Yates.

"That's it," said Meekins. "Wall, Sittin' Bull wouldn't have it that way, an' what he said went."

"Why are they afraid of him? Is he so brave?"

"Lord, no, he's a coward, but he's a great medicine man. They think he kin make any kind of bad medicine, an' they're a superstitious lot, so they're afraid as death of him, although they really despise him in their hearts. They ain't got no use for a coward, but they're powerful fearful of his medicine."

"Go on, Meekins," said Custer, as the old scout paused and shook his head.

"Wall, Rain was firin' mad hisself, an' he ups an' tells Sittin' Bull to do his worst. If he ain't satisfied with what's been done to lay out the plan of operations hisself, an' that he, Rain, will go through with it. Everybody applauded them sentiments.

"I rather suspected it was a bluff an' that would be the end of things, but that old devil weren't satisfied, an' what does he do but turn Rain over on his back, an' he makes two deep, deep slits on each side of him, jest a leetle above his kidneys. Gosh, I thought he was a goin' to cut him in two. Then he shoved that rawhide through the slits.

"Injuns don't smile in them circumstances as a rule, but Rain, he actually laughed. Wall, they hung him up to a tree an' there he swung. For well nigh a hull day he actually hung there, jeerin' 'em, mockin' 'em, laughin' at 'em, defyin' 'em.

"I never seen Sittin' Bull so mad in all his life, an' he can git some mad. The hide wouldn't give way—the Injun's hide I mean.

"Rain-in-the-Face hung there singin' his war songs an' boastin', an' every now an' then tryin' like mad to tear loose by kickin' an' swingin', but it weren't no use.

"Sittin' Bull would 'a' kept him there forever, I reckon, but Iron Horn protested after a while, an' so did Gall. They said somethin' must be done, but they didn't know jest what to do. I suggested that they put weights on him."

"And did they?"

"They sure did. They dug up some Buffalo skulls somewheres, tied a bunch of 'em to each foot, an' by doin' some powerful kickin' he finally tore loose. I kin see him now standin' tremblin' on the ground all them white skulls at his feet, blood streamin' down his back onto 'em. Other men would have fainted dead away a dozen times after sich an experience as he'd gone through, but not him. He looked jest as proud and haughty as he is lookin' now."

"What happened then?"

"They couldn't do enough for him after that. The squaws took him away an' washed up his wounds, an' treated him the best they knew how, an' they have got some considerable skill in that sort of thing. But it was a long time before he was about again.

"When he did git well there wasn't anybody more respected in the hull Sioux nation than he was. An' since

he killed your hoss doctor and the sutler he has stood higher'n ever. I tell you all there'll be hell to pay if anythin' happens to him. Them tribes is disaffected now, an' if he should get swung for this murder—"

"Well, I guess we can stand up under it," said Yates as they plodded along.

The whole post was out to greet the triumphant little band and its famous prisoner. General Custer received them with great satisfaction. He warmly and publicly congratulated Yates on his skilful conduct of the expedition. He thoroughly approved of every detail of its management.

He was proud of the personal prowess of Tom Custer, and spoke generously of the loyal work of the junior officers, Britton especially, and of the soldiers. The greatest satisfaction and enthusiasm prevailed throughout the regiment and the army over the brilliant exploit.

Rain-in-the-Face was interrogated again and again. He admitted after a day or two of sullen, stubborn silence that he had killed the two men with whose murder he was charged, and he even gloried in the fact.

"You will be turned over to the civil authorities in the spring for trial," said the general. "Meanwhile your quarters will be in the guard-house."

There were two other prisoners in the guard-house, white men, charged with horse stealing. One night, by means of hatchets secretly furnished by some friends of the white prisoners, the white captives cut their way to freedom.

Rain-in-the-Face took advantage of the opportunity to go away at the same time. A few weeks later a friendly half-breed drifted into the post and handed Tom Custer a piece of buffalo skin carefully rolled up and tied with a strip of rawhide.

"Where did it come from?" asked Little Hair curiously.

"It was given to me by a Unkpapa," answered the half-breed, "who said his name was—"

"Rain-in-the-Face!" exclaimed Tom Custer quickly.

"You've guessed it."

With his knife the young captain cut the rawhide lashing. A white piece of beautifully tanned buffalo skin opened before his eyes. Upon the fair surface a little red heart had been rudely drawn, and through it were numberless Indian arrows—the arrows of the Sioux.

"Rather gory but effective," said Custer, exhibiting it to his brother, Yates, Britton, and a number of other officers who happened to be assembled at the general's quarters. "What does it mean?"

"It means that there is war between you and Rain-in-the-Face," said the half-breed.

"It means more'n that," said old Meekins gravely.

"What more?"

"If he ever ketches you he'll cut your heart out an' eat—"

"First catch your Custer," laughed the young officer.

"I am glad he didn't send it to me," said Yates carelessly. "When I die I'd like to be buried altogether," he added.

"Or to me," laughed Britton. "I feel the same way."

"Don't feel slighted or disapp'inted, gents," said Meekins grimly. "He's marked down Cap'n Tom partic'lar, but he's got you all down all right," added the old scout, who did not appear to see the situation in quite as amusing a light as the rest. "If he gits his chance you'll see."

CHAPTER VI.

To the Rescue.

BRITTON was officer of the day. As the buildings were scattered over a considerable distance with many guard-posts he had availed himself of his horse to inspect them.

Plunged in deep thought as he rode he was returning to the guard-house by way of the parade ground. Things had not been going well with him. It had been very easy to get himself involved with Mrs. Granson; it was extremely difficult for him to extricate himself from the tangled web which fate, with much assistance from him, had woven about the two when opportunity had been given.

Of late to Frances Granson had been vouchsafed a brief period of respite. The general had received a request from a new settlement for a troop of cavalry to chase some cattle thieves, and Granson's troop had been sent.

So long as they had to leave the post the general had given them instructions to scout for a week or ten days to the north and westward.

Small parties of Indians on the warpath had been reported from time to time in spite of the fact that winter was popularly supposed to be a closed season for such expeditions, and it was thought that the presence of this small but efficient and mobile force would act as a check upon any further operations by the Sioux.

Everybody knew, of course, that in the spring there would be an elaborate and extensive campaign made against them, but such a demonstration should certainly be sufficient for the winter.

Granson, to do him justice, was a brave enough man, a good fighter and a fair leader, and as his home was so unpleasant—although the unpleasantness was entirely of his own making—he rather welcomed the order.

It was with a feeling of boundless relief that Frances Granson saw the backs of the troopers as they trotted out of the post. She enjoyed a few days of undisturbed happiness.

Yet not so complete a happiness as she had fancied might be hers, because it was obvious that there was some little constraint springing up in the relations between her and Britton. She could not escape that conclusion, although there was nothing tangible to which she could point as a base for suspicion or a cause for resentment, or even a ground for asking an explanation of Britton.

The young man had been exceedingly circumspect in his attention to Barbara Manning when Frances Granson was present. She had been so sure of him that she was not a little blind. Nevertheless, there was something—what she could not tell.

There had never been anything actually wrong in the relations between her and the lieutenant. Sympathy for a woman in distress had been freely tendered originally and as freely accepted.

The affair had been quite platonic in the beginning, but as the course of events ran on it had developed amazingly.

Poor Frances Granson was now madly in love with the handsome, dashing young officer who was but a few years older than she, and much more suited to her than her elderly, dissipated, cruel husband.

And Tony Britton had persuaded himself that he returned her affection. Indeed, it was not difficult for him to arrive at that conclusion, for until Barbara Manning appeared he had thought Frances Granson was the most beautiful and charming woman of his acquaintance.

As to whether Barbara Manning could vie with Granson's wife or not there were naturally two opinions—not in Britton's mind, however.

And yet Mrs. Granson exercised an extraordinary fascination over him, especially when they were alone together. Mrs. Granson, of course, lacked the charm of virgin innocence and youthful loveliness which her rival possessed in such generous measure, but she was yet young and beautiful and not without a great appeal to strength and chivalry because of her unhappy lot.

Indeed, Britton was almost like wax in her hands, although in truth the

melting mood was hers rather than his.

They had been entirely too much together. They had talked of love, they had wondered, they had even made plans. He had drunk deep of the fragrance of her lips in secret.

Now Britton would have been content to have had it stop there forever. Not so the poor woman. He had kindled a fire in her heart that had begun to burn fiercely and showed no sign of burning itself out, and one that he could not quench. Truth to tell, he did not make any great effort to do so.

There had been a tremendous risk in the affair, a terrible danger and an excitement and stimulus to the whole matter. It is more than probable that like would have enkindled like, and that before he knew it the affections of the young officer would have been as deeply engaged as those of the lady.

Barbara Manning, although she would have disdained the rôle, came just in time to save him. At least she hoped so. Before her arrival the two had actually got so far in their love affair as to plan something like this:

At the first convenient opportunity Britton was to get a long leave of absence, to which he was entitled by his length of service. Mrs. Granson was to take advantage of the same opportunity to leave her husband. Britton was to accompany her East, or, if that were impossible, to meet her at her mother's home in Chicago, where, after she had got a divorce, which would not be difficult, he could marry her.

No definite arrangement to this end had been entered into, but the matter had been talked over vaguely, and the lieutenant had gone so far as to apply for the leave. It had been held up, but he had received word that morning that it had been granted; that the month of freedom would begin ten days from the time of his receipt of it. Ten days from that time Captain Granson would be due at home.

The sense of relief which his wife had experienced since he had been gone had been so great that she had made up her mind that come what might she would leave the post before his return, and she was fully purposed that Britton should go with her.

Britton was equally purposed that he would not, and yet he did not know that he would not. The moral consideration suddenly loomed largely before him.

Carried away by the glamour of a secret and forbidden passion he had blithely entered upon the affair. Now he saw that he stood to lose his commission in the army, or if by hook or crook he retained it after such an action as had been contemplated, he would, without doubt, be compelled to seek a transfer to some other regiment which would be almost as bad as leaving the service.

He adored Custer, under whom he had spent all his military life; he was devoted to the other officers and men of the great regiment.

Many a man would have counted Frances Granson as a full equivalent for all these losses, and Britton might have been among their number had it not been for Barbara Manning.

He was now a miserable, distracted man. He felt that whatever happened he would be forced to play an ungenerous, an unhappy part.

He was too fair-minded not to realize that he had led Frances Granson on, and the fact that direction of affairs had now been taken out of his hands did not alter that circumstance.

Now that he had come to love Barbara Manning he knew what love was, and he could divine what was the depth and power of the feeling that he had inspired in Frances Granson's heart.

How could he refuse to carry out his part in the project which had been arranged so lightly? Sometimes what is the honorable course is not so clear as it ought to be, and it seemed to him that having involved the woman in an affection he had no right to repudiate

her just because another woman had come on the scene.

And yet the life he sought to take Frances Granson away from showed him the peril in a life from which love was absent. Loving him as she did he felt that he could not confess that he cared nothing for her except as a devoted and admiring friend, that all he had felt for her had been sympathy.

And yet would it not hurt her worse in the end if they tried to live together and she found out the real state of his affections, as she was bound to do, too late?

A proud woman, Mrs. Granson had gradually withdrawn herself from society, as much as any one could in a small post; and he had been her only comfort and support.

That was the reason she did not suspect Barbara Manning. In short, Britton was in too deep to withdraw. Yet withdraw he must, for all the love in his heart was for Barbara Manning. That young lady treated him with a high hand indeed.

Phillips and Morrison seemed to be in the running and he out of it completely. He had flattered himself that some little glory from the dashing capture of Rain-in-the-Face might have made him a welcome suitor at Captain Eversly's, and indeed he had been welcome at first.

If he had been able to devote himself single-heartedly to Barbara Manning all might have been well, but he could not break away from Frances Granson. He had to divide his time between the two women.

Never for a moment did the latter suspect that she had lost his affection; but she knew that something was the matter and she was miserable in the thought.

She was jealous of Barbara Manning, too, and of every other woman at whom her lover looked. And yet there had been nothing upon which she could put her finger or accuse him. She did not dare accuse him, anyway. She was afraid to strain the tie.

Britton, she had slowly observed, was with Barbara Manning often, but in a regimental post everybody was thrown more or less intimately with everybody else; and Barbara Manning's favors were impartially distributed. If any officer were distinguished over another it was thought to be Morrison, or perhaps Phillips.

Barbara Manning herself was very unhappy. She really cared more for the young lieutenant than she would have admitted, and that he gave a moment's time to Mrs. Granson was almost more than she could bear.

Perhaps if she had spoken or voiced her complaint he might have broken with the other whatever betided, but she did not. She could not speak.

What to do with that leave of absence was the problem that perplexed Tony Britton as he rode quietly out on the parade that morning. Should he avail himself of it?

Should he tell Mrs. Granson? Would she take advantage of the leave and of her husband's absence to go away? Would he go with her? Would he boldly refuse the leave of absence, remain at the post and let her take her own course? Was that possible?

Was it worth while to pursue his apparently more or less hopeless suit of Barbara Manning any further? Would it be better to do this or that or the other?

Immersed in deep thought he mechanically turned the corner of a building and the whole parade lay before him. It was late in February, but there had been a brief warm season and the snow had melted. The level parade was rather soft, but dry enough not to be muddy.

As he turned the corner his attention was instantly aroused by a woman's scream. It was followed by shouts and cries from many men. Across the parade he saw a woman on a runaway horse.

One glance told him that it was Barbara Manning. She was riding a

horse that belonged to Captain Eversly that was reputed to be perfectly gentle. She had taken advantage of the pleasant weather for a brisk canter across the plains beyond the post from which she had just returned home.

Morrison, her escort, had dismounted and was preparing to dismount her when a child's brightly colored knitted cap torn from the head of a little girl passing on the walk and blown by a brisk wind directly into the horse's face had startled him just as his rider had released the bridle.

Even the sanest and best-natured horse will sometimes play the fool. This is no discredit to a horse, because the sanest and best-natured man or woman is liable to do the same sort of thing—on occasion.

The horse bolted. For all his gentleness he was a big, powerful animal, and although Barbara Manning was a good horsewoman, and although she instantly clutched the reins and pulled on the curb-bit with all her strength, she could make little impression on the horse.

Unfortunately Morrison's horse had picked up a stone and had been going lame. His first impulse was to mount his horse again, but he knew that with that stone in his left forefoot the horse would be useless for pursuit.

Frantically he dragged the foot from the ground and jerked away at the stone, Barbara Manning getting farther away every second.

The scream Britton heard had come from Mrs. Eversly, who had opened the door to welcome the two. In an instant it seemed barracks and officers' quarters opening on the parade swarmed with men.

The tall form of the general leading, they raced across the parade, although it was entirely obvious that they never could catch the frantic horse. The cruel curb could not be applied with sufficient force to check him by the woman, and the pressure on his jaws only frightened him the more. With every instant he ran faster.

On the other side of the parade, back of the quarters, there was a low embankment, beyond which ran a ditch toward the river, half artificial, half natural. It was very deep and much too broad to jump, especially at that very corner of the parade toward which the maddened horse was rushing.

Although she put every ounce of power she possessed on the reins the girl was absolutely unable to check or control, and helpless even to direct the horse. Perhaps he had never run away before, and he was the more desperate in his intention then.

Britton had heard the first scream and had taken in the whole situation. He saw the horse headed for the open space in the corner of the parade. He realized in a flash what would happen.

Usually there were several mounted men passing through the parade on various errands. At that moment he was the only one. The gray three-quarter bred Kentucky horse that he rode had also sensed the excitement. His head was up, and he was in a measure prepared for that which he had rarely received and which yet surprised him greatly—the spur.

Speaking to his horse and digging the spur sharply into him, Britton leaned forward in his saddle. With a bound that would have unseated a less unpractised rider the horse sprang forward. In a second he struck his stride and went thundering over the parade in the wake of the flying girl.

Her nervous tugging at the bridle had this effect. She did not quite give the bay his head, and therefore he could not run quite as freely as the other. Yet the thundering of the hoofs behind him which told the story of pursuit kindled his blood still further and added to his now blind terror.

Just as the gray was about to overtake him the girl completely lost control of him. If the horse had been successful earlier in the battle to free

himself the gray would have perhaps never have overtaken him, but his freedom and burst of speed came just too late.

The horses might now have been running with equal speed perhaps, but the momentum of the gray gave Britton just the advantage that he craved.

Across the parade from every direction men were running, except directly in front. So soon as he saw Britton thundering over the parade Custer had waved the men away from the front of the two horses, realizing that it would be more dangerous to the girl to try to intercept the horse and cause him to swerve and throw her off probably than to let him run; although, of course, if Britton had not been there, and if it had not seemed likely that he would overtake the bay, the risk must have been tried.

Anything would have been better than to let the horse thunder over the embankment and into the ditch where both horse and rider would be inevitably killed.

Therefore the way was open. The people running were coming from behind and from either side. Every one in the post was out by this time—the women staring white-faced, the men naturally were yelling. It was impossible to get them silent, although the noise and shouting excited the horse still further.

Inch by inch the gray drew abreast the bay.

"Barbara," shouted Britton, "hold on, for God's sake! I'll be alongside in a minute, and when I catch you release your feet from the stirrups. You understand?"

But the girl was past speech. The terrific violence of her efforts had exhausted her. She was almost in a state of collapse. She could not hear a sound. The wind roared by her ears.

She saw before her the opening between the houses that edged the parade. She knew of the ditch. She thought she was going to her death. She did not realize that rescue was at hand until the moving head of the gray suddenly shot past her staring vision.

With one last supreme effort, spur, voice, knees, reins, soul even, Britton lifted his horse. With one last terrible leap he was alongside.

The two horses were running on even terms. Tightening his grasp upon his bridle and edging his horse close to the bay so that his leg touched the barrel of the latter, Britton threw out his arm. He intended to seize the girl and by main strength lift her from her horse.

Just as his hand touched her she fell forward and, to his horror, slipped sidewise out of his reach!

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.

RETRIBUTION

By Harry Kemp

STEP by step she led me on
Till love grew in my heart;
Then, stretched and quartered, hewn and drawn,
She tore my life apart.

But hush, my soul, for who am I
That dare to chide and blame?
Have I not made another die
Inch by inch the same?

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.

At Rohpore Jacynth makes the acquaintance of Elwin, a subaltern. She finds life in an Indian palace behind the *purdah* vastly different from what she had imagined, but she makes friends with Kathbela, the maharajah's queen, a former dancing-girl. She learns that as soon as her caste can be restored she is to be married to Shamshud Singh, a neighboring prince, whose reputation is not pretty as described to her. Tom starts for India with an aeroplane. Jacynth sends an appeal for help to Elwin, but he is shot and the message returned. Kathbela sends for the maharajah and offers him a nectarine.

CHAPTER XV.

Flight.

NECTARINES were the *maharajah's* favorite fruit. He took it and ate greedily, like one who is eager to hurry on with a meal for the sake of the sweetmeats to follow.

When Kathbela had in turn munched some fruit she poured out wine. The *maharajah* was always suspicious of wine, unless he uncorked it himself. Wine was often a vehicle for more potent liquids not good for the health of kings.

For that reason he had cultivated a sensible preference for champagne, whose sparkle is proof against the tamperer.

As though she read her lord and master's thoughts, Kathbela drank a goodly portion before passing him the goblet. It was a sweet, native wine, and a very little of it satisfied him.

Once more he bade her come beside him on the divan.

"Have patience," she remonstrated. "I would talk with thee. The night is yet young. Thou hast not told me of thy plans, of Shamshud Singh, the marriage-money he will provide, or yet the feasting and dancing that will take place."

The *maharajah* gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"The sum is considerable," he admitted. "More than I would have paid for any virgin. Shamshud, fortunately, is young and being full of

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

desire for a white wife is thoughtless about rupees. For myself I prefer an *ourat* like thee, versed in the weaknesses of the flesh."

Kathbela accepted the compliment, but argued morality in circles. She talked to gain time, waiting until the nectarine, skilfully treated by her own hands, should begin to show its effect. She had no mind to yield to the blandishments of the *maharajah*.

The drug did not take very long to assert itself. Gradually the *maharajah* found it difficult to keep his eyes open. A pleasant feeling of lassitude fell upon him. He began to desire sleep even more than the company of his queen.

"Thou shouldst have sent for me earlier," he grumbled. "It is the hour of sleep."

"Sleep then, my lord."

"Aye, and thou?"

"In thine arms, heart of my heart."

"Come then, *humara bala*."

Kathbela stretched herself beside him and lay very still, holding her breath the better to listen to his. Presently its evenness assured her that he slept.

She moved noisily to make sure. He did not stir. He was deaf to her voice.

That was not enough for Kathbela. She had simulated deep sleep herself before now.

To make doubly sure she pricked his arm with the point of her little dagger, bending over him so as not to miss any telltale contraction of his face. He did not flinch. Her work had been well done.

Allowing herself a faint exclamation of triumph, she slipped off the couch and drew a shawl over the unconscious form of her lord, covering his face.

Then she crept to the window and silently opened wide the shutter. The window, one of the few in the outer walls of the palace, was of reasonable dimensions. A full-grown person could pass through it.

But it was high up, some sixty feet from the ground level, and in the faint moonlight it hardly looked a tempting means of egress or entrance. Far below a velvety sheet of water, that widened toward the rear of the palace, lapped the base of the walls.

At first glance the drop looked sheer. But a narrow ledge of masonry ran beneath the window, slanting to the right for twenty yards or so where it enlarged itself into crumbling masonry thickly overgrown by creepers.

Kathbela leaned out, her eyes searching for a shadow among shadows. The silence was profound. Half a minute passed.

An owl hooted.

Kathbela smiled in the dark. Her lips sent out a just audible whisper:

"Bakshu! Idhar ao!"

Jacynth sat up in bed suddenly.

A voice had called her furtively. A shadowy figure was bending over her. By the light of the *butti* at the further end of the room she made it out to be Kathbela.

"What has happened?" she whispered back, alarmed by the unexpected visit. "Is it—Shamshud Singh?"

"Hush, no. He cometh not till the morning. It is Bakshu Tanan. He is in my room. He waits for thee. He will help thee to escape.

"Make ready instantly. He has fast horses without the walls. He will convey thee to a house in Rohpore where thou wilt be safe. For the rest, thou must make thine own plans. Bakshu will not himself entrust thee to the English officials, for he hath troubles of a private nature with the government. But he will do what I tell him. Therefore haste—*jaldi, jaldi!*"

Jacynth began hurrying breathlessly into some clothes. She had not the least idea how she was to escape, but her common sense dictated the advisability of wearing European clothes.

Fortunately she had a coat and skirt of thin gray tweed at the bottom of her box. This she put on while Kathbela in whispers jerked out instructions.

"Art thou agile? It is a great way from my window to the earth below. Be not afraid, however. Bakshu will help thee. His arm is strong, fashioned to hold women fast." A ring of feminine pride in the masculine strength of her lover came into Kathbela's voice.

"Where is the *maharajah?* Is he out of the way?" Jacynth asked. She was doing up her hair with shaking fingers.

"He is in my room also."

Jacynth stared.

"He sleeps like a pig. I have drugged him. Peradventure he will not wake at all. That would be best. But he will. *Ar-ree bapre!* he will wake!"

"But why is he with thee? Is it safe?"

"Safer while he is with me than away from me. When he comes to me then am I no longer watched. They say, the watchers, 'The *maharajah* rests in Kathbela's arms. All is well. For a space we may close both eyes.' Art thou ready?"

"Does Narain know? Is he coming?"

"Time presses. I had no thought of him. Doubtless the gods will see to that. Wind thy *saree* about thee and about thy head, so that thy garments are not seen. Let us go."

They grasped hands and, moving with the utmost circumspection, began the long and necessarily slow progress in the direction of Kathbela's apartments.

The way was unlighted except at rare intervals. Here and there a glimmer came from the opening of a sleeping chamber, warning them to step warily if they did not want to be heard.

What they had the most difficulty in avoiding were the sleeping forms of women lying in the passages themselves. But for Kathbela's almost feline quality of eyesight and her guiding hand Jacynth would inevitably have stumbled over them.

In those tortuous gloomy passages she would have lost herself. By day she could not trust herself to find her way about them without one of the women to guide her. Fear of discovery and the natural apprehension of one unused to adventure at dead of night made her pulses throb boisterously long before they reached their destination.

Kathbela herself was fully awake to the risk they ran. Had circumstances permitted she would have avoided it, courageous and unscrupulous plotter though she was.

But there had been no time to make a different plan.

She had not expected Bakshu Tanan that night. The signal announcing his coming had reached her little more than an hour ago, and she had had to think and act rapidly in the interval.

The first fruit of this thought had been her invitation to the *maharajah*.

For his part, Bakshu was not a little dismayed when, after swarming up to Kathbela's window he passed through it to find himself not only in her company but that of her husband as well.

At first he imagined he had been lured into a trap. Had the *maharajah* moved an eyelash at that juncture his end would have been a quick one.

Luckily for himself the drug had him in complete subjection. Even when he was assured of that, the point of Bakshu's dagger remained poised over the recumbent man, and his grasp on the hilt did not lessen while Kathbela in hurried whispers won his promise of help on behalf of Jacynth.

So, while the two women were running the gantlet of the sleeping passages, risking the danger of discovery at every step, the *maharajah*, an unconscious hostage to his queen's infidelity, lay at the mercy of his rival's steel.

Kathbela, entering in front of Jacynth, smiled wickedly at the tense expression on her lover's face. Well she knew that had he been discovered, or she failed to return, her lord and master would have paid the penalty with his life.

Her mind did not dwell particularly on the fact that such a fatality had been possible. Rather, it satisfied her to know that her lover's hand was strong and sure.

Very manly in some ways was Kathbela.

"Put up thy *dah*," she signed rather than said, and brought Jacynth up to Bakshu. "This is my lover. He is a *man*. Bakshu, here is thy charge. Deal well with her for my sake. Moreover, remember that freedom for her means Rohpore for thee when the days of that one are numbered." She gave her head a jerk in the direction of the inert figure on the divan.

Bakshu Tanan still kept a watchful eye upon it: his fingers did not leave the hilt of his knife.

"If thou didst deal with me in like manner I would have thrown thee to the crocodiles," he murmured simply.

In the faint moonlight Jacynth could not make out his face distinctly.

He towered above her. He was broad and powerfully made, apparently a young man.

With that scant knowledge she had to be satisfied, although she was about to entrust her life to his hands. This was not a time for questions.

The other two were engaged in hurried low-toned talk, the one giving instructions, the other briefly acceding to them.

Kathbela turned to Jacynth. She had something in her hand.

"Here," she said, "is money, gold, and paper. If thou art successful in escaping, thou wilt need both. Take them."

Jacynth hesitated. She had very little of her own, and the *maharajah* had not provided her with any since her arrival.

"Oh, thou foolish one!" Kathbela impetuously unbuttoned Jacynth's blouse and thrust the purse down securely next to her skin. "There, that is safe, now go. Take her, Bakshu. But one moment." She drew Jacynth on one side. "This is farewell. We may never meet again. Little sister, with all my heart I wish thee well and a safe return to thine own people."

She drew Jacynth to her and kissed her on the forehead. Then, as if ashamed of yielding to a weakness, she pushed her toward the window where Bakshu Tanan waited.

"Go," she whispered, "and take with thee the stomach of a man!"

CHAPTER XVI.

Narain to the Rescue.

WITH hardly a sound, and an ease probably born of long practise, Bakshu passed through the window and lowered himself out of sight.

Kathbela dropped a narrow Persian rug over the sill. She had twisted it so that it might operate as a soft and heavy rope.

Wrapping the end which she retained round her waist, where she securely held it, she assisted Jacynth with her free hand on to the window ledge.

It was a trying moment for the girl. She was looking into an abyss. Far below she could see the glimmer of water with apparently nothing between her and its somber depths.

The sheer drop made her head reel; nevertheless she summoned all her courage, grasped the rug with hands and knees and slid slowly downward.

Kathbela's face was all she could see now. She caught a parting word of encouragement from her, and then Bakshu's hands grasped her feet and held them until they rested on a solid foundation.

She found herself upon the ledge that broke the face of the wall, and

though its width was close on eighteen inches, she grasped at the wall in deadly fear of losing her foothold.

"Take my hand and look not below," whispered Bakshu.

Thus supported she crept after him.

The path sloped downward; it was uneven and sometimes inclined dangerously toward the edge. More than once Jacynth thought she must overbalance and plunge headlong to her death. Panting, she hugged the wall.

But step by step with a vice-like grip on Bakshu's strong hand she kept on.

The ledge dipped, then ended. It seemed to her that beyond it lay only dark space, waiting to engulf them both.

Here Bakshu stopped, gently disengaged his hand and faced about. Stooping, his feet sought rough steps in the masonry.

Then reaching up he gave her his hand again, supporting her while she came slowly down the declivity.

The descent seemed interminable. The steps, such as they were, lay in deep shadow. No two were of the same height. As often as not he had to hold her feet and direct them.

One false step, she knew, would mean disaster for herself and him. It was not a thought to give way to.

She was trembling in every limb, almost exhausted, when the descent abruptly ended.

Dimly she made out a square and level space, and with her back to the wall, collapsed to her knees. Her breath was coming in short quick stabs, she was weak with exertion and sickening fear, but the level space and the cessation of movement were like a reprieve.

Bakshu, too, was glad of the rest. He had felt the double strain upon his muscles.

For a little while he leaned against the wall waiting for a renewal of strength.

Here, the outer edge of the masonry was broken by foliage. When Jacynth had recovered sufficiently to notice anything she got the impression that it belonged to some tough and tenacious creeper. A glance upward moreover told her that quite half the descent was over.

She was vaguely associating the two ideas when Bakshu made a movement.

"Now, for a little while I go," he said. "Rest here and be not afraid. I will return with a rope to assist thee down."

She nodded, and he went, letting himself down by the creeper. The rustle of its leaves proclaimed his progress.

It was slow but apparently safe, for not once did the snap of a bough reach her.

Presently it ceased. The silence of the night enveloped her.

At first, in spite of her perilous position, she welcomed the rest. But as the minutes went by and Bakshu Tanan made no sign, an eery feeling came over her.

Here she was, perched in space, unable to go forward or back, waiting for one who was over-long in coming.

Perhaps he was not coming! Perhaps he had deserted her.

She fell a victim to almost childish panic, and had to fight down a scream that rose in her throat. If the situation continued much longer she felt she would be in danger of losing her head.

It seemed years before the blessed rustle of leaves again fell on her ear.

Faint at first, it momentarily increased; accompanied by other sounds: the scrape of feet against rock, the intake of deep breaths, and she knew that Bakshu Tanan was mounting toward her.

Presently his head and shoulders appeared over the edge of the wall.

With a last heave he raised himself, and stood beside her a little winded from the exertion of the climb. Then from his waist he unwound a length of rope, tied a loop at one end of it and adjusted it under her shoulders.

Jacynth was quite docile. She did not need to ask what he intended. It was clear to her that the only way of escape lay downward, and that she must make it with the help of the rope.

She put only one question as she stooped to grasp the creeper.

"What is below?"

"A boat," he said. "One of my servants is in it. As soon as thou hast reached it he will signal, and I will descend. Grasp the rope above thy head and place thy feet against the wall as I lower thee."

He payed out a foot or two, and she swung clear.

The bushes stung her face. The tautened rope under her arms cut into her.

Then her knees hit the tough stem of the creeper, and her skirt caught and tore against innumerable projections.

But her feet told her that the descent was not quite vertical. Sometimes they rested on projections of the rock face, and so relieved the strain under her arms.

Still, the descent was painful and nerve-shaking. It seemed ages before she caught the sound of water lapping against a boat's sides, and when a man's arms at length grasped her she subsided limply into their keeping.

She did not faint, but closed her eyes for a little while, waiting until her weakness should pass off. When she opened them she saw the silhouette of two figures, one of whom was silently propelling the boat; the other, Bakshu, bent over her solicitously, but in a manner that was slightly proprietorial.

"All is well," he said. "There is no pursuit."

She saw that they were slowly receding from the palace. It towered black against a sky of lighter hue.

What lay on the opposite bank she could not see, but she remembered the view from Kathbela's window, a sandy waste of low-lying ground, and knew they must be making for it.

While she pondered this the boat grounded. Three horses showed up murkily against the sky-line.

The man in the bows said something, and a reply came from the bank. Bakshu Tanan started up.

"What sayest thou?" he demanded sharply.

"*Huzoor,* he is a *babu* seemingly. He asks for aid," said the voice.

"Aid against what? Whom does he fear?"

"That I know not, *huzoor,* but he testifies to having escaped from the palace yonder."

"It is truly spoken," broke in a second voice that thrilled Jacynth with gladness, for it was the voice of Narain.

Bakshu Tanan jumped ashore. Intuitively Jacynth knew that the action boded ill for Narain.

She was about to call out that he was her servant, when an inspiration came to her that she would serve him best by keeping silent. She was sure he had some plan that a word from her might spoil.

She would wait for her cue, and take it from him.

"Who art thou?" Bakshu demanded irascibly.

"Narain Khumar Ghose am I called, excellency," came the reply.

"What dost thou here?"

"I seek aid. I am in danger."

"From whom?"

"The *maharajah.* He seeketh my life. It is a matter of money." The whine of the suppliant came into Narain's tone. "But I am innocent, excellency. False witness has been borne against me—"

An exclamation of impatience broke from Bakshu. "What are thy misfortunes to me? Doubtless thou art guilty. Thy manner proclaims it. I am not here to succor thieves. Get thee gone!"

He turned away, but Narain followed him to the bank.

"Excellency, truly am I guiltless. Let me sit behind one of thy servants

for a little way, I beg thee. A few *kos* and I shall be safe. Or if not upon the horse's back then the assistance of a stirrup-leather."

Bakshu was helping Jacynth out of the boat.

"Poor thing!" she whispered. "It is little he asks. Will you not grant it?"

Her intervention had one good effect. It set Bakshu thinking of the risk of leaving the fugitive behind as a possible informer of the manner and direction of their own escape.

"Since thou dost wish it," he said; and added to his *syce:* "Let him run beside thee, but look to it that he plays us not false by returning."

A torrent of gratitude, that sounded truly genuine, broke from Narain's lips. He called Bakshu his preserver, his benefactor and his father and mother. He called down benedictions from the gods on his head with a whole-heartedness that might have gratified their recipient, had he not been occupied with the more important matter of pushing on.

Mounting one of the horses he helped Jacynth up beside him.

The two men were already in the saddle, riding abreast, giving Narain the support of the stirrup-leathers between them.

The going was rough. Where they could they cantered, but frequently the horses were forced to walk.

Fatigue and the oppressive heat of the night had enervated Jacynth. She sat supported by Bakshu's arm drowsily listening to the plod of hoofs going through loose sand and thin grass and the tinkle of curb-chain and stirrup-iron.

The excitement of Narain's unexpected and more than welcome presence had passed off. How and why he had succeeded in following her was a question her tired mind could not answer.

For the moment it was enough that he had done so. It gave her a feeling of security.

An hour went by. Bakshu made few attempts at conversation. They were out of the rough ground now, cantering easily along tracks just discernible in the moonlight.

The ground had risen and fallen behind them. The palace was lost to sight. The easy action of Bakshu's horse lulled Jacynth to sleep.

The sleep and the distance covered might have been long or short. Waking abruptly she had the conviction that long before this they should have reached Rohpore.

She looked about for signs of habitation: all that was to be seen consisted of thin jungle and here and there a marshy pool.

"Where are we?" she asked over her shoulder, and getting no immediate answer said: "Hast thou lost thy way?"

"To have gone by the road would not have been safe," returned Bakshu.

The statement was a mere evasion. He had not intended to take her to Rohpore, at least directly.

Ultimately he might do so. But at the *dâk* bungalow there, which, according to Kathbela, was to be her destination, he would have found a caretaker and perhaps some European visitors.

Either would be a hindrance to the project he had in view.

Bakshu was not entirely a villain, but being of an inflammable disposition where women were concerned he had been unable to resist the charms of this English girl. Close contact with her from the moment he had helped her out of Kathbela's window had stirred his susceptibilities.

For hours now he had ridden with an arm round her waist. Throughout, she had not shown any disinclination to this contiguity.

It did not occur to him that she regarded it with indifference. Had she not lain quiescent in his embrace, with head nestling upon his shoulder and the scent of her hair in his nostrils?

And because of her association with

Kathbela, he took it for granted that her moral views were not over-rigid ones. Moreover, Kathbela was, or ought to be, quite aware that he was no great admirer of womanly virtue. Her own lack of scruples was an excuse for not keeping faith with her.

True, he was her lover, but he was not at all decided in his mind that he should want to make her his queen in the event of his succession to the *maharajah's* throne.

To begin with, she was childless. That was a serious drawback to his Oriental mind. As a mistress and an ally in the camp of the enemy she was desirable enough, but the joys of possession were wearing off.

He did not just then make these excuses to himself, but they were at the back of his mind all the same, and explained his somewhat brazen mental attitude toward the girl who shared his horse.

She was once more on the verge of sleep when she became aware that they had stopped and that facing them was a building of some sort. Though no light showed anywhere in it it did not occur to her that it was unoccupied.

Bakshu Tanan lifted her from the horse.

"We will rest within," he said, and turned to his servants. "Water the horses, and wait until we are ready to continue the journey."

Narain wondered at the object of the halt. He did not know where Bakshu was supposed to be taking his mistress. All that he could do was to be at hand, always at hand, as ordained by the gods.

The *syces* led the animals away, but Narain, footsore and fatigued as he was, stood his ground in case Jacynth should need him.

Bakshu produced a small electric torch from his pocket and lit the way with it, guiding Jacynth across a dilapidated veranda to a room bare of everything but some worn-out floor-matting and a broken cane chair.

"Why, the place is not furnished!" she cried in dismay. "Is this the *dâk* bungalow? Please call the caretaker. Surely, there must be some better room than this."

Bakshu adopted an air of easy gallantry.

"The *dâk* bungalow is still some distance away," he said. "Here we are safe from pursuit—and interruption."

"But I don't understand. Kathbela said—"

He interrupted her with an impatient gesture.

"We do not need to consider Kathbela, thou and I. Where the gods make opportunity shall the plans of an absent woman thwart them?"

Even then she did not take his meaning. The idea of molestation did not occur to her. She was very tired and sat down on the one flimsy chair which he had dragged forward.

No sooner had she done so than he threw himself at her feet, embracing her knees.

"What is Shamshud Singh's loss is Bakshu's gain," he said ardently. "Come, let us not lose precious moments. Thou art more truly beautiful than Kathbela, for thy face is without artifice."

With unexpected vehemence he put his arms about her and drew her to him.

She was confounded with indignation. She felt unable to make a sound. She tried to struggle, but was quite powerless in his fierce grasp.

"I have dreamed of this," he murmured exultantly. "Long have I desired to hold a white woman as I hold thee."

He had loosed his arms to take her face between his two hands and bring it close to his.

It gave her a moment to win free.

"Are none of you to be trusted in this country?" she cried desperately. retreating from him.

"I ask not trust, only love. Who could resist thee?" He advanced on her persuasively. "See, I am big and

full of youth. I can make the moments rapturous for both of us."

She could retreat no further. Her back was against the wall. Fear had hold of her now. It made her faint.

"Think of Kathbela. Be true to her!" she implored.

"Kathbela is gathered fruit," was the contemptuous reply. "Fruit that lieth on the ground is free to all men, belonging to none. Do not shrink from me. If thou didst know what true pleasures are thou wouldst run to me, panting like the deer to slake thy thirst at my thirst."

He crushed her to him again, and this time her fear found voice. She screamed.

He covered her mouth with his big hand, silencing her.

But Narain had heard the cry. He raced in its direction, and guided by the spot of light made by the electric torch, burst into the room.

Bakshu faced round furiously. A torrent of abuse broke from him.

But Narain did not quail before it, nor did the other's bull-like strength make him falter. A divine courage inspired him.

With a rapidity surprising in one of such frail build he placed himself in front of Jacynth. His hand shot out, and Bakshu, completely taken by surprise, found himself covered by a revolver.

"Dog!" Narain flung the contemptuous word at him. "Wouldst thou molest a woman in her hour of need?"

CHAPTER XVII.

The Great Swamp.

FOR half a dozen seconds neither made a movement. Bakshu felt impotent. In the light of the torch lying on the floor he could see a determined look in Narain's face.

But for his dagger he was unarmed. He could have crushed the life out of his opponent had he been able to get at him, but the mouth of the revolver gaped full at him. A touch and it might go off.

He had no doubt now that he had been taken in by Narain, that he was a spy of the *maharajah's*. In that case it was extremely likely that he was being followed, had all along been followed.

Once convinced of that his thoughts went to his horses. He backed away involuntarily.

"Go quickly or I fire," said Narain, suspicious of the movement.

"Pig of a *babu*, thou shalt pay for this!" snarled Bakshu.

But he went, followed by Narain with his finger close on the trigger.

It was trembling. Luckily for him, Bakshu did not observe this. He was anxious to get into the saddle.

Narain saw him mount, wheel sharply, and ride off, followed by the *syces*. Then the revolver dropped from his nerveless fingers.

Reaction had set in. Narain came of a caste in which the fighting instinct had been in abeyance for centuries. A crisis had revived it, but only momentarily.

When he reflected that he had been on the verge of shedding human blood, his gentle nature was appalled.

The unbroken silence brought Jacynth on to the veranda. With Bakshu Tanan's departure much of her fear had passed away.

It had been of a different order to that which had inspired Narain; nor was she, like him, affected by a tragedy averted.

That peculiar absence of physical courage, or, rather, the inappreciation of physical danger in its full sense, so common with the majority of women, now made her the calmer of the two.

When she found Narain leaning against one of the posts in a state of collapse she was alarmed.

"What is it?" she asked. "Are you hurt?"

"No, but my heart is sick," he murmured.

"But he has gone. We are no longer in danger. Oh, Narain, how can I thank you? You saved me from him!"

"It is like a most distressing dream from which it is good to awaken."

"There is nothing dream-like about your revolver, or the way you handled it."

She saw it lying on the floor and picked it up. It was a cheap Belgian weapon, for which Narain had paid twelve and sixpence in London. When she handed it to him he opened it, and his fingers fumbled mechanically with the breech.

An exclamation of surprise, that changed into one of distinct gladness, broke from him.

"What is it?" she inquired.

"Bear witness, highness, it is unloaded!" he cried excitedly.

Jacynth felt the cartridge chamber. It was empty. To make sure she carried it to the light. Then she looked at Narain in a bewildered way.

"Was it empty when you pointed it at Bakshu Tanan?"

"Thanks to gracious goodness!"

"But why?"

"Otherwise I might have killed him. Now my soul is free from the shadow of a blood-stain!"

Jacynth could not follow this reasoning. The advantages of an unloaded revolver were too subtle for her.

"But have you no cartridges?" she demanded.

He searched the folds of his *cummerbund* and at last extracted two.

"The rest must have spilled while I ran beside the horses," he explained.

Thought of the horses recalled him to the present.

"Highness, for a surety, Bakshu Tanan will return and exact vengeance. We should be wise to go hence."

"But where can we go? Where are we?"

"Where we are I know not; but we must endeavor to make our way to Rohpore. All night we traveled north. I observed it by the moon. Rohpore, therefore, lieth to the right hand."

"Come, then; let us go," said Jacynth.

Narain picked up the electric torch, switched off the light, and tucked it into his waist.

"Perchance we may need it," he said, as he led the way out.

While they had been in the building the sky had brightened. High up it still remained a monochrome of darkest blue; but in one direction the horizon showed pale and opalescent.

Narain stood watching it. But for that herald of the rising sun he would not have known which way to turn.

"The east lies there," he said. "We should go in that direction."

But they could see no path toward the east, so, for the present, they retraced the track they had traveled overnight. Their choice of this direction lay in the fact that it was not the one by which Bakshu Tanan had departed.

"With the rising of the sun we shall find a way," said Narain.

Almost as he spoke its red disk showed over the horizon.

Day came with tropical suddenness. Facing them, the sky turned to a blaze of amber fading into pale rose and purple at the zenith. In the same moment the face of the country about them stood out sharp and clear.

And then Jacynth got a vista of flat marshy land stretching for miles before it merged into jungle, with higher ground on its further side. No road or track could she see, only still pools and larger sheets of water divided by great stretches of reed-beds and stunted trees.

From this her attention was diverted to Narain. He was muttering to himself; his eyes were full of vacancy. Listening she caught these words:

"'*Danger compasseth her feet; yea, unto the mouth of the pit that*

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

The great swamp! The pit that hath no name!

This was the third time she had heard these places mentioned—once by the *poonghi* in the palace courtyard and subsequently by Narain on the day he had carried her letter to Elwin.

Now he was repeating them again. It sounded uncanny.

She was about to ask him what he meant when she remembered the vision he had spoken of, and her healthy mind, which disregarded anything occult, dissuaded her. Narain's Oriental temperament, she argued, was prone to mental delusions, and fatigue was probably responsible for this one.

Narain came out of his dreamlike state, searched for a path, and found one. Although it pointed into the depths of the swamp he did not hesitate to take it. It was distinct and firm, and must lead somewhere.

He was quite normal now, with all his thoughts concentrated on guiding Jacynth into safety.

For a time they went on in silence. As the sun rose higher the heat increased. No air circulated among the low-lying reed-beds. The stagnant water of the pools that lay along their path gave the atmosphere an enervating humidity.

Jacynth was soon bathed in perspiration and parched with thirst. She looked longingly at those pools, but knew that to drink from them might mean death.

Once when she paused beside one she saw a moving form below the surface, and started back with a shudder on discovering it to be a crocodile.

Thirst was not the only torment they had to endure. They were hungry. It was many hours since either had eaten, and yet how and where they were to obtain food was an urgent question to which they could find no answer.

"I cannot go any further," Jacynth said after hours of endurance. "We must rest, Narain. Here is a little shade. When we are cooler we will go on again."

They sank down exhausted into the shade of one of the few trees that dotted the marsh, talking only intermittently. During this rest Jacynth learned how it happened that Narain was then with her.

On the previous evening a premonition had come to him that danger in some form threatened her beyond the palace walls. Some force which he could neither explain nor control sent him out of the gates before they closed for the night.

The same force ultimately took him to the spot where Bakshu Tanan's horses were in waiting.

To Narain it was simply a manifestation of the power that, where Jacynth was concerned, had guided him throughout.

She herself looked upon it as a Providential coincidence for which she could not be too thankful.

The rest of their journey across the desolate waste was one long drawn-out torment. Hunger and thirst and the fear of being benighted drove them onward; the scorching sun and utter weariness weighed down their footsteps.

But no word of complaint came from them. To Narain their position was one controlled by destiny. Jacynth buoyed herself with hope. She was out of the palace at any rate. Somewhere beyond the swamp she felt there must lie help, food and water.

Until near on sunset their predicament underwent no change; but when they were debating the question of shelter before darkness should fall on them they noticed that the ground began to rise.

Soon the miasma of the marsh was left behind. As they pushed on the jungle closed in on them.

It gave them grateful shade, and presently something more.

A faint tinkle fell upon their ears, the blessed sound of running water. They stumbled on at a redoubled pace and came abruptly on a tiny water-course that trickled across their path on its way down the slope toward the marsh.

On hands and knees they drank and drank. Jacynth could not tear herself from the cool and assuaging stream. She bathed her face, steeped her hot hands in it.

Narain saw how reluctant she was to move, but a glance overhead told him that darkness would soon be on them.

For her sake, more than his own, he did not care to contemplate passing a night in the jungle with its stalking beasts of prey.

"We must not linger," he said, and muttered something about food and shelter.

"But where are we to find them?" she asked piteously.

Narain's face was lifted. He was scenting the upper air much as an animal would.

"Yonder, I am constrained to think there be men," he answered in a voice the dubiousness of which she missed.

The path turned and twisted, but its general direction still tended eastward. As they went on the ascent grew steeper, but the jungle to either side became more dense as the sun descended.

Rounding a bend it shut them in like high walls; then suddenly, abruptly, it ended, and they were standing, holding their breaths, gazing down at a dead and deserted city.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Pit in Reality.

IT lay in the hollow below them, a gigantic heap of broken masonry, a checker-board of fragmentary palaces, temples and houses, overgrown with grass and desert-like scrub.

So they stood for perhaps five minutes, watching the flush of the setting sun tinge the ruins a deep and yet deeper red. Then night came down like a canopy, and the whole scene was blotted out.

But both had had time to catch sight of a thin spiral of smoke. It ascended from behind a broken wall almost opposite where they stood, and a few hundred yards away.

"There must be people there," whispered Jacynth. "We must try and get to them."

"Wait," advised Narain. "Presently our eyes will become accustomed to the darkness."

A minute or two sufficed for that. A spangle of stars gradually spread across the sky. The rays of the young moon seemed to gather strength.

Narain pointed to the path that zigzagged downward like a dim ribbon, and cautiously led the way.

Jacynth found the descent sharp but easy. A little further on they got on to comparatively level ground. All they had to do was to avoid the heaps of débris that here and there impeded them.

A little way ahead they could distinguish a broad, straight road that ran through the center of the city. It was only a matter of minutes before they reached the beginning of it, and then, for the first time that day, they were able to walk abreast.

Jacynth unconsciously edged nearer to Narain. She had the eery feeling of being in a dead world. The silence, the gaunt walls, the age-worn silhouette of broken pillars and gaping cloisters, were of sepulchral significance. A terrible remoteness brooded over the place.

Further on they found it necessary to proceed with caution. The surface of the road was fissured. Sometimes they found themselves on the edge of old reservoirs whose depths were lost in blackness.

Black shadows thrown by towers and pillars fell across their path, making every step uncertain.

These were trying moments to Jacynth. She was weak with hunger, terribly footsore, unutterably weary. Had it not been for the wreath of smoke which she had seen earlier, her courage would have failed her.

All along she and Narain had been trying to locate it. Now, deeming it to lie more to their left, they turned into a transverse road that gave in that direction.

Hardly had they entered it when they found their way barred by a huge mass of fallen masonry. To avoid it they took a course among the buildings on one side.

Here they got into a labyrinth of walls, and were on the point of turning back when a broad flight of steps, leading apparently in the direction for which they were aiming, tempted them to descend.

Reaching its foot, they stood for a moment in a flagged courtyard, looking with misgiving into a cavernous opening which seemed to be the entrance to some underground building.

Then there came a rush of feet. Two figures leaped out of the shadows, and they were roughly seized.

A hand was placed over Jacynth's mouth, stifling her belated cry. She was lifted off her feet and borne toward the opening into the blackness of which a moment earlier she had been looking.

Behind her she could hear the second man following with Narain.

She could see nothing. Not a ray of light broke the jetty darkness. But her bearer hurried on apparently sure of his way.

It seemed to have a downward slope. The air grew cool. It had the earthy smell peculiar to underground passages.

A turn, and she was being carried down steps, interminable steps between rough walls. She could hear the brush of the man's sleeve against them.

Where the steps terminated there was a faint glimmer of light.

It came from a *butti* in a niche of the wall, and it showed Jacynth a bare stone chamber with a passageway at one side and two iron-studded doors at the other. It showed her also the drawn and anxious face of Narain, and their captors, two powerful men.

Without resisting, because they knew it would be useless, they were propelled toward one of these iron-studded doors. It was swung open, and they were pushed into a large, but bare, cell.

It was of stone and windowless. High above them an iron grating permitted some sort of ventilation.

Against the walls two charpoys faced one another, and a *chatti* of water stood on the floor.

They were too dumfounded to speak. Then men did not utter a word. But the silence was broken by a voice, hated and familiar.

"Veree good business! Oh, quite excellent!"

Startled, they looked up to see Rajanath in the doorway regarding them with gloating though tired triumph.

Jacynth cowered. The sight of the little man filled her with greater dread than all the danger she had recently gone through.

He personified captivity.

He came into the room, limping a little, rubbing his hands unctuously. He also showed amusement.

"You have run in circles," he said. "Do not look so cast down. Capture was inevitable. We all meet again. Very good. Here we are!"

"Where are we?" asked Jacynth fearfully.

"In a place of confinement," was the glib reply. "A little private quod. Oh, veree good place to come to!" he gurgled with satisfaction.

They felt like rats caught in a trap. How had Rajanath known where to find them, since their coming to the place had been purely fortuitous?

Rajanath had not known. After scouring Rohpore and the main roads about it, he had wandered on to the deserted city.

It was the last place in which he expected to find the fugitives. The way to it was known by few of the palace people, and certainly could not be to these two.

Rajanath liked to think of the "pit that hath no name" as a state secret. He regarded in much the same way as the governor of the Bastille must have regarded an oubliette of that awe-inspiring fortress.

It was not altogether chance that had taken Rajanath there, however. He was distinctly apprehensive of returning to the palace empty-handed. A longer absence would, perhaps, convince the *maharajah* of his zeal.

In the deserted city, moreover, he would be able to pass the night and, at the same time, treat himself to the exercise of a little of that authority over the guards of the pit which his officious soul always found so grateful.

When, therefore, shortly after reaching it the lucky capture had taken place, he was almost beside himself with joy. It made him forget the bruises caused by a painful fall given him earlier in the day by the horse which the *maharajah* had commanded him to ride.

Jacynth was regarding him with something of the look that one sees in the eyes of a ferretted rabbit.

"How did you know we were here?" she could not resist asking.

"How did I know?" He made a sweeping gesture that was meant to comprehend heaven and earth. "Rajanath knows everything. He never fail. In the morning we will return to the happy home. For the mean time I graciously wish you good sleep. I cannot put you apart, for the accommodation is limited."

For that small mercy she was devoutly thankful.

"I should not advise you to make off with yourselves," he went on unctuously, enjoying his command of the situation. "There are guards innumerable without who will seize you uncomfortably and bring you back. You are quite snug. Have you any longing for food? I will give the order for some."

He departed after a final backward glance of satisfaction.

The two natives followed him. One of them returned shortly with a small quantity of food, enough only for one person.

Jacynth had to be very firm in persuading Narain to share it with her. It was only when she threatened not to eat at all if he refused that he gave in. Inadequate as it was it, at least, temporarily allayed their hunger.

All Jacynth's hopes of freedom had now left her; but she was too worn out to weep or otherwise spend herself. Nature, taxed to the uttermost, demanded her toll.

"It would be no harm to sleep a trifle," said Narain, observing the struggle she was making to keep awake.

He spoke in English. It pleased him to relapse into her language. He had always been a little proud of his proficiency.

The English-speaking Indian is prone to this mild form of conceit.

"I suppose they won't harm us?" Jacynth asked, a shade mistrustfully. "If I go to sleep you must do the same. Poor Narain, you look awfully done up."

"My looks are weaker than my spirit, which is untireable," he declared valiantly. "Still; as you order it I obey, and take the recumbent."

Jacynth lay down on the charpoy, and in less than a minute was sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion.

Narain kept awake as long as he could. He did not anticipate further danger, but he, nevertheless, placed his revolver beneath the cushion at his head. Then, before he was aware of it, he, too, dropped off into profound sleep.

While they still slept, and some hours later, the heavy door was slowly and silently opened, giving entrance

to a figure that, in spite of the complete darkness, moved with no uncertainty.

It came to a stop beside Jacynth, and passed its hands over the sleeping form with a touch so light that she did not even stir. Timid, speculative fingers touched her face, tracing the features with such gentleness that it inspired in the sleeper a dream of an English garden and butterflies that brushed against her cheek.

Then the figure crossed over to Narain's charpoy, and from its foot upward those fluttering fingers reached his face, pased on, and came into contact with the cold barrel of his revolver and closed upon it.

At the same moment Narain awoke.

He had heard nothing, felt nothing, but his super-sensitiveness made his mind receptive to the faint movement, and he became conscious of a third presence. It affected him uncannily. He groped for the electric torch, switched it on, and looked wildly around.

For a single moment, so fleeting that he could not be sure whether he was the victim of illusion or not, he saw the figure of a woman in the doorway—a white-faced woman with tragic eyes.

A white woman! He leaped from his couch.

Something went wrong with the torch. For an instant the current failed. When he got it working again the figure had vanished.

Except for himself and Jacynth the place was empty, the heavy door shut.

Narain's movements had awakened Jacynth.

"What is it?" she inquired.

"But a moment since there was one within the room," he answered, staring at the shut door. "I was awakened by a touch."

Something more than tact kept him from telling her what he had actually seen.

"I expect it was a dream," she murmured drowsily.

He was beginning to agree with her when instinctive precaution sent his mind in search of his revolver. He could not find it.

"It is no dream!" he cried. "I cannot find my shoot. It has been taken!"

"Your revolver gone?" Jacynth was wide awake now. "Why, you put it under your head when you lay down. It can't have gone."

"It is quite gone," he asserted in dismay.

They began a search for it, but without success. Had it been anywhere in the room they must have come across it. Obviously it had been taken.

As they reached this conclusion Rajanath came in. It was just dawn, and he saw no object in losing more time in getting them back. He had been gone a day from the palace already.

"The horses are in readiness," he said briskly. "Let us take time by the forelock—very good English expression. What do you seek?"

"Narain has lost his revolver," replied Jacynth.

"It is not the only thing he will lose," said Rajanath, with grim suggestiveness. "Very good loss," he added. "Firearms are confiscatable property at all time. We go."

One of the men stood without carrying a lamp, and preceded them up the stairway. It was an intolerable climb, and though Jacynth knew it could not lead to liberty, she made it willingly.

She wanted to get away from this mysterious, fear-haunting donjon. Although she had not been told so, she felt morally certain that she and Narain had had a brief but none the less sinister experience of the "pit that hath no name." Its long subterranean passages, the close air, and the darkness, were things she would never forget.

Just then, while under their full subjection, there came the sound of a

muffled explosion. Startled by it, she stopped. Rajanath also came to a halt.

The report, evidently that of a fire-arm, set him thinking of Narain's lost revolver. With a hurried word to the lamp-bearer to keep guard over the prisoners, he turned and descended quickly.

Ten minutes or so elapsed before he returned. As Jacynth perceived, he held the missing revolver in his hand, but his face showed no agitation. If anything, it conveyed a certain relief.

And yet she could not help the conviction that deep down, somewhere in that noisesome labyrinth, a tragedy had but just occurred.

For some indefinable reason it awoke in her a feeling of intense pain and unutterable grief. Her eyes went to Narain, silently questioning him.

To her surprise he was trembling. Great beads of sweat stood on his face.

The ascent was continued, and at last they emerged, but not at the spot that had given them entrance.

This, however, they hardly noticed. They were too overjoyed at getting back to the blessed light of day and the fresh morning air.

From a cavelike opening in the broken wall, almost screened by bushes, they passed into an open, sunlit space. Around it stood half a dozen troopers of the *maharajah's* guard and, in addition, three riderless horses.

Pointing to one of these, a vicious-looking black entire, Rajanath said to Narain:

"Take the black *budmash,* thou. Thy days are numbered, so if he kills thee it matters not."

He helped Jacynth on to one of the other horses and mounted the third himself.

It was a matter of minutes before the black could be induced to let Narain scramble into the saddle. It bucked and reared and did its best to trample him like the devil Rajanath had designated it. Narain could hardly keep his seat.

Jacynth observed the fear he exhibited, and, though full of her own misery, felt terribly sorry for him.

But the expression of fear that had come into Narain's face was not entirely due to the difficulties he was experiencing with the black horse. He had been anxiously watching Rajanath, who on coming into the light had opened the breech of the revolver and extracted one of the cartridges with which it had been charged.

That one had been fired!

As Rajanath threw it from him, Narain was smitten as with a revelation. Across his brain there flashed certain enigmatical words of his vision: the swamp . . . the pit. . . . There to render means of escape to one who hath long sought it . . .

A twelve-and-sixpenny revolver, bought in a Strand gun-shop, had fulfilled one prophecy of the gods!

CHAPTER XIX.

Shamshud Singh.

ON the morning following Kathbela's administration of the incapacitating drug, the *maharajah* awoke late.

For a little while he lay still, drowsily wondering what had brought him to her apartments. The tray of fruits and the flagon of wine stimulated his memory.

At the wine he made a wry face and clacked his tongue. He must have been in a very amiable mood overnight to have imbibed any of the sickly stuff. He wished he hadn't.

He could hear Kathbela in an adjoining room alternately singing and scolding her women. She never lost an opportunity of twitting him about his age and infirmities, points on which he was sensitive.

If she would come in now she would be sure to rally him on his sluggish habits and probably make indelicately pertinent remarks on his other failings. So he slipped away before she could do so.

A glance at the sundial in the courtyard told him that it wanted but an hour to noon.

The maharajah pulled himself together. He hurried on to his own quarters.

The first thing he did there was to fortify himself with the best part of a bottle of champagne. It remedied the odd taste left in his mouth by Kathbela's wine, but it took away his appetite. He could not face the meal that seven menials set before him. Instead of eating he installed himself in a corner of the courtyard with his matutinal pipe and dose of opium, and sent for Rajanath, who should have been in attendance already for the customary game of *pachisi*.

Rajanath came, but not to play *pachisi*. His turban was crooked and his clothes disordered. His undistinguished features expressed the greatest dismay.

On him devolved the official and domestic management of the palace. He was responsible for everything, from the commissariat to the crown jewels. And but an hour ago he had made the appalling discovery that the chief gem in his king's collection of valuables, Jacynth to wit, was missing!

To say that he was frightened does not properly express his feelings. He dreaded being dismissed from his lucrative post more than death itself.

The maharajah frowned at his disheveled appearance.

"Why comest thou in the guise of a sweeper?" he demanded. "Art thou distraught?"

Rajanath threw himself on the ground. His turban rolled off and his back hair came down. He was quite oblivious of his ridiculous appearance.

"Wo! Wo!" he wailed. "We are betrayed! They have outwitted even Rajanath, who slumbers with both eyes open. They are fled. Search has been made everywhere. They are not within the walls!"

"Cease thy noise," thundered the maharajah. "Who hath gone? And since when?"

"Her highness, thy daughter, and the servant, Narain. For two hours have I caused search to be made!"

"For two hours?" The maharajah was furious. "And why was the news not brought to me on the instant? Because thou didst think to escape my wrath if thou couldst discover them? Fool! Miserable ape! Meat for crows!"

Rajanath cringed and whined and wrung his hands.

The maharajah lashed himself into an ungovernable rage. The unfortunate creature drowned in the torrent of it. No invective was so strong but that it was not capped in the next breath.

In the past, present and the future Rajanath, his forebears and his descendants, were cursed unconditionally and exhaustively.

"Which way have they gone?" panted the maharajah, when wind rather than words failed him.

"I know not, Heavenborn! But on the further bank facing the queen's apartments there are the marks of horses' hoofs—of three horses, and beneath the queen's window there is broken masonry and creeper which has become torn away from its mother-wall. Yet that the queen is concerned with the escape is not credible, for last night thou wert with her and of a surety thou wouldst have been a witness of it."

Such logic should have been irrefutable, but the maharajah saw the flaw in it.

He had slept. He had done nothing but sleep. To save his own face he would not admit as much to Rajanath, or that he suspected his own queen.

This reticence had the effect of redoubling his fury. He bawled out instructions. Men and horses were to set out instantly and search for the fugitives. They were to split them-

selves into four parties, so as not to miss an inch of ground.

Rajanath was to split himself up into four quarters, too, and go with each. He was to ride the black stallion which no man could sit. He was not to change horses on pain of death. If the black stallion threw him and stamped upon his head, it would save the maharajah the trouble of a public execution.

There was no more miserable creature in the whole of India than Mr. Rajanath that day.

When the search party had clattered off, the maharajah made a reconnaissance on his own accord. He inspected the wall beneath his wife's window, noting its abrasions and the track of withered leaves made in the creeper below it.

His face took on an ugly look. He was practically certain that Kathbela was involved in the escape, and with his indignation at white heat he went off to accuse her of it.

He found her apparently absorbed in the innocent task of embroidering huge red and green spiders on a square of canvas, which, judging by other similar works of art about the room, was ultimately destined to become a cushion-cover.

A visit from her lord at such a time as this was entirely without precedent. She guessed at once what it portended, but maintained an Oriental and entirely feminine calm—the calm that all the world over is so exasperating to a man in a bad temper.

Her little brown hand, loaded with its glittering rings, rose and fell as she manipulated needle and silk with tantalizing indifference to the storm that convulsed him.

"So thou hast conspired against me, thou bad one!" he cried in a threatening tone.

She looked up, as if only just aware of his presence.

"Dost thou speak of thy daughter's escape?" she asked evenly. "It is as I thought. And what have I to do with it? Seemingly, thou sharest the foolishness of the weak-witted Rajanath! But an hour ago he sought me, offering me money if I would tell him in which direction to search! There it lieth on the floor where I scattered it. Take some, lord. Doubtless it was stolen from thee."

The suggestion momentarily diverted his wrath. The sight of money lying about—money in profusion—was irresistible to one who loved gold more than he loved anything else.

He gathered it up, and Kathbela considerately found him a bag to put it in.

"He shall forfeit this for his insolence," he said.

With the bag of money held close to his chest, some of his excitement died down. After all, the girl was sure to be found, and in addition to Shamshud Singh's gift of money, here was he in possession of Rajanath's bribe to his queen.

The thought had often occurred to him that all women were slightly mad. He had seen Jacynth cast away a ring of great value as if it were a two-anna bauble, and now it seemed that even the mercenary Kathbela could scatter gold!

He returned to his grievance.

"There is but one way by which they could have gone," he said suspiciously. "The marks beneath thy window show it."

"Oh, there be marks beneath my window! Of a truth there should be, after the gambols of thy tame leopards. Two nights ago they were at large, as thou probably knowest."

He did not know, but he had no evidence to the contrary. The leopards were sometimes loose at night.

For a little while he stood thinking.

"Last night I slept. What didst thou do?"

Kathbela laughed shrilly, showing little teeth red with betel-nut. She looked like a small and rather fierce animal of the tiger tribe.

"*Arre bapre!* Hear him!" she

cried. "What did I do? All night I waited for thy caresses; sleepless, counting the hours, wherefore thou upbraidest me for perfidy! Is it so thou wouldst keep a hungry wife faithful?"

It was no argument, but it silenced him. Such scoffing always touched him on the raw. A capacity for gallantry was not one of his strong points, though he liked to delude himself to the contrary.

"Shamshud Singh will be here on the morrow," he said, more pacifically. "It is natural that I am overwrought. What shall I say to him? How make the hours pass? He is very European. Doubtless he will desire to see his bride before the marriage day."

"If thou canst not entertain him, send him hither," said Kathbela wickedly. "Even from behind a curtain I can make a man take delight in a woman."

The maharajah did not doubt that. To let her tempt his son-in-law-to-be was the last thing he desired. He wanted him for Jacynth, and to that end he wanted Jacynth back above all things.

The prospect of losing her and the lac of rupees Shamshud would bring as her dower was too terrible a thought to dwell on.

He was full of wrath when he left her. Last night's wine (he was very vague about last night, and could only come to the conclusion that Kathbela must have beguiled him into drinking more than was good for him) and this morning's champagne, combined with much altercation, had completely upset him. He had a nasty taste in his mouth, a bad headache, and a worse temper.

The two former he had to endure, but he got rid of a good deal of the latter by visiting it on every one who approached him.

One of the first to feel it was the keeper of the leopards. Though the man swore by all his gods that the animals had not been at large for several days, the Maharajah did not believe him.

When he still maintained his statement the Maharajah had him bastinadoed.

Then he went off to the cook-house and charged his head cook with having attempted to poison him. Punishment in this case consisted of the culprit being made to eat three green *chillis* each the size of a small cucumber.

When he was rolling on the floor in agony and gasping for breath the Maharajah left him to look for another victim.

Hardly any one in the palace escaped him. That day he turned it into a house of pains and aches and lamentation.

When he had done his work he sat and brooded over the most suitable infliction he could impose on Rajanath when he got back. In his present state of mind he considered the ordinary forms of torture too mild for his factotum. He would have enjoyed crucifying him.

But the afternoon and evening went by without a sign of Rajanath.

Some of the men he had taken with him returned after a fruitless search. They could tell the Maharajah nothing.

Night fell, and still no Rajanath. Figuratively speaking, his Highness of Rohpore went to sleep on a bed of empty champagne bottles.

Next morning, curiously enough, he was in better spirits. A feeling, almost a conviction, possessed him that Rajanath's continued absence must be due to the recapture of his daughter. Otherwise he would have returned for the night.

It was therefore merely a question as to which party would arrive first—Shamshud Singh's or Rajanath's.

In any event, Shamshud would not fail to appear, so the Maharajah began the day with the making of a gorgeous toilet suitable to the reception of the wealthy suitor and the treasure-box which would undoubtedly accompany him.

A little before noon signals reached the palace from horsemen, previously despatched for the purpose, of the Jam of Tetri's approach.

At once the whole place hummed like a disturbed hive. Men ran aimlessly to and fro in the courtyard, the guard noisily sought their arms and their horses, cooks and servants chattered volubly, the green shutters in the women's quarters opened and shut stealthily and a low murmur of excitement came from behind them.

Then two antiquated cannon began banging a salute from the ramparts.

The discharge of the first was accompanied by a yell of pain from the man in charge of it.

Afterward it was ascertained that in his zeal for a good report, he had used about a quarter of a pound of powder as a priming and an ordinary safety match to ignite it. As a result he was nearly blinded and entirely deprived of his eyebrows and hair.

By this time the Maharajah was in the courtyard ready to receive his guest. The guard had clattered out and lined up before the open gates, awaiting the approach of a big and powerful car rapidly nearing them.

It came on, swung into the courtyard, and pulled up. Out of it leaped a young man of slight and agile build, clad in white linen of a make and cut that proclaimed the tailoring of Bond Street.

Except for his turban and his face, by no means an ill-looking one, he was outwardly quite English.

In one other respect he conformed with his surroundings. He had brought a garland of jasmine, and with this he went forward to meet his host and place it about his neck. The Maharajah, equipped with a similar garland, returned the compliment.

That ceremony over, Shamshud Singh at once reverted to the manners of civilization, in his case acquired at Eton and Oxford.

He linked a genial arm in one of the Maharajah's and looked about him.

"This the way indoors?" he said in fluent English. "By Jove! I sha'n't be sorry to get out of the sun. I came on without much of a stop. Keen about your daughter, you know. She's nearly English, isn't she?"

The Maharajah nodded.

"That's good. My tastes are entirely English. By the way, the usual sort of caravan's coming on—elephants and horses, luggage and truck of that kind. Hope you'll be able to find room for 'em all. Can I have a wash and a brush-up before we start a *buk?* But have a look at my car first. She's a top-power Rolls-Royce. The road was simply awful, but she averaged over thirty. We ran over two coolies and one *pi*-dog, that's all. The dog's dead, but the coolies got up and cursed."

The Maharajah was delighted to find Shamshud Singh such a spirited conversationalist. Although he didn't understand half he said, he hoped he would keep on talking at this rate. It would help to make the time pass pending Rajanath's return with the fugitives.

He enthused over the car as much as it was in his nature to enthuse over anything, and then escorted his august visitor to the quarters that had been assigned to him.

Although they were the state apartments and the finest in the palace, all modern conveniences were conspicuous by their absence.

Shamshud Singh rattled on merrily.

"Great Scott! You are behind the times! In my place I've got hot and cold water laid on everywhere, and electric light, too. I'm having no end of a fine bath-room built for Jacynth—that's her name, isn't it?—pink marble with silver fittings. Thought it would please her, you know. She'll be able to sit in it and eat mangoes to her heart's content. Is she fond of mangoes?"

"I know not what she is fond of. I have so many women and no time to discover all their likings," was the evasive reply.

"What does she think of this marriage-without-being-asked business? A bit trying for a girl brought up in England, what? I hope she'll like me when she sees me. Of course, you'll arrange we have time to make each other's acquaintance beforehand, won't you? *I* sha'n't keep her *purdah*, you know.

"Oh, I forgot to mention it—I'm going to have our wedding ceremony filmed, if you've no objection. I've brought the machine and the chap along."

"Filmed? What is that?"

"B'Jove! I forgot! Would you rather I talked Hindustani? I'm not very good at it. You see, I went to England when I was ten, and I only returned six months ago."

"My daughter speak very good."

"Oh, does she?" Shamshud Singh looked a trifle disappointed. "I hope she hasn't been learning it on my account. And now—can't I see her?"

The Maharajah's face was beginning to wear a worried look.

"Oh, no; first we must eat, and then discuss the otherwise arrangements," he said craftily.

"There isn't much to discuss, is there? You asked for a certain amount—a dashed lot, sir—and I wrote a check. Here it is. May as well give it to you now as later. As to a bit of a snack, I'm your man."

The Maharajah looked suspiciously at the check, but he took it. It seemed to him a very insignificant equivalent of a lac of rupees, the amount he had stipulated for. Morever, the figures, in pounds English, had a relatively meager look.

Still, he was sufficiently familiar with the rate of exchange to know that eight thousand pounds had the same value as one hundred thousand rupees.

He would much have preferred the amount in silver. Then he could have sat up all night counting and gloating over it. He was about to put the check in the folds of his sash when Shamshud remarked casually:

"I've post-dated it, of course."

The term was a strange one to the Maharajah. It applied to the check, however,; so he asked its meaning. Shamshud explained that it deferred payment until after the marriage.

When the Maharajah understood his jaw dropped.

"If it is possible to tell the *bank-wallah* not to pay the *chit* a week hence, how do I know he will make payment later?" he asked in dismay.

"Oh, that'll be all right," declared Shamshud Singh; and the recipient had to be satisfied.

All the same, he felt that the young man was not reposing very much confidence in him.

Another grievance he had against him was that he ate nearly as quickly as he talked. The meal which the Maharajah had hoped would prolong matters was soon over.

Moreover, Shamshud Singh was abstemious. He would not drink more than a half glass of champagne.

As time went on he fidgeted, and at last grew importunate.

"Well, now, I really think I must ask you to let me see my future wife," he said with a firmness that the Maharajah did not like. "It isn't your wedding, you know; it's mine, and I'm naturally interested in the lady. Which way?" He got up.

The Maharajah put out a detaining hand.

"She may not be in readiness," he temporized. "I will go and prepare her."

He shuffled off, to make cautious inquiries about the search party.

It had now been gone some hours. Suppose it were unsuccessful! The prospect alarmed him.

No Jacynth, and a post-dated check dependent on her wedding day!

The wild and unscrupulous thought occurred to him of passing Kathbela off as his daughter. She was young, she was comely, and she spoke English.

But her skin was not white, nor did she in the least resemble the photo-

graph which doubtless had caused the susceptible young monarch to hasten to Rohpore.

The Maharajah was in a quandary.

"She sleeps," he invented without originality on his return. "When she wakes and has attired herself, they will send for thee. Shall we play *pachisi?*"

Curbing his impatience, Shamshud Singh politely acquiesced. They adjourned to a shady corner of the colonnade overlooking the courtyard.

From here the Maharajah, forgetting that Shamshud had eyes as well as himself, was able to command a view of the surrounding country. He wanted to be prepared for the approach of the search-party. Then he would find some pretext for conducting Shamshud below, and so keep him in ignorance of the real state of things.

As it happened, however, his attention became absorbed in the game. Shamshud, on the other hand, was bored by it. His eyes were more often roaming over the surrounding country than directed on the board.

When they were in the middle of their eastern variant of the game of drafts he detected a distant cloud of dust.

"Are those my people?" he wondered aloud. "No; they're riding too fast. Mine wouldn't come that way, either."

The Maharajah, deep in a projected move, looked up. The group of spots on the plain resolved itself into horses and their riders moving at speed. They could only be his anxiously expected troop.

Were they bringing back the runaways? And if so, would Rajanath have the sense to ride round some other way?

He doubted it. If Rajanath had been successful he would be excited; and the man had no diplomacy. He was all fatness, cowardice, and splutter!

As the party came nearer he thought he could make out the figure of a woman in its midst. The next moment he became sure of it.

He was immensely relieved. He shot a sidelong glance at Shamshud Singh.

"Let us finish the game within," he said. "The sun will be on us soon."

"Oh, not for another hour at least. Still, if you prefer it. Let's see what all those Johnnies are up to first, though. Looks as if they've got a woman with 'em. She's flopping all over her saddle. Seems dead beat."

But the Maharajah was fidgeting to be off. He interposed himself between Shamshud and the view.

"It is only my *sowars* exercising the horses," he mumbled and led the way below.

At the foot of the steps he turned to avoid the courtyard, but Shamshud did not follow him farther. He was not used to being marshaled about at the whim of a host. The *laisser-faire* of English country houses where guests do as they like was more in his line; and he simply did not understand anything else.

So he remained watching the oncoming horsemen with a boy's interest.

The Maharajah was on pins and needles when the party wheeled up at the gate, waiting for it to be opened. When they entered two of them took charge of the young native who was riding a black stallion and led him off, apparently under restraint.

The girl, Shamshud Singh observed, was white—white of skin, and paler still by reason of extreme fatigue. She wore a gray coat and skirt and a white blouse. Her hair had come down and fell in disorder about her shoulders. Her eyes looked as if they were on fire.

A little man slipped off his horse's back and rather roughly helped her down.

He recognized her then by the photograph. This was his future bride, who at that moment was supposed to be asleep in the women's quarters! And she looked as if she had not closed her

eyes for nights, as if she had been tortured.

Rajanath, panting and perspiring, almost pushed her up the steps. He did not see Shamshud Singh. He had eyes only for the Maharajah.

"Thy Rajanath hath ridden like the wind!" he cried vainglorlously. "We fell upon them even as—"

He caught a look in the Maharajah's face that petrified him. At the same time he became aware of the presence of the bridegroom-elect, and the words stuck in his throat.

Shamshud Singh could not make things out. Why had the Maharajah lied to him? Women did not ride in the heat of the day. He went eagerly toward Jacynth with his hand out.

"I'm Shamshud Singh. Have you had a good ride?"

Jacynth looked at him for one long moment.

"A good ride?" she echoed. Then her voice cracked. "Oh, my God!"

CHAPTER XX.

A Decree of Death.

THE exclamation, harsh and full of bitterness, might have come from a man. Only a woman in extremity could have spoken in such a tone.

She stood there limp and spent, with vacant, miserable eyes, inattentive to Shamshud Singh and everything else around her.

Then a laugh broke from her, cracked and mirthless. It was the prelude to a thing she had never before exhibited—a fit of hysterics.

She went off into peal after peal of that same laughter, and the courtyard rang with the uncanny sound.

The maharajah turned angrily on Rajanath.

"Take her away. Bring her to her senses. *Maro!*"

Shamshud Singh wheeled sharply round.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Beat a woman? You don't mean to say you do that sort of thing? She's got hysterics. She can't help it. I don't know what the deuce you've all been up to to make her like this; but—"

"She ran away," struck in the maharajah sulkily.

"Why?"

"Because she is mad. Like all white people."

Jacynth's attack of laughter subsided abruptly. She had the look of a person startled out of sleep.

Shamshud Singh patted her hand reassuringly.

"You're awfully upset, poor little girl," he said. "I should go and rest if I were you."

His eyes were kind. She read sympathy in them. Sympathy was in his voice.

"Thank you," she said weakly. "I—I will. I believe I've been making a scene. I'm sorry."

She spoke to Rajanath, who was about to follow her.

"No, I don't want you. You make me worse, you horrid little man!"

Shamshud offered his arm, and with a certain grave dignity she took it and walked wearily in the direction of the womens' quarters.

There Shamshud had to leave her. He had grown very grave, and stripling though he was, his tone when he addressed the Maharajah was full of authority.

"This is all very strange to me. I must ask you for an explanation. Now, what is it? Be as beastly frank as you like. If she's taken a dislike to me say so. Only I won't be left in the dark."

The Maharajah saw that the time for evasion was past.

"We will tell thee all," he said meekly. "Rajanath, I shall need thee to piece together the narrative. My head is revolving."

They went indoors, and there Shamshud Singh was given their version of his intended wife's escapade.

Being an astute young man he was able to put two and two together and to feel heartily sorry for Jacynth.

If she had expected to be forced into marriage with a younger edition of the type of which the Maharajah was a specimen, no wonder she had run away, poor child.

"But now that we are forewarned," said Rajanath comfortably, "we shall be able to overcome her resistance. She will not escape again. She will be guarded with discretion—oh, guarded most particularly!"

The Maharajah nodded in agreement.

"That is so," he said. "Everything will now proceed. In three days we can consummate the marriage. You will transfer her to yourself, and then we can go to sleep," he added wearily. "Rajanath, go tell the women to robe her in order that she may receive the heavenborn with formality."

But Shamshud Singh here made a gesture of dissent.

"I'm not in a hurry at all now," he said. "She's got to rest. I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll just scribble a note to her."

He tore a leaf out of his pocketbook and wrote hurriedly:

I can quite understand you've been through a rotten time on my account. What sort of an ogre did you think I was?

Don't bother to see me until you feel inclined. I can wait.

And get it out of your head that I'm a beast of prey waiting to pounce on you and bear you off. I'm nearly as new to India as you are, and this marriage is just as rummy to me as it is to you, except that I can't help looking forward to it. Forgive me for saying that.

All the same, I sha'n't make it an excuse for intruding myself on you. Please buck up! "There's a sun still shining in the sky," and a very hot one out here!

When we're married I'll take you straight off to Paris or England for the honeymoon.

England! London! Good old place!

SHAMSHUD SINGH.

P. S.—I've brought a cinema show affair along with me. It will have arrived by the evening. There are some good pictures. I'll send the chap along to your quarters when you're rested to amuse you with it. There's one of me playing polo at Ranelagh. I'm pretty decent at polo. Do look out for it.

I'd like to see you to-morrow morning if you're feeling fit enough. Then, if you don't mind, we can have an unreserved talk. It will be better for us both.

When Rajanath went off with the note, Shamshud Singh avoided the controversial subject of Jacynth. Disappointed though he was at the turn of events, he was gentleman enough not to show it.

He would have to take them as they came; but he had made up his mind that he would not in the future want to cultivate his prospective father-in-law's acquaintance over much. He thought him rather an unpleasant person.

As for Rajanath he would have liked to make him feel the toe of his boot.

Concealing these feelings, and trying not to show how bored he was, he talked on to the Maharajah.

All the time he was thinking of Jacynth, of the coming meeting between them, and of the probabilities of ingratiating himself with her. He had fallen deeply in love with her with boyish ardor, deeply, if harmlessly, and in a spirit of nice honesty.

About three o'clock that afternoon his retinue arrived, leisurely elephants with lordly *howdahs,* elephants laden with gifts of silks and precious stuffs after the manner of the East.

A camel bore the cinematographic apparatus and its operator. There was a pianola and the latest thing in gramophones for the Maharajah, and an assortment of gauds for the women of the palace.

He had even ordered a batch of dressed dolls from Calcutta, for the inmates of the zenana are fond of such childish things. After the manner of impetuous youth, Shamshud Singh had done things quickly, but he had done them thoroughly and well.

The Maharajah was in great good humor with his share of the cargo. In a way he thought of it as loot. To lay Shamshud Singh under contribution was the chief pleasure he got out of the domestic transaction.

If he could have held him to ransom as well, he would have had nothing else to wish for.

He kept Rajanath at the pianola until his legs ached, accompanying him on the gramophone the while. It was a much larger and louder one than his own, and the discord of the two instruments going at once so gratified his musical tastes that temporarily he forgot his post-dated check.

From behind her shuttered window Kathbela had watched Shamshud Singh's arrival. She liked his looks.

Assuming, as she did, that Jacynth was beyond his reach, she thought it rather a pity that the Maharajah was too jealous to let her exercise her wiles upon him. To her it was like being excluded from an entertainment that others were enjoying.

The only pleasure she expected to get out of his visit was the vicious one of anticipating the fracas that would ensue directly he became aware of his bride's elopement.

When, ultimately, she was a witness —again from the privacy of her shuttered window—of Jacynth's ignominious return, her consternation was only equalled by her disappointment.

How the escape had miscarried she could not conceive. She took it for granted that Bakshu Tanan had loyally carried out his share in it.

On the spur of the moment she was about to go direct to Jacynth in order to condole with her and resolve her own doubts; but that struck her as a possibly dangerous course. She was under no illusions as to the Maharajah's belief — and Rajanath's, for that matter—in her complicity with the captives. To show anxiety about them might confirm the two men in their suspicions.

Then again Jacynth would probably be in a state of excitement and indiscreet. She might say things that it was as well should not be overheard.

Altogether, Kathbela decided it would be best to bide her time and so avoid further dangerous complications.

Jacynth, on her part, was at first too exhausted and low-spirited to go in search of Kathbela. Dressed as she was, she had thrown herself on her bed and remained there until she had energy enough to bathe and get into clean and cool clothing.

She had received Shamshud Singh's note. Somehow it confirmed the impression of sympathy and good-heartedness with which she had credited him. Those two minutes in the courtyard had convinced her of his honesty.

His note made her feel better. Its wording was kind, and its unconventional English very human and comfort-giving.

Its first effect on her had been to suggest a relationship with "home," an emotion she had almost ceased to feel.

So two hours elapsed before she was ready to go to Kathbela. Kathbela must be told everything.

There was Narain, too, to inquire about. She was very anxious to know what had been done with him. It was her duty to see that no harm came to him on her account.

Kathbela did not hear her come in. She was at her window overlooking the courtyard where the Maharajah and Rajanath sat together talking.

She could not hear them, of course, but she knew as well as though she had that Jacynth, Narain, and herself were the subject of conversation.

Screened by the shutter, she followed the play of their features, watched every gesture with the understanding of a sixth sense. Kathbela was pretty bad at the written word, but she could read character and faces like other people read large print.

She whipped round sharply when Jacynth called her by name.

"Speak low," she whispered without preamble, and took the precaution of looking down the passage beyond the doorway.

Then she came back, wasting no time in lamentation, only seeking to be informed.

"How didst thou come to be taken?"

Jacynth answered her with an impatient gesture.

"We were lost. We wandered for hours. We came to a swamp, to that place — the 'pit that hath no name.' We spent a night there. Rajanath was there before us. We were caught in a trap. We hadn't a chance."

"All this I do not understand. What of Bakshu Tanan? Did he not take thee in safety to the house in Rhopore of which I gave him many directions?"

For a moment Jacynth forgot her own troubles. She saw the queen's lips tighten and her eyes narrow in doubt—doubt of her lover, the man she had believed in.

That was because Jacynth had not been prompt with her answer. Quick as lightning Kathbela had noted her hesitation and argued ill of it.

"What of Bakshu?" she demanded.

"He is at his own place, I suppose."

The two women stood looking into each other's anxious eyes. One was waiting to hear her doubts confirmed, all tension, with rage behind it; the other searching for the easiest way to impart unpalatable news.

Jacynth wanted to spare Kathbela's feelings, her pride and sensibilities. But Kathbela's acute perceptions had already told her all she needed to know on that score.

"He was false to me—and to thee," she said. "Do not deny it, for I know. Moreover, do not be afraid to wound me. It is not in me to care for any man deeper than the stab of a flesh wound. It is of thee I would hear now, and wherein his misdoings concerned thee. Do they know he was with thee?"

"No, they cannot. He took us to a deserted bungalow in the opposite direction to Rohpore."

"Us?"

"Narain and me. He came, too. He was waiting on the further bank with the horses. Bakshu Tanan did not want him to come, but he hung on to the stirrup leather of his servant. In the dark I could not tell the way we went."

"Why did Bakshu take thee out of the right course?" Kathbela's eyes were like knives.

"To—to make love to me. I think he went mad. Narain came when I shrieked, and—and sent him off. Narain had a revolver. He would have shot him if he had not gone. That was only the beginning."

In short, breathless sentences she told the rest of her story; of their interminable tramp across the swamp, of their wanderings at night amid the ruins of the dead city, and then of their dread underground experiences after being captured.

Throughout their talk Kathbela had not expressed sympathy in words. That was not her way.

But Jacynth knew very well what her feelings were. They showed in her face — disappointment for her friend, dejection because of the complete failure of her plans, and humiliation on her own account.

Concerning Bakshu Tanan she was doubly wroth, as much on Jacynth's account as her own. She was not the type of woman to weep over the duplicity of an unfaithful lover; rather would she make him a bad enemy. She felt very venomous now toward him.

"Men!" she exclaimed with angry contempt. "To other men they will pass their word and remain steadfast; but to a woman they will act treacherously at the first shadow of desire for another. Men! Bah!"

She gave a vicious twist to the leaf in which she rolled her betel-nut and paste. It signified how much she would

have liked to accord the same treatment to Bakshu Tanan.

Men were necessary to her, as she to men. But, like many of her class, she was antagonistic to them.

Calling out always the base in man, she saw man only as base.

"He shall pay for this thing," she said more deliberately. "He shall pay in the days when I again control men."

Jacynth did not know what she meant by the cryptic utterance and was too worried to ask. Besides, she was really indifferent as to what had happened to Bakshu Tanan. She regarded him as she would have regarded any other offensive thing from which she had escaped.

She went on to tell Kathbela of the incident of the pistol shot. She had had no opportunity of exchanging views about it with Narain.

"And the horrid sound of that firearm going off underground filled me with a feeling so strange that I cannot describe it. Why should some one have stolen Narain's revolver, and what did they want it for?"

Kathbela's brows were drawn.

"Of that I can say nothing, for I know nothing. But of this pit—" Her tone became cynical. "*Now* the reason I have heard no mention of it before is plain to me. The *shikar* doth not inform the tiger of the trap; the king is silent to his queen concerning his secret prison house."

"I want to find out where Narain is," said Jacynth. "I am anxious about him."

Kathbela summoned the woman Illima and sent for him. When she returned there was a look of triumph on her face, hardly concealed. To be able to carry a refusal to the queen was like belittling her authority.

"He is not suffered to come," she said flippantly. "He hath conspired against the Maharajah, and it is decreed that he shall die at dawn!"

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.

UNFULFILMENT

By Jane Burr

ALL round the world, there's not a land
Where human beings tread
That has not served me supper and
A pillow for my head;

I've reeled in music—dreamed in art;
I've loved and hated, too;
I've been within my hungry heart—
All faithless and all true.

I loathe each loss—I curse each gain—
Mere knowing sinks to wo,
Without the one supremest pain
That I would die to know.

This pointless jest! This poor heart-break!
God's promises defiled!
My white throat throbs—my full breasts ache
To bear and nurse my child!

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.

Monica is now very rich. She makes an appointment with Frank at her house, wanting to give him money as a wedding present for his approaching marriage with Phyllis Raysun. Moraine learns of this and warns Hendrie, who, with some detectives and the sheriff, surprises Frank, just after Monica has handed him money, and arrests him for burglary. Frank makes no denial, because he is unwilling to involve Monica, and he is sentenced to five years in the penitentiary. The trial has been kept secret, and Monica, hearing at length of the secret trial, is desperate, and breaks her oath to her dead sister. She tells her husband of the story of Frank's birth, and he immediately obtains Frank's pardon. Frank, however, is so embittered that he hides himself.

CHAPTER XXV.

A Young Girl's Purpose.

WITH her determined little chin thrust into the palm of her hand and her elbow propped upon the window-ledge of the railroad car, Phyllis made a delightful picture of country simplicity.

A commercial traveler had vainly striven for hours to attract her attention, his florid face set ready at a moment's notice to wreath itself into an engaging smile, should she chance to glance in his direction.

Then, too, a youth, in the company of an elderly female relative, had gone through a severe process of neck-wringing, several seats in front of her, in the vain hope that her interest in the absurd fields of wheat might abate in his favor.

Besides these it was a curious fact that this particular car demanded so much attention from the train-crew. One official bore down on her and, with unusual courtesy, asked her if he should open a window near her to cool the air. Having achieved his purpose of receiving smiling thanks, he added a few remarks, passed on, and another came along and threatened pleasantly to close it, as he was sure she was in a draft.

Through it all the girl's whole interest seemed to lay in the wonderful cloth of gold spread over the world through which they were passing. That and its trimmings in the shape of farmhouses, small settlements, townships just starting, verdant bluffs, and gleaming rivers, all of which glided swiftly by, a delightful panorama before her wondering eyes, as the transcontinental mail swept across the prairie-lands upon its east-bound journey.

It was nearly noon when the conductor of the train entered the car for perhaps the tenth time that morning. Phyllis saw him moving down the aisle, and from force of habit got her ticket ready. But the amiable man spared her this time. He hurried along toward her, and, with the sigh of an overworked man, dropped into the seat beside her suit-case.

"Guess you'll soon be in Winnipeg now," he observed, having learned her anxiety to reach her destination some twenty or thirty visits to her before.

"I s'pose you know Winnipeg well?" she hazarded.

"Live there," the man replied comprehensively.

"Maybe you know Grand Avenue?"

The man's eyes opened wide.

"Sure I know Grand Avenoo. That's where the big fellers live. All small houses. Sort o' Fifth Avenoo, Noo York." Then he grinned. "If you were to tell me the part of Grand Avenoo you're needing, maybe I could give you the right surface car to take."

"That would be very kind," Phyllis said earnestly. "But I don't really know just whereabouts Mrs. Hendrie lives."

"Mrs. Hendrie, d'you say, miss? Mrs. Alexander Hendrie?"

"Yes, yes. That's the lady," Phyllis cried eagerly.

"Gee!"

"What did you say? I didn't—"

"Beg pardon, miss—I—I just said 'Gee'!" The man rose from his seat hurriedly. "You just go right out of the booking hall at the depot and get on to the first Main Street car you see. It'll take you along up to Grand. Just give word to the ticket man, an' he'll see you get off right. We'll be in in less than two hours. We're plumb on time."

He moved away quickly, and Phyllis vaguely understood that his going had something to do with the fact that she was going to see the wife of one of the biggest men in the country.

Grand Avenue was bathed in sunlight when Phyllis stepped off the car and looked about her. Automobiles and pair-horse carriages sped upon their dazzling ways down the great wide road with a speed and frequency that, for some moments, left the country girl almost dazed.

A policeman directed her to Alexander Hendrie's house.

It was not without many heart-quakings that Phyllis ascended the white marble steps and pressed the great button of the electric bell. Nor were these lessened when the door was opened with magical abruptness, and she found herself gazing up at the liveried footman in wonder and dismay.

The man's cold survey of her was disheartening. Plainly as looks could speak he regarded her visit as an impertinent intrusion, while he waited for her to speak.

"I want to see Mrs. Hendrie," she demanded shortly.

The man devoured her with eyes

which plainly conveyed a definite and contemptuous refusal.

"Can't be done," he said at last, and prepared to close the door.

But Phyllis had not traveled all these hundreds of miles to be defeated by a mere footman.

"Oh, yes, it can," she declared tartly. "And you'll do well to remember that you're speaking to a lady. Mrs. Hendrie is expecting me. Please tell her Miss Phyllis Raysun is here—from Gleber."

The man's manner underwent a slight change, but he still remained barring the way.

Then suddenly something happened that was evidently utterly unexpected by the churlish man servant.

There was a sound of rustling skirts hurrying down-stairs. Some one brushed the man aside and seized Phyllis's two ungloved hands, one of which still held the deplorable suitcase.

"My dear, my dear, however did you get here?"

It was Monica. Then she turned angrily upon the discomforted footman as she drew the girl into the house.

"How dare you keep this lady standing out on the door-step? How dare you? I never heard of such a thing."

Then to Phyllis, with warm welcome:

"Come along, dear. Come up to my room and get your things off. Henson will see to your grip."

She took the bewildered girl by the arm, and hurried through the great entrance hall. Then up the wide staircase, and, having left the sharp-eared servants well behind, opened out a battery of eager questions.

"How did you get here all by yourself from that little far-away farm of yours?" she demanded. "How—how dared you attempt such a thing, my dear?" she went on with genuine concern. "You shouldn't have done it. You really shouldn't without letting me know, so that I could have arranged for your comfort."

They had reached the first floor, and Monica's arm was about the girl's waist.

"I never heard of such a thing," she hurried on, pushing open the door of her boudoir. "Weren't you frightened to death? How—how ever did you manage to find this house—you, who've never been away from your prairie home in your life?"

"I—I had to come, ma'am," Phyllis cried. "I—I hope you're not angry, but I just had to come. I got a letter from—from Frank, and he told me he was never coming back to me, and he was going to—to—enlist—or something, in the army of workers and give his life to bettering their lot, and—and a lot of other silly nonsense like that. And—and I just had to come and see you—since I knew that—that you loved him, too."

There were tears crowding the girl's beautiful, appealing eyes as she looked up into Monica's face.

Monica stooped and kissed her quite suddenly.

"I'm so glad you came to me, Phyl," she cried. "There's so much to say—so much for us both to think of. Oh, my dear, my heart is broken. I don't know what to think or what to do. My poor, poor boy."

An hour passed. Two hours passed. Monica and Phyllis still remained together in the former's room. Monica broke down, weeping.

"Oh, Phyl, Phyl," she cried desperately. "It is all my doing; all through my wretched selfishness. You—even you can't blame my husband. The fault was mine alone."

Phyllis's dark eyes were hard as she flung in her denial.

"But I do blame him," she cried. "Even if Frank had been guilty it was a wicked, cruel thing to do. I can't help it if it hurts you, Mrs. Hendrie. I do certainly blame your husband."

Monica shook her head.

"He was in a fury of jealousy, and no man is quite sane under such circumstances." Phyllis's challenge had given Monica the firmness of decision, which in her grief she had utterly lacked. "I *am* to blame. I can see it all now. Had I never lied to Frank in my ridiculous sense of duty to my dead sister, and my selfish desire to marry my husband; had I never told the boy that I was his mother—this would never have happened. It—is—too terrible. Oh, what can I do? Whatever can we do?"

"What can you do?" cried Phyllis, a glowing light of strength and love shining in her tearful eyes. "What can we do? Why, everything. But we're not going to do it by writing letters, ma'am. You love him? Your place was at the gates of Alston prison as it was mine, if I had known. It was for us to have been along there, ready to reach out and—and help him. What can we do? What can I do? I'll tell you. I'm just not going to write my Frank in answer to his—his nonsensical stuff. But I won't take back my promise to be his wife. I'm—I'm going to marry him—because I know he wants me, and I want him. Oh, no, I'm not going to marry a man who gets worrying to make strikes and things, and calls it helping labor. I'm not going to marry a man who's always making trouble in the world, who leaves kiddies starving for what he calls a 'principle,' and most folks generally—miserable. But I'm going to marry my Frank, and I'm going right on to Toronto to find him—if I have to walk there."

The girl finished up breathlessly. All her love and courage were shining in her eyes. Monica had been held spellbound by the force and determination underlying every unconsidered word Phyllis uttered, and now she sprang from her seat, caught in the rush of the other's enthusiasm.

"Oh, Phyl, Phyl," she cried, catching the girl by the shoulders and looking down into her ardent face. "You brave, brave child. I never thought. I could never have thought, fool that I am. Yes, yes, we will go to him. Not you alone. I will go, too. You are the bravest, wisest child in the world, and—I love you for it."

The street-cars hummed in the still, summer air. The sun-awnings were stretched out from the endless array of stores, across the superheated sidewalk. A busy life perspired beneath them. Toronto's central shopping areas were always crowded about midday, not with the smart woman shopper, but with the lunching population of the commercial houses.

It was more than a month since Frank's memorable journey from the hopeless precincts of Alston to one of Canada's gayest cities; a month during which he had found his days far easier than he expected, if more full of the responsibilities of life. From the moment of his meeting with Austin Leyburn he had permitted himself a looking forward, if not with anything approaching youthful hope and confidence, at least to a life full of that work which his understanding suggested to him might serve to deaden bitter memories, and help him to face a useful future.

For the moment the man Leyburn, with his narrow eyes, his purposeful face, was something little less than a god to Frank. Here was a champion of those very people whom he believed needed all the help forthcoming. Here was a man who, from sheer belief in his own principles, had devoted himself, nay, perhaps, sacrificed himself, to those very ideals which he, Frank, had only just awakened to. His official positions in the organized societies of labor surely testified to the sincerity of his purpose.

On that eventful train journey Leyburn had promised to enroll him among the workers for the good of the submerged ranks of labor. Moreover, he had proved as good as his

word. He had done more. For some unexplained reason he took Frank into his own personal office, treating him to a confidence that was by no means usual in one of the most powerful heads of the labor movement in Canada.

It was a strange association, these two. On the one hand a man of great organizing powers, of keen, practical understanding of Socialistic principles; and, on the other, a youth of lofty ideals which had little enough to do with the bitter class hatred belonging to the sordid modern product of Socialism.

It was on the occasion when the last detail of the story was passionately poured into his apparently sympathetic ears that Austin Leyburn treated his protégé to something of his platform oratory.

"You certainly have been the victim of the class against which all our efforts are directed. Think of it," he went on, thrusting his elbows upon the luncheon-table which stood between them—they were in the fly-ridden precincts of the cheap restaurant which Leyburn always affected—and raising his voice to a denunciatory pitch. "Think of it. Every man with power to think, with power to work, who comes within the web of this wealthy man you speak of—whoever he is—is open to the possibilities for evil of his accumulations of wealth. That man, a millionaire, openly confesses to being able to buy the law sufficiently to legally crush the moral, almost the physical life out of those who offend him." Then he smiled whimsically. "Can you wonder at the class hatred existing, and of which I know you do not wholly approve?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Frank eagerly. "I see all that. I see the iniquity of it all that such tyranny should be possible. I agree entirely. It is against the very principles of all creation that any one man should possess such power. No man, woman, or child is safe with such possibilities in our midst. But this class hatred. The opposition of labor is not directed sufficiently against the principle. It is directed against the individual, and so becomes class hatred."

"Remember you are dealing with human nature," Leyburn objected. "When such forces as we control are put into active protest against a principle, the principle must become merged in the individual who represents it."

"My objection is against that fact," Frank persisted, in the blindness of enthusiasm. "Class hatred! It is dreadful. Christ never preached class hatred."

Leyburn nodded.

"Why should the man or woman who lives by the sweat of others enjoy the luxury which is denied to the people who make that luxury possible? Is the argument not perfectly, humanly just?"

Frank leaned back in his hard chair.

"You are preaching for the worker the very methods of present-day capital. You are telling him to—grab."

"So long as capital grabs, labor must do likewise. Unfortunately this is an age of grab, and until evolution carries it away, like any other pestilential influence, we must all grab or die in the gutter."

Frank shook his head.

"No, no," he cried desperately. "I can't believe it. This war of classes is all wrong. It is against all the ethics of brotherhood. It is the war of body against brain. Leave out the individual and stick to the principle. If the working class were wiped out tomorrow the brain, which is really the life of the world, would only change its tactics. After a brief stagnation it would evolve a fresh condition of things."

Frank waited with flushed face and anxious eyes for the other's reply.

Leyburn's cynical eyes looked up from the stained table-cloth on which the remains of the meal were still scattered.

"And in the mean time," he inquired, "how are you going to achieve the good and merciful government that is going to provide for us, each according to our needs? By sitting down and submitting to the sweaters who rule the lives of the present-day laboring world, making its condition just what their own quality of selfishness demands, just because the Divine Hand has bestowed upon them a greater power to think than It has upon the worker? I tell you, boy, we are fighting for all that which you have outlined; and we are fighting—which is the only way.

"Come, my boy, we must to work again. There is that case of tyranny to be looked into. The discharge of that fireman for drinking when off duty on the North Saskatchewan Railroad. There is also the question of colored agricultural workers to be considered. You, my friend, are young. You are enthusiastic and idealistic, and I like you for it. But you will soon see that that which a long experience has taught me is right."

Leyburn rose from his seat and beckoned the waiter. He settled the bill, while Frank picked up his hat. At the door of the restaurant Leyburn turned to him with his peculiarly ungracious smile and sniffed the sickening atmosphere of hot food.

"We've satisfied our appetites, and now we hate the smell," he said, with a laugh. "Human nature is ungrateful. By the way, you'd best go on to the Saskatchewan Railroad offices and ask for that report they promised to send me. I'll go back to the office." Then, as an afterthought: "Say," he added, with a laugh, "I'm going to send you up West some time in the near future. Along the line. To do some—talking. But you'll need to cut all that stuff right out. I mean the ideal racket. So-long."

He turned sharply away and hurried down the heat-laden street.

Frank looked after him. He shook his head. "He's a good feller," he said to himself; "but he's wrong—dead wrong—in some things."

At that moment somebody bumped into him and he turned to apologize. Seeing it was a woman, he raised his hat. Then an exclamation, half joyous, half of dismay, broke from him.

"Phyl!" he cried. "You? In Toronto?"

In her turn the girl started and stared.

"Frank!" she cried incredulously. Then, regardless of the passers-by: "Thank God, I've found you! Oh, Frank, I'm so—so glad. We have been hunting Toronto these weeks; and now—now—"

"We?"

"Yes, 'we,' dear."

Phyllis, her pretty face wreathed in a happy, confident little smile, was studying him closely.

"Well?" she cried as the great fellow stared back at her rather like a simple babe.

Frank tried to pull himself together.

"Why have you come here? Oh, Phyl, it is so hard. I tried to explain it all in my letter."

The girl tilted her head slightly on one side, so that the shadow of her wide-brimmed hat was removed from her face. Frank became aware of the movement, also of the hat. He also became aware of the smartly tailored costume she was wearing, even the pointed toes of her exquisite shoes and her white kid gloves. She intended him to notice these things.

"Oh, Frank," she cried, deliberately ignoring his protest, "Toronto's just the loveliest place ever to buy dress fixings. Mrs. Hendrie has just made me buy and buy till—well, till I don't know how much she's spent on me. You see," she went on naively, "she said I just couldn't get hunting my beau in Toronto with hayseed sticking all over my hair. Don't you think I—I look better this way?"

Frank breathed a deep sigh.

"You—you look wonderful, Phyl,"

he cried, for a moment all else smothered in the background.

Phyllis laughed. "Then come right along. See, we're bumping folks, standing here. I'm going to take you to where your—where Mrs. Hendrie is waiting for you. The—"

But the mention of Monica left Frank once more alive to realities.

"No, no, Phyl," he cried. "It is useless. Don't you understand?"

In spite of all his protests, Frank was walking beside Phyllis, moving unquestioningly in the direction she selected.

The girl looked round laughingly. Phyllis had never perhaps smiled so joyously, so sweetly as she was smiling now; but every look, every word she spoke, was full of definite purpose.

"I haven't recovered from the shock you handed me—in that—that letter," she said without a shadow of distress in her smiling eyes. Then, just for a moment the girl's mask was dropped.

"Do you know, dear, you'd have been more merciful if you'd brutally struck me in the face with your great big fist, instead of sending me that letter. You see, you'd sure have left me senseless."

The subtle appeal was too much for the man. His face flushed with a shame that swept through his heart.

"But what could I do, Phyl? I had to tell you. I had to give you —your freedom. You could never marry a—convict."

Phyllis's mask of lightness returned to her face.

"A convict?" she cried. "Oh, Frank, I could marry a convict far, far easier than a present-day socialist."

The thrust drove straight home.

"Phyl!"

The man's look was one of dreadful pain. Phyl's ridicule was far worse than any suffering he had endured, however unjust.

"You can't—you don't mean that," he cried hoarsely. "No, no, Phyl, you don't mean it. You

"But I do—I do," the girl cried, with sudden passion. "Oh, I know you've suffered. God only knows just how you've suffered! And since I've heard all you've gone through, I've suffered every moment of it with you. Frank, your own honest notions are just too big for words. They're like you—all of them. But how—how are you going to carry them out? I'll tell you. You're going to help fix things right by tying yourself to the ranks of labor, so as to fight capital. That's how you're going to bring about brotherly and sisterly love in the world! By fighting!

"Do you need me to tell you of the wretched, self-seeking leaders of the working men? The men who lead them like a flock of silly sheep so they may personally prosper and feed on them? That's not your socialism, if I know you. There's no principle about it. It's just self self, self, all the time. Everybody wants something they don't honestly earn. And when they can't get it, if they think they're strong enough, they just start right out to fight for it, like a lot of savages, while those who look to them for support and comfort are left to starve, and put up with all the horrors caused by savage passions. Oh, Frank, it's just awful to think that you have become one of these—these villains."

The girl's passionate denunciation came to an end just as she halted at the foot of the great flight of steps leading up to the entrance of the Eldorado Hotel.

"Say, Frank," she cried, with an air of absurd importance. "This is my hotel. We've a suite of apartments right on the first floor. And, dear," she added with a sudden tenderness, "Mrs. Hendrie—Monica—your Mon, who loves you nearly as much as I do, is just waiting right there—for you. You'll come along in, won't you?"

Frank looked up into the tenderly

pleading eyes, and his last objection melted before them.

He nodded.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Decision.

MONICA and Frank were alone in Monica's private sitting-room at the Eldorado Hotel. Phyllis had conducted him to the door of the room, where she waited until he had passed within. Then she discreetly withdrew to pass many anxious moments pacing the narrow limits of her own bedroom on the same floor.

The sitting-room was a large apartment with two lofty windows looking out upon the busy street. At one of these windows Frank was standing, with his back turned upon the room and the woman who had drawn so near to him.

His troubled blue eyes were fixed upon the busy life outside, but it had no interest for him.

Monica was just behind him, and a little to one side. Her face was drawn, and dark rings surrounded her eyes. Her age was strongly marked just now. It had been a long, and for both, a painful interview. The mother love had pleaded with a humility that was pathetic, and the man had listened, steeling his heart against the inroads which the sound of that gentle voice made upon his determination.

Never for one moment did he find aught to blame for her. Monica was still to him all she had ever been—his mother.

But now her final appeal, that he should return to her, had been made, and, as the end came, she handed him a letter in Alexander Hendrie's handwriting. The letter remained unread in his hands.

"Won't you read it, Frank? Won't you read it—for my sake?" Monica pleaded earnestly, after a long, painful silence.

There was something like tears in her voice.

He sighed, and glanced down at the folded paper.

"Where is the use?" he asked gently. "There can be nothing in it to alter my determination. Oh, Mon, don't you understand?"

Monica drew a step nearer. Her had was laid upon his shoulder.

"I know, I know, Frank," she cried. "But—won't you read it? When you have read it you will understand why I want you to do so. It is the letter of a man with a mind as big as his passions are violent. It is the letter of a man whose proud head is bowed in the dust with grief at the wrong he has done to you."

Frank unfolded the letter, and, after a moment's hesitation, began to read. Monica waited breathlessly. The letter, in a clear, bold handwriting, was without heading or date.

"I cannot begin this with a conventional heading. I cannot expect that you would tolerate any sort of demonstrativeness. Therefore, what I have to say must be short, sincere, and to the point. I am sending this by Monica, to insure your receiving it, and in the hope that she will persuade you to read it. I can think of only one wrong, ever committed by man, greater than that which I have done to you. The wrong I refer to was done some two thousand years ago. This may sound extravagant to you, however bitter your feelings, but you do not know, perhaps you never will know, all that is in my mind as I write. The expression of all my regrets would be useless to convey what I feel. Let them pass. There are things I desire to do, and I implore you, as you may hope for future salvation, as you may pity a mind and heart racked with torture, to come back with Monica, and accept an equal partnership in all I have in the world. It is here, waiting for you at all times between now and the day I die. I hope

that some day you may learn to forgive the wrongs I have inflicted upon you.

"ALEXANDER HENDRIE."

The letter remained in Frank's hand as his eyes were once more lifted to the window. There was a slight change in them, a slight softening in their expression. Monica, watching him, drew a sharp breath. For an instant hope leaped within her, and a whispered urging escaped her.

"Frank!"

The man made no movement, but the softening passed swiftly out of his eyes.

"You will—come?"

He held out the letter in reply.

"Take it, Mon, take it back to him," he said deliberately, yet without harshness. "I will not write a reply, but you can take him this message. The past is over, and, though perhaps it cannot easily be forgotten, I have no longer any feeling about it beyond hatred of the injustice which makes it possible for the weight of one man's wealth to bring about such persecution as was dealt out to me. Tell him I cannot accept that which he has no right to be able to give. Tell him there are thousands—hundreds of thousands of men and women who could be benefited by that which he would now give to me."

Monica drew back sharply, the caressing weight of her hand slipped from his shoulder.

"You mean that? Oh, no, no, Frank! You cannot answer him like that. It is not you—never, never!"

"That is the answer, dear." Frank had turned from the window, and came toward this woman who had been more than a mother to him. "That is the answer to his letter, and to all that you have asked me. But you are right, it is not I—it is the teaching of the suffering and misery I have witnessed that is speaking, and to that teaching I remain loyal."

"Frank is right, Mrs. Hendrie."

The man looked across the room with a start, and Monica turned abruptly. Phyllis was standing just inside the room with her back to the door she had just closed behind her. She nodded in answer to their looks of surprise, and her eyes were smiling, but with suspicious brightness.

"You're going, Frank?" she demanded. "You're just going right back to those — you've — you've joined?"

The girl's voice was so quiet, so soft. Nor was any of her aching heart permitted to add one touch of appeal to her manner. The man cleared his throat. He averted his eyes.

"Yes, Phyl," he said hoarsely.

He stood there feeling as though he was once more before a tribunal, awaiting sentence.

"Then—it's 'good-by'?" she said gently.

The man nodded. He dared not speak until he had full mastery of himself.

Phyllis sighed.

"We came here, Frank, to show you all that was in the hearts of two women who—who love you," she said slowly. "Maybe we haven't done it well. I can't rightly say." Her smile was wistful, yet almost pathetically humorous. "It's the way with folks who try hard—isn't it? They never just seem to get things right."

The man made a movement as though to interrupt her, but she would not allow him to speak.

"Don't worry, dear. Guess you got all you need that way coming. I just want you to know I love you through and through—just as long as I live. Meanwhile," she added, her smile gaining in confidence as her thoughts probed ahead into the distant future, "I'm going right back to mother; right back to that little tumbledown shack you know, dear, and I'm going to get on with my—plowing. And later on, dear, when you just get the notion, and come along, why—I guess you'll find me waiting round for

you—and I sha'n't be fixed up in black—and bugles. Good-by, dear—for the present."

CHAPTER XVII.

The Shadow of War.

IT had been a troublous fall in the labor world, and an even more disturbed winter. As spring dawned, from every corner of the world came the same story. Strike, strike; everywhere, and in every calling, the word had gone forward—Strike! Rapidly, in almost every direction, the flood of storm burst. Every sane, hard-thinking man asked his neighbor the reason. Every far-sighted man, on both sides, shook his head, and pointed the approach of a hideous reckoning.

Something of this may have been in Alexander Hendrie's mind as he sat before the accumulations of work awaiting his attention on his desk in the library at Deep Willows. His hard face was shadowed, even gloomy. His work remained untouched. Even an unlighted cigar remained upon the edge of his desk, a sure sign that he had no taste for the work that lay before him.

This condition of affairs had been going on for some time. It had gradually grown worse. Angus Moraine realized the growing depression in his chief. But he knew its cause, or, at least, he knew something of its cause. Hendrie had changed from the time of his discovery of the mistake he had made in the case of Frank Smith. Angus had heard from his employer the story of that mistake, but Hendrie had only told him sufficient of it to account for his actions in obtaining the man's release.

Then there was that other more intimate matter, the news of which had leaped like wildfire throughout the household at Deep Willows. Monica was ailing. It was obvious that she was to become a mother, and it was equally obvious that her health was suffering in an extraordinary manner. There was a doctor, a general practitioner, in residence at Deep Willows. There was also a night nurse, besides a girl companion from one of the outlying farms over Gleber way.

Angus was in good humor as he entered the library just before noon. He believed he possessed the necessary tonic for his employer's case, and intended to administer it in his own ruthless fashion.

Hendrie glanced across at the door as he heard it open. Then, when he saw who his visitor was, he sighed like a man awakening from an unpleasant dream. He picked up his cigar and lit it, and Angus watched the action with approval. He always preferred to deal with Hendrie when that individual had a cigar thrust at an aggressive angle in the corner of his mouth.

"Well? Anything to report?" Hendrie demanded.

"Why, yes."

Angus drew up a chair and laid a sheaf of papers beside him. He saw the crowded state of the desk, but gave no sign of the regret which the sight inspired.

"Guess there's a hell of a lot of trouble coming if you persist in this colored labor racket," he said quickly. "I don't mind telling you I hate niggers myself, hate 'em to death. But that's not the trouble. As I've warned you before, ever since that blamed Agricultural Labor Society racket started, the beginning of last year, we've had the country flooded with what I call 'east-side orators.' Talk? Gee! They've got the ear of every white hobo that prides himself he knows the north end of a plow from the south, and they've filled them full of this black labor racket."

Hendrie was lifted out of himself. The cold light of his eyes flashed into a wintry smile.

"Ah," he said. "Strike talk."

"Sure. And I guess it's going to be big. I'd say there's a big head behind it all too."

Angus took a cigar from the box Hendrie held out, and bit the end off.

"It's well enough for you. You ain't up against all the racket. I am. We've got plenty labor around here without darnation niggers. Why not quit 'em?"

Hendrie shook his head, and the other went on.

"Anyway, yesterday, Sunday, I was around, and I ran into a halleluiah chorus meeting, going on right down, way out on the river bank. Guess they didn't reckon I'd smell 'em out. There were five hundred white men at that meeting, and they were listening to a feller talking from the stump of a tree. It was the nigger racket. That, and strike for more wages, and that sort of truck. He was telling 'em that there was just one time to strike for farm folks. That was harvest. Said it would hurt owners more to see their crops ruined in the ear than to quit seeding.

"Well, I got good and mad, and I'd got my gun with me. So I walked right up to that feller and asked him what he was doing on your land. He'd got five hundred mossbacks with him, and he felt good. Guessed he could bluff me plenty. He got terribly gay for a while, till I got busy. The moment he started I whipped out my gun. I gave him two minutes to get down and light out. He wasted most of them, and I had to give him two that shaved the seat of his pants, one for each minute. Then he hopped it, and the five hundred mossbacks laffed 'emselves sick."

Hendrie's smile had become fixed. And the set of it left his eyes snapping.

"See here, Angus," he cried, with some vehemence. "I don't hold a brief for niggers as niggers. But I hold a brief for them as human creatures."

He swung himself round on his chair and rested his elbow, supporting his head upon his hand, upon the overflowing desk. His cigar assumed a still more aggressive tilt in his lips.

"Guess a nigger hasn't a dog's place among white folks. But a nigger can do my work, and I can handle him. And if the whole white race of mossbacks don't like it they can go plumb —to—the devil. That's the way I feel. I'll fight 'em—and—I'll beat 'em."

Angus Moraine's sour face and somber eyes lit.

"This is the first year of the trust operations," he said shrewdly. "What if the crop is left to rot on the ground? This place, here, is now just a fraction of the whole combine, as I understand it."

Hendrie nodded. Amusement was added to the light of battle in his eyes.

"Sure," he said.

Then he reached across the desk and picked up a large bundle of papers. He passed them over to the other.

"Read 'em," he said easily. "Read 'em over at your leisure. Maybe you'll read something that's cost me a deal of thought. That's the United Owners' Protection Schedule. You'll find in it a tabulated list of every property in the combine. Also a carefully detailed list of *Owner Workers,* their numbers, and supplies of machinery for seeding and *harvesting.* You'll also find a detailed distribution sheet of how these, in case of emergency, can be combined and distributed, and, aided with additional machinery, supplied by the trust, can complete the harvest on all trust lands *without the help of one single hired man.* The machinery is ordered, and is being distributed now. There's also another document there of no small importance. It was passed unanimously at the last general meeting of directors, and is inspired by these—darned labor troubles. It empowers me to sell crops *standing* in the ear, at a margin under anticipated market price to speculators—if it's deemed advisable by the directors. This again is for our protection."

Then he held up a bunch of telegrams.

"These are wires from some of the big speculators. They're in code, so you can't read 'em. They're offers to buy—now. These offers, increasing in price each time as we get nearer the harvest, will come along from now on till the grain is threshed. I can close a deal any moment I choose to put pen to paper. Well?"

"Well?"

Angus looked into the man's fearless eyes, marvelling at the wonder of foresight he displayed. For the moment he almost pitied the dull-witted farmhand who contemplated pitting himself against such caliber. Hendrie went on, after a pause:

"I'm getting another crew of niggers up from the south, and you'll have 'em put on 'time' right here at Deep Willows. I'm going to run my land in my own way. They need fight? They can get it."

Hendrie stood for a moment with his hand on the open door. His eyes were still alight with the fire of battle which Angus's visit had inspired. He wanted to fight. He felt it was the safety valve necessary for his own desperate feelings.

Monica's condition troubled him. All the more so because he knew that his own actions had helped her peculiar ailing, which was rapidly sapping all her vitality at the time she most needed it. He knew, no one better, that Frank's troubles, his absence, and the uncertainty of his future, had played upon her nervous system till she was left no longer fit to bear her burden of motherhood. He was a fighter; he could battle with self as with any other foe. But, for Monica, his love drove him to desperation.

He closed the door behind him, and hurried toward the entrance hall. As he reached it he saw the figure of Phyllis Raysun ascending the stairs. He promptly called to her.

"Tell me," he cried, "what is Dr. Fraser's report?"

The girl descended the stairs.

Monica's appeal to her to come to her had been irresistible to the heart of the sympathetic girl. The appeal had been conveyed to her by Hendrie himself, the man whom she believed she hated as a monster of cruelty. The man puzzled her understanding. Now she looked at him with unsmiling eyes.

"The doctor's just gone into Everton," she said.

"Yes, yes. But—his report?"

"He says—slight improvement," she replied coldly.

"Ah! Improvement! Yes?"

The man sighed. He was clinging to the meager encouragement of that single word.

Phyllis understood. She nodded. Then her eyes lit with a sudden purpose.

"Oh, but, Mr. Hendrie," she cried; "it doesn't just mean a thing. There's just one hope for Mo—for Mrs. Hendrie. It's Frank. She's pining her life right away for him. She loves him. He's—he's her son. Can't you see? She thinks of the days when his little hands used to cling around her. She—she just loves every hair of his poor head."

The girl's hands were held out appealingly, and the man's eyes dared not look in her direction. She could not add one detail to his knowledge of all it would mean, not only to Monica, but to himself, if only Frank could be brought home to the great house at Deep Willows.

"Oh, God!" he cried, his eyes suddenly blazing with a passion that had for one brief moment broken the bonds which usually so sternly controlled it. "What do you know, child? What can you know of the awful longing I have to bring that boy here? I'd give all I have, everything I possess in life, even life itself to bring that boy here, and know that he would remain with us for—ever."

"Frank is in—Calford," she said slowly. "I had a mail from him."

"What is he doing in Calford?" he asked abruptly.

A faint smile lit the girl's eyes for a moment, and then passed.

"He's—guess you'd call it 'agitating.' He doesn't. I'd say he calls it preaching brotherhood and equality to a gang of railroaders."

The man started.

"He's—working on the—railroad trouble?" he demanded incredulously.

Phyllis nodded. Hendrie drew a deep breath.

"Yes. He's been working hard for a year now, and—and I believe he's just thrown himself into the cause of—socialism with all his might. He—he gets talking everywhere. Can't you do a thing? Can't you help—bring him here?"

Hendrie looked into the girl's earnest face. Then he looked away. Many conflicting emotions stirred him.

"I can't say right now, child," he replied, after a pause. Then he looked up, and Phyllis read a definite resolve in his hard gray eyes. "You best write him," he went on. "Write him to-day. Tell him how Monica is. Guess there's going to be a big fight with labor, and we're going to be in it. It's about the only thing can make me feel good—now. But I wish—your Frank was on our side," he went on, almost to himself. "I'd say he'd be a good fighter."

"Must men always—fight?" asked Phyllis quietly.

The man stared.

"Why, yes!" he said in astonishment.

"Frank doesn't think so."

The millionaire shook his head deliberately.

"Say," he cried confidently, "your Frank will fight when the time comes. And—he'll fight—big."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Capital and Labor.

IT was a large hall on the outskirts of Calford, in one of the poorer neighborhoods. It was packed almost to suffocation by an audience of stern-faced, eager humanity. There were the ample figures of uniformed train conductors; there were the thin, hard-muscled freighters. There were men from the locomotive departments, with traces of coal-dust about their eyes, of which, even in their leisure, they never seem quite able to rid themselves.

A tall youth, with thick, fair hair and enormous breadth of shoulder was standing out alone on the platform. He was talking rapidly in a deep, resonant voice which carried distinctly to the remotest corners of the building.

He talked well. Extremely well. And his audience listened. But there was none of that explosive approval which is as nectar to the ordinary demagogue.

To one man, sitting in the back of the hall, a man nearly as large as the speaker, though older, enveloped in a rough suit, which, while matching the tone of the rest of the audience, sat ill upon him, it seemed that the speaker lacked something with which to carry his audience.

He listened attentively, he followed every word, seeking to discover the nature of this lack. Nor was it till the evening was half spent that he quietly registered the fact that this man missed one great essential to win his way to the hearts of these people. *He was not one of them.* He only understood their lives through immature observation. He had never lived their life.

Somehow the conviction left him satisfied, and he settled himself more comfortably upon his uncomfortable bench.

The meeting lasted over two hours, but the man at the back of the hall left long before its close.

Frank had returned to his room at the Algonquin Hotel. He was tired, and a shadow of dissatisfaction clouded his blue eyes as he scanned the bundle of manuscript lying in his lap.

He was going over his speech, the speech he had made that night to the railroad men of Calford. He knew he had not "made good," and was seeking the weak spots in the written manuscript. But he could not detect them.

It was nearly midnight when a bell-boy knocked at his door. A man, he said, was waiting below and wished to see him. He handed him a card.

Frank took it and glanced at it indifferently. Then his eyes lit with a peculiar expression.

"Alexander Hendrie," he read.

"Wants to see you — important," the boy urged as the man remained silently contemplating the strip of pasteboard.

"Important!" The word repeated itself in Frank's brain again and again. He still stared at the card. What did Alexander Hendrie want?

"Shall I show him up?" demanded the boy impatiently.

It was on the tip of Frank's tongue to pronounce his refusal, when, quite suddenly, he changed his mind. No, he would see him. It would be good to see him. He could at least show him he was not afraid of him.

"Show him up," he said coldly. The boy hurried away.

Frank rose from his chair and began to move about the room in the restless fashion of a man disturbed more than he admits—more than perhaps he knows. All thought of his evening's failure had passed from his mind. He was about to confront the man who had dishonestly sent him to a convict's cell, and a deadly bitterness surged through his veins.

The door opened without any warning.

"Well?" he demanded with a deliberate harshness.

Every feeling of bitter antagonism was expressed in his greeting.

The millionaire closed the door behind him. His face expressed no feeling whatsoever. He made no attempt at politeness or amiability. He accepted the position as the other chose to make it.

"I drove from Deep Willows to hear you speak to-night. Also, I wanted to speak to you." Hendrie glanced about him. "May I—sit?"

For a moment Frank remained silent. He looked hard at the strong, ruthless man with his slightly graying hair and clean-cut, resolute features.

Suddenly he kicked the rocker he had previously been occupying toward his visitor.

"You are uninvited, but—it's a free enough country," he said with almost childish rudeness.

Hendrie passed his manner by.

"Yes, I s'pose it's a free enough country," he said, accepting the chair deliberately.

Frank watched him, and slowly his self-schooling began to assert itself. Somehow, he felt that, had he been in his place, it would have required courage for him to have faced any man he had dishonestly condemned to a penitentiary. He admired courage.

"Free enough for the rich," he said with a sarcasm that hardly fitted him. "Honest people don't always find it free."

The millionaire eyed him leisurely. Somehow his gray eyes were softer than usual.

"Would you mind if—I lighted a cigar?" he inquired.

Frank seated himself upon the edge of the bed.

"Smoke all you want," he said ungraciously.

Hendrie deliberately lit his cigar. For once it did not find its way to the corner of his hard mouth. Then he leveled his eyes directly into the other's.

"I made you an offer months ago. You refused it then. It still stands."

Frank sat up, and his eyes lit.

"It can go on standing," he cried fiercely. "I want nothing from you. I suppose it is only the arrogance of your wealth makes you dare to offer me—me such compensation."

"I thought every man who does a wrong—unwittingly—has a right to make—reparation, not compensation."

"Unwittingly? Do you call it 'unwitting' when you use your wealth to bribe and corrupt so that a man, even if he be not guilty, may be made to suffer? These were the things you did to ruin me—an innocent man."

Hendrie smoked on. His eyes were lowered so that the other could not see their expression.

"I did these things, and—there is no excuse," he said presently. "You are young. Let me try to fit the case on you. Suppose you married—your Phyllis. Suppose you had every reason for believing her faithless to you. Suppose you caught her lover, as you believed, with money, your money, with which she had supplied him. To what lengths would you go to punish him?"

"It would be impossible. As impossible as it was in your wife's case."

"Just so. But—suppose. Suppose you believed."

Hendrie was leaning forward in his rocker.

"I might shoot him, but I would not—"

"Just so—you would commit murder, where I—I resorted to methods perhaps less criminal."

The subtle manner in which he had been inveigled into debate infuriated Frank. But somehow he was powerless to withdraw.

"If you possessed half the honesty you claim for your purpose you would have been man enough to go to your wife for explanation."

Again Hendrie's eyes were averted, but the extraordinary mildness of his manner forced itself further on the younger man.

"And yet you would have shot the man you found in what you believed similiar relations to your—Phyllis? My passion for my wife is as strong as is your young love for Phyllis, and I was too cowardly to risk hearing the truth that her love for an elderly man was dead, and all her affection was given to a younger man."

Frank had no answer.

"It is because of these things I have dared to offer to make reparation to you, have dared to come and see you," Hendrie went on. Then his eyes smiled into the other's half angry, half troubled face. "You will accept nothing from my hands, you say. So be it. But—and make no mistake—reparation, all of it that lies in my power, shall be made. That you cannot prevent. Remember you are launched upon a life of great vicissitudes. Wherever you are I shall be looking on, and all my influence will be at work—on your behalf. I was around to-night listening to your clever but unconvincing speech. You would have done well among men of a higher intelligence; but you failed to raise one single hope among those you were addressing, that they would get 'something for nothing' if they followed your leadership. Consequently you failed."

Frank's face suddenly flushed, and a fierce retort leaped to his lips.

"Something for nothing!" he cried scathingly. "That is your understanding of the laborer who is sweated by big corporations seeking outrageous dividends. Something for nothing!" he went on, lashing himself to a white fury. "It is always the sneer of the employer, of the vampires who live by others' toil and enjoy luxury, while those who help them to it may starve for all they care. Every man is entitled to a fair share of the profits of his toil."

Frank's eyes were flashing and his breath came quickly, but he stared blankly as the other nodded approval of his claims.

"Perfectly right," Hendrie said. "Perfectly just." He leaned back in his rocker and swung himself to and fro. His cigar was poised in one hand, and his eyes were seriously reflective. "Does he not get that?"

"No, a thousand times no!"

"You talk of service in the world's work," Hendrie went on reflectively, apparently untouched by the other's heat. "You suggest that it means a man's willingness to exercise his muscles, and whatever intelligence he may possess in the general work which is required by civilization at the moment. Civilization owes its progress to the thinkers, not the mere toilers. Battles are won by organization which is the work of the thinker, not the rush of a rabble. The mill owner is the thinker who must find a market for the wares produced in his mills, or there is no work for the laborer. He must found that mill, or it does not exist. The thinker will harness Nature's forces in a manner which will ultimately provide work for millions. And so it would be quite easy to go on indefinitely illustrating the fact that labor owes its well-being, almost its existence, to the thinker. And you would deny the right of the thinker to reap the reward of his efforts."

"I deny the right to profits extorted at the expense of labor. I deny the right to a luxury which others, less endowed by Nature in their attainments, can enjoy. I deny the right to a power in the individual which can be dishonestly used to the detriment of his fellows."

Again the younger man's feelings had risen to fever heat.

Alexander Hendrie looked on unmoved.

"My boy," he said gently, "if you would deny all these things, then appeal to your Creator to make all men of equal capacity in thought, morals, and muscle. You cannot force equality upon a world where the Divine Creator has seen fit to make all things unequal. I tell you you cannot change the principles of life. It will go on as before. The thinkers will live in the luxury you deplore, and the toiler will sweat, and ache, and sometimes live in misery, as he does now. All that can be done is to better the lot of the worker within given limits. But, for God's sake, make the limit such as to leave him with incentive sufficient to lift him from the ranks in which he is enlisted, should his capacity prove adequate for promotion."

The force of the millionaire's simple views left a marked effect upon the other. There was something so definite, yet so tolerant about them. Somehow Frank felt that this man was not thinking with the brain of the rich man.

"Do you so treat—your labor?" he asked.

"I pay him his market price. Privately I am at all times ready to help him. But my best sympathies are not with the poor creature who has no thought beyond his food, his sleep, and the fathering of numerous offspring. It is the man who will strive to rise above his lot that has my sympathy. That is the man who appeals to me, and whom I am even now seeking to help."

Frank rose from his seat upon his bed.

"You are helping—now?" he demanded incredulously.

The millionaire shook his head, and rose heavily from his chair. "Let that pass," he said with a quick, keen glance into the boy's face.

"I must get back to Deep Willows. I had no right to spend all this time away. Mrs Hendrie is ill—seriously ill, I fear. Your Phyllis is with her, serving her for friendship's sake. She does not receive even a market value for her toil. The price of her service is inestimable."

"Mon—Mrs. Hendrie is—ill?"

"Yes," he said simply. "She is to become a — mother. But she is ill — and — ah, well, maybe she'll pull through."

"You say—Phyllis—is with her?"

"She has been with us for months."

"Has Mon—Mrs. Hendrie been ill —so long?"

Frank's voice was almost pleading.

"She began to ail when she — re-

turned from Toronto—nearly a year ago."

"A year—ago?"

"Yes."

The keen eyes of the millionaire were strangely soft as he watched the evident suffering in the boy's young face. He waited.

"I—" Frank hesitated. Then, with a sudden, impulsive rush, he blurted out a request. "Can I—that is, might I be allowed to call and see—her?" he asked, his voice hoarse with sudden emotion. He had forgotten he desired nothing at this man's hands.

"Why, yes. The doors of Deep Willows are always open to you."

Hendrie picked up his hat.

"Good night, my boy."

Hendrie passed out of the room and closed the door behind him carefully.

As he went Frank flung himself into a chair, and for a while sat with his face buried in his hands.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Strike Troubles Spreading.

IT was a sultry afternoon. Lionel K. Sharpe, the proprietor of the Russell Hotel at Everton, was propped behind his counter, smiling with amiable idiocy at the vagaries of two drunken flies scrambling about the inner sides of a tumbler, which contained the dregs of what was alleged to be port wine. Abe Hopkinson and Josh Taylor, the bullet-headed butcher, watched them from the other side of the bar.

"Guess I'd say it's hereditary in flies," said Abe, feeling scientific.

"Wot's hered—heredit'ry?" demanded the butcher.

"Why—drink," explained Abe.

"Seems it's here—her—heredit'ry in most folk," smiled Lionel K., chewing the stump of his cigar vigorously to conceal his difficulty with such scientific terms.

Abe grinned.

At that moment the swing-door was thrust open, and Pete Farline, the drug-store keeper, and Sid Ellerton pushed their way in.

"Drink, Lionel," demanded Peter wearily.

But the hotel proprietor shook his head and winked at Josh.

"I gone on strike—sure!" he said.

Pete looked around at Josh and Abe for enlightenment.

"Strike?" he inquired. "Guess I don't get you."

"Why, every feller's strikin' now," grinned Josh.

"Oh!"

"Quit servin' drinks?" asked Sid, supporting himself on the bar.

Lionel K. Sharpe shook his head and laughed.

"Nope," he said amid a cloud of smoke. "Just quit chalkin' up Pete's score."

He got the laugh he was looking for, and set glasses before the newcomers.

The swing-doors were pushed open again and a stranger made his way in.

All eyes were turned upon the newcomer. He was a powerfully built man of medium size. The gray in his dark hair showed beneath his soft felt hat, and his eyes were narrow and keen. His dress was the ordinary dress of the city man.

The men in the bar eyed him covertly as he made his way to the counter and called for a "long lager."

Lionel K. Sharpe served him as though strangers were an every-day occurrence in that bar, but he was speculating as to who he might be.

"Bad road from Calford," the stranger said after a journey into his beer.

"Rotten!" returned Sharpe, wiping glasses.

"How far to Deep Willows?" asked the other presently.

"Nigh seven," replied Sharpe.

The stranger finished his drink and made his way out of the place.

In a moment the "strikers" were crowding at the window, watching his

departure. They saw him walk across the road to a large automobile waiting for him. They saw him speak to the driver and then jump into the seat beside him. Then the machine, with a heavy snort, rolled away.

"Another all-fired capitalist!" and Josh laughed.

"Friend of Hendrie's," murmured Abe.

"Didn't seem Hendrie's class," protested Pete.

Lionel K. Sharpe shook his head.

"I seen him before," he said reflectively. "Seems to me I see him at Calford some time back. Yes. That's it. He—say, gee!" He broke into a loud guffaw and turned to Josh. "Say! I mind hearing him shouting 'Down with capitalists!' to a lot of bum railroaders. That's when I saw him."

"You got a nightmare!" cried Josh scornfully. "Him drivin' about in an automobile!"

Abe grinned.

"That's what they're out for!" he cried contemptuously.

Alexander Hendrie was leaving Angus Moraine's office, where he had spent the early hours of the afternoon discussing matters of business and receiving reports. The two men had also spent some time considering the conditions prevailing on the railroad—conditions threatening to affect them considerably. That a big strike was imminent was sufficiently apparent to them both, and each understood the disastrous possibilities of the harvest if it should occur at that time.

There had been strikes before; but, from Hendrie's confidential sources, it had been learned that the forthcoming strike would be of a particularly comprehensive nature. There was big talk of sympathetic strikes on the part of all transport workers, and among those who were required to handle goods ultimately intended for transport on the railroad.

The Scot was troubled. But Hendrie seemed to revel in the contemplation of a great struggle with labor. He would have less time to think, and he had no desire to think just now.

He left the office by the outer door and walked leisurely round to the front of the house. At the entrance porch he paused and drew a bundle of cipher messages from his pocket. He read them carefully. Each one represented a financial transaction with some well-known Chicago wheat speculator, the completion of which would place his interests beyond the reach of disaster through any strikes. He had only to wire an affirmative to any one of them to set all doubts at rest.

However, he finally returned them to his pocket and shook his head. No, it was too easy. It would rob him of all place in the fight to come—if such fight really were coming. Besides, there would be that loss of profit for the speculator's risk; a loss which his keen, financial mind begrudged. No, not yet.

He thrust his hands deeply into his coat pockets as though to emphasize his decision, and his gaze wandered toward the fair woodland picture of the river-banks, crowded with virgin growth. Acres and acres of ripening grain lay beyond.

To a man of lesser caliber the responsibility of that wheat world must have been a burden to tax the nerves to the uttermost. But to Hendrie it was scarcely a labor. But for Monica's illness, and a curious sort of nightmare haunting the back cells of this man's memory, Alexander Hendrie must have been a perfectly happy man, reveling in a success which had been his lifelong ambition.

Finally he turned from the pleasant scenes his thoughts were conjuring. He moved toward the doorway, but paused abruptly. The sweep of the private trail on the north bank of the river had come within his view, and he beheld a powerful automobile rapidly approaching the house.

He left the porch and stood out in the open, watching the vehicle curious-

ly. It was a large touring car, and two people were occupying the front seat. A few moments later it drew up sharply abreast of him. A pair of keen eyes were staring at him from the other side of the chauffeur. Hendrie caught their stare, and a quick, deep breath filled his lungs.

Then he saw the man on the other side of the driver jump out of the car. Then he heard him speak.

"You can go back up the trail," he said to his man. "I'll walk out and meet you when I want you."

The car turned about and rolled away. Hendrie saw all this without taking any interest. For some reason his thoughts had been abruptly carried back into a dim past, to a vision of a land of lofty, barren hills, a land where fierce cold ate into the bones.

And all the while his eyes were fixed upon the back of the powerful figure that remained turned toward him until the car had passed out of sight. Then the stranger swung about. He raised one hand, and his forefinger pointed a deadly hatred.

"You! Leo!" he cried.

The dreary scenes of the Yukon heights faded abruptly from the millionaire's mind. He looked into that narrow, evilly expressive face with a cold, hard stare.

"Yes," he said. "Well?"

There was no flinching. There was no surprise even.

"So—I've come up with you at last!" cried Austin Leyburn. "Oh, I knew I should do so some day! I've sounded every corner of this continent. Some day I guessed I'd turn the stone under which you were hiding."

For an instant Hendrie's eyes lit. Then they smiled with a contempt for the mind that could suggest his hiding.

"I allow the world has known just where to set its fingers on Alexander Hendrie for many years now."

"You? Alexander Hendrie?" Leyburn cried incredulously.

"Guess that's my name—has always been my name." Hendrie smoothed his mane of hair with one steady hand. "Folks used to call me Leo because—of this."

The face of Austin Leyburn expressed a devilish hatred no words could have told. But the calmness of his intended victim had a restraining effect. He felt the need for coolness.

So he laughed. There was no mirth in his laughter. It was a hollow sound that jarred terribly.

"Yes, I came here to find Alexander Hendrie, and not—Leo. I came to warn him that it was impossible for men of our union to work side by side with black labor, which earns white man's pay. I came to tell him that he must dismiss all black labor at once. I came to tell Alexander Hendrie these things, and I find—Leo."

Hendrie smiled into his face.

"You came to tell him all this, and you found, in his stead—Leo, the feller I guess you're not particularly well disposed toward. In fact, whom you—rather dislike."

"Whom I hate better than any man on earth," Leyburn cried in a low, passionate tone. "Listen to me, Leo. You're a great man now. You're among the rich of this continent, and so you're the more worth crushing. We both find ourselves in different positions now. Very different positions. You are powerful in the control of huge capital founded upon the gold you stole from me twenty years ago on the Yukon trail. I—I control hundreds of thousands of workers in this country. Hitherto my power has been exercised in the legitimate process of protecting that labor from men of your class. But from this moment all that is changed. It is my personal vengeance upon the man who robbed me twenty years ago and left his mistress, bearing her unborn child, to starve on the long winter trail."

"It is a lie! She was not left to starve. She was provided for."

Hendrie was driven to furious denial by the taunt.

"Ah, that's better!" cried Leyburn. "Much better. I've cut through your tough hide. I say you left her to starve—for all you cared. And I've set myself up as the champion of her cause as well as my own. That highway robbery is just between ourselves. Well, I guess I don't need any one's help to avenge it."

Hendrie had himself well under control again. He nodded as the man paused.

"Go on," he said.

"I intend to!" Leyburn cried, his face livid and working with the fury that drove him. "I'm going back now to Toronto to set the machinery working. And that machinery will grind its way on till you are reduced to the dust I intend to crush you into. It will not be labor against capital—but labor against Alexander Hendrie."

"And what shall I be doing?" Hendrie's eyes were alight with something like amusement.

"You — you? I'll tell you what you'll be doing when I've finished. You'll be wishing to God you had never stolen a dead man's gold."

Austin Leyburn turned away and hurried down the trail.

CHAPTER XXX.

Leyburn's Inspiration.

FEVERISH activity was going forward in all the labor controls which acknowledged Leyburn's leadership. Everywhere was agitation and ferment among the rank and file of the workers, while controlling staffs worked night and day.

Leyburn had projected the greatest coup ever attempted in the country. At one stroke he intended to paralyze all trade. East and west, north and south—it was his purpose to leave the moving world at a standstill.

There were many nominal causes for the upheaval. The real cause of the forthcoming struggle lay deep. Years ago Austin Leyburn had declared his belief that some of the overflow from the world's pockets could be diverted into his own. Since then he had endeavored to prove his assertion. That he had been successful there could be no doubt.

The life he displayed to his colleagues was simple and unpretentious. He lived in a cheap suite of apartments in the humbler quarters of Toronto. He ate in restaurants where he rubbed shoulders with men of the labor world. In his business he walked or rode in the street-cars. To carry added conviction, his clothes were always of the ready-made order.

But there was another Austin Leyburn when the claims of his business released him for infrequent week-ends. He was an affluent sort of country squire. A man who reveled in the possession of an ample estate and splendid mansion, hidden away in the remoteness of a natural beauty spot some twenty-five miles outside Toronto.

To this place he would adjourn at long intervals. And at such times even his name would be left behind him in the city as he lounged back in his powerful automobile, which was never permitted to cross the city limits.

All these things were bought and paid for by a method of making money almost devilish in its inception. Leyburn was a gambler on the stock-market. He gambled in labor strikes. This was the great final coup he now contemplated.

Long ago he and many others of his associates had learned the fact that all strikes more or less affected the financial market. Nor were they slow to take advantage of it.

A general transport strike would send shares crashing to bed-rock prices; would send them tumbling as they had never fallen before, as even international war would not affect them. And when they had fallen sufficiently he and his fellow vultures would plunge their greedy beaks into

the flesh of the carcass and gorge themselves. Then, and not till then, the starving worker might return to his work.

Just now he was in Calford and hard at work. He had only that morning returned from Deep Willows. As he sat before his desk he picked up the telephone receiver and spoke sharply.

"Is Frank Smith in the office?" he demanded. "Yes. Tell him to come to me at once."

He replaced the instrument and leaned back in his chair. He felt that fate had played an extraordinarily pleasant trick upon him. In his cynical way he admitted grudgingly that for once she had been more than kind. The chance of it.

His narrow eyes smiled. But the smile died almost at its birth, lost in a bitter hatred for the man who had robbed him upon the Yukon trail twenty years ago.

The door of his room opened and Frank hurried in. His manner was nervous, unlike his usual manner.

"You sent for me?" he demanded, a look of nervous expectation in his serious eyes.

Leyburn nodded. His manner was the manner of an employer to a subordinate. The intimacy between these two had somehow died out.

Frank experienced a feeling of irritation. Leyburn frequently irritated him now.

"Guess I'm going to hand you a change of work, boy," Leyburn said at last, his manner deliberately impressive. "You weren't a big hit with the railroaders." Frank winced perceptibly, and the other saw that his thrust had gone home. "Oh, I don't blame you a lot," he went on patronizingly. "You've never been a railroader—that's where it comes in. So I'm going to hand you a change to the farming racket. Guess you're a bit of a mossback yourself. You'll understand those boys."

Frank's face had flushed. He felt the crudeness of this man's manner.

"I'll do my best," he said briefly.

There was none of his earlier enthusiasm in his assurance.

"That's right," said Leyburn with some geniality. "I don't like your 'cocksures.' You'll make good, lad—this time. I'm going to set you chasing up the work among the farms. See it's going ahead. There's going to be a strike around harvest—this year. It's going to happen along with the transporters."

Frank was startled. There was to have been no serious movement this year on the agricultural side. Why this sudden change of plans?

"This year?" he said.

"That's how I said," returned Leyburn dryly.

"But I thought—"

"I'll do the thinking, boy," said Leyburn quickly. Then he went on:

"You'll make your headquarters at Everton. That's where Hendrie's place is. I've got men at work there. They've been there quite a while. We're taking up that nigger question there, and punching it home for all we're worth. It's a good lever for running up wages on. The wheat men will be easy — their crops are perishable. If Hendrie don't squeal quick, he's got miles of wheat growing," he said significantly.

Frank stirred uneasily.

"Must I go on this work?" he asked hesitatingly.

Leyburn looked up sharply.

"Sure," he said coldly.

"Couldn't you hand me another section?" Frank asked.

"Why?" The demand rapped out. It was full of a sudden, angry distrust.

But Frank's hesitation and nervousness vanished under the other's intolerable manner.

"I can't do the work you want me to round about Deep Willows," he said with deliberate coldness.

"Why?" Again came the monosyllabic inquiry.

Frank found it easier to explain in consequence.

"You see, Mrs. Hendrie is—is my foster mother," he said simply.

Leyburn stared. There was no resentment in him now—only amazement.

"Then—then—Hendrie is—"

"Hendrie is the man who sent me to the penitentiary for five years."

Frank turned away as he made the admission. Leyburn emitted a low whistle.

Leyburn suddenly pointed at a chair.

"Sit, boy, and let's talk this thing out."

Frank was glad enough to accept the invitation.

"It's the queerest thing ever," Leyburn went on thoughtfully, as Frank drew up a chair. "Seems almost like fate pitching him into your hands for what he's—done to you. He's hurt you, and now—now, why, your turn's coming along."

"But I have no desire for any retaliation," said Frank simply. "One time I might have been pleased to—hurt him. But now—well—somehow I seem to understand what drove him to it, and—I don't blame him so much."

Leyburn nodded. His expression had become absurdly gentle.

"But there's no real hurt coming to Hendrie if—he's reasonable," Leyburn went on thoughtfully.

"If he treats us right, then there's no harm done. This war — you hate the word—can be run on peaceful lines if both parties are not yearning to scrap. All we've got to do is to be ready to scrap. You won't be hurting Mrs. Hendrie. You won't be hurting a soul. But you'll just stand by to defend labor if they're out to hurt us. Get me?"

Frank nodded. Leyburn laughed.

"If I know Hendrie, there'll be no strike. All we've got to do is to be ready for one. We're just going to bluff Hendrie into doing what he doesn't want to do. That's giving a living wage to folk who work for him. He'll give it when the bluff's put up."

"You think so?"

"Sure. They all do — in the end. Wheat men are easier than railroad companies. Their crops are perishable. So Mrs. Hendrie's your—foster mother. Say, it beats the devil."

"Yes." Frank looked up. "She's a sort of aunt, too," he said unguardedly, flushing as he remembered that he could claim no real relationship with any one. "Her sister was my—mother. I don't know who my father was—exactly. I know he was called Leo, but—"

"Leo!" Leyburn started. It was with difficulty he could keep himself from shouting the name. "Leo—you said? Then you are—"

"I am—what?" demanded Frank, caught by the other's excitement.

But Leyburn was equal to the occasion.

"I was going to say Italian. Maybe Leo was just his first name."

Frank shook his head.

"I don't know. I don't think I'm Italian, though," he said unsuspiciously. "You see, Mrs. Hendrie is American, as, of course, was my mother. She had been an actress. Audrey Thorne, I think she called herself."

Leyburn stared out of the window for some moments. He was thinking hard. Hendrie, Frank's father! Audie's son! Audie! Yes, more than ever Frank must be enlisted in this work. It was a good thought, and very pleasant to him.

He turned a smiling, kindly face upon his victim.

"It's all devilish hard luck on you, boy—to be born, in a manner of speaking, without father or mother. The world certainly owes you a big debt."

Frank shook his head. His smile was tinged with sadness.

"I don't seem to feel that way," he said slowly. "Maybe I did a while back, but I don't now."

Leyburn sighed with pretended sympathy.

"You're a good boy," he said kindly. "Too good for the hard knocks life likes handing around. However,

we've got to put this business through. We've got to make these people give a fair wage to their workers. Nigger labor is cutting them out, and it can't be tolerated. We're not out to injure these employers. Our methods may be rough, but the end justifies it. They are our only ways of doing it. And when the war is over, Hendrie will be the first to see the righteousness of our cause—and thank us. We take out a tooth, boy, because it aches. You don't feel you can do this work I want you to do? Well, I won't press it. But" —he turned a sidelong glance upon the other's ingenuous face, now so expressive of the struggle going on within his simple mind—"but I think the teaching for Hendrie would have come well from you. Yes, it surely would." He smiled. "Good for evil, eh? And it is for his good. It is almost a duty —feeling as you do."

Frank rose from his seat and began to pace the room. Leyburn silently watched him. The smile behind his eyes was well hidden. At last Frank abruptly came to a stand before him.

"I'll do the work," he cried, with a gulp. "I tell you, Leyburn, I'd rather do anything else, but I—I believe, as you say, it's my duty to do this. But I warn you, if trouble threatens Mrs. Hendrie, I'll do my best to help her if all labor in the world has to suffer."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Hendrie Sells.

ALEXANDER HENDRIE'S mood was one of doubt and almost indecision, as he rode over the hard, white trail intersecting the miles of wheat surrounding Deep Willows. He had spent an unpleasant morning with his manager. He had listened to bad reports of Monica's condition, and added to these were many unpleasant reflections upon the visit of the man Tug—whom he now knew to be the great labor leader—Austin Leyburn—to Deep Willows.

Now that the harvest was drawing near he found himself surrounded by a picture of golden glory. Under ordinary circumstances he must have reveled in the sight, for, before all things, the growing of wheat represented the chief factor in his life. But now he found little enough pleasure in the contemplation of an abundant harvest.

Moraine's tale of trials and portentous happenings had been a long one. The unrest among the hundreds of workers employed upon the farms was paralyzing efficient work. The imported black labor was both unsatisfactory as regards work, and a constant source of worry in its relation with the white.

Thus, at Angus's earnest request, Hendrie had set out on a tour of inspection of some of the remoter homesteads on the estate. He was going to see for himself and test the attitude of his army of workers. The truth of his manager's statements was quickly brought home to him. He soon discovered a definite antagonism toward himself in the white camps, which left him no room for doubt.

But this was only a part of that which was troubling him. Far more serious than all question of labor, Leyburn's personal threats stood out in his mind. He did not fear him personally. But he understood the scheming mind of the labor leader, and it certainly troubled him as to the direction his attack would take.

If it were through labor, Hendrie had little concern. That was prepared for. But he doubted if it would come through that quarter. Elsewhere he knew there were many vulnerable spots in his armor of defense.

His alert mind was not slow to fix upon his weakest spot. It was his home-life. His passionate love for Monica guided him unerringly to the one point in which he dreaded an attack most. This man Tug, as he knew him, would not openly assail him before the world. He would attack sub-

tly, and in the direction he was sure of hurting most. Hendrie himself knew where he could be hurt most. Did Leyburn?

Something very like despair gripped him, as, in fancy, he pictured Monica's scorn and loathing for the man who was her Frank's father, against the man for his apparent desertion of her dead sister, Audie. This was the shadow that had oppressed him ever since that fateful day on which he had learned that Frank was his own son. This was the burden he had borne as the just punishment for that crime he had committed so long ago.

His moments were very dark as his horse made its way back to Deep Willows. They were so dark that they seemed almost impossible of ever lightening. Then, as so often happens in the midst of the blackest moments, there came a flash of revealing light. It was the desperate courage of the man suddenly rising superior to the false cowardice inspired by his love for his wife. Why should he not forestall Leyburn? Why not tell her his story himself? Why not make a desperate fight to rid himself forever of the haunting shadow of that painful past?

Reaching the home farm, Hendrie dismounted and left his horse with the waiting groom. Angus stopped him.

"Been around?" he inquired, without any lightness.

Hendrie nodded. He was in a hurry.

"Sure," he said.

"Well, what d'you think of things?"

The Scot's persistence was not easy to fling off.

"Can't stop now," Hendrie exclaimed. "I'll tell you later."

But Angus had not yet finished.

"Say." He paused deliberately. "If you'll listen to me, Mr. Hendrie, I say, for God's sake sell, and sell quick!"

Hendrie smiled at the other's earnestness.

"I'm going to," he said easily. "I'm going right into Calford to fix it to-night."

At the house he encountered Dr. Fraser, who had been impatiently awaiting his return. His news was written in his anxious face.

"Trouble?" demanded Hendrie shortly as the man detained him.

"Yes. Mrs. Hendrie has had a bad night. And—there are signs I don't like. I want you to have another nurse at once. There are developments I am afraid of. If they come along we shall have to act very promptly."

"Danger?" The millionaire's face was tensely set.

"Oh, not yet. Not yet. I hope there won't be, but—we must be prepared."

Hendrie pushed his way through the glass entrance doors, and hurried up-stairs and along the softly carpeted corridor to his wife's sick-room. At the door he paused for a moment before he knocked. His heart was beating furiously.

Phyllis opened the door. When she saw who it was she drew aside to allow him to pass in. Then, as she heard Monica's glad cry from the bed, discreetly withdrew, and closed the door.

In three strides Hendrie was at Monica's side, and the next moment her head was pillowed upon his shoulder as he seated himself upon the bed.

"My poor Mon," he said gently, as he looked down into the pale, worn face of the sick woman. "I've just seen Fraser, who tells me you've had another bad night."

Monica nestled closer to this great, strong man whom she almost worshiped.

"Yes, dear," she said, gazing up into his face in almost pathetic appeal. "It is the nights that are worst. It's—it's too dreadful. The moment night comes I am haunted by dreadful waking dreams. There is no peace—none whatever. Every dreadful thing, every painful moment I have ever endured in my life seems to rise up and

mock at me. Sometimes I feel I shall never sleep again."

For a moment Hendrie had no answer. Every word Monica had uttered left a stab in his aching heart. He knew, as Phyllis knew, the cause of all this trouble. He knew, no one knew better, that he, and he alone, was its cause. His mind went back to Frank and his visit to him. It had seemed to promise well. Frank had desired to see Monica. But—he had not yet done so.

He stifled his feelings, and vainly endeavored to cheer her.

"I think it would do you good to go away to the sea, or the mountains, Mon," he said in his lightest manner. "It could be easily fixed. A special train. What do you think?"

But Monica only shook her head.

"I don't want to leave Deep Willows, and Phyl, and you," she said plaintively. "The happiest moments of my life have been spent here. No, dear, when our son is born I want him to be born—here."

Hendrie bent and kissed her.

"Son?" he said gently.

"Yes, dear. I'm sure he will be our —son."

The man sighed. He was thinking of Frank. He was thinking of another woman who had said that to him. He was thinking of all he had come to tell this woman, and he knew he must remain silent. The doctor said she must not be excited. The way he had calculated to beat the man Tug was barred to him, and he knew he had thought more of beating him than of the honesty of his purpose.

Suddenly Monica turned her head.

"Tell me, Alec, do you think Frank will ever come to me? Oh, if he would only come I—I believe these dreadful nightmares would leave me. If you only knew how I long to see him. If you—"

At that moment one of his headstrong fits seized the man.

"He shall come," he cried. "I—I promise you!"

The sick woman clasped her hands in an ecstasy of hope and thankfulness.

"Oh, Alec," she cried, "you promise? Then—he will come. I can be happy now. Quite happy—till you return."

But immediately Hendrie realized how he had committed himself. He saw ahead the added danger of failure. And in his moment of realization he rose abruptly from his seat on the bed. But he would not yield to his momentary weakness. His promise once given must be fulfilled. He must set about it at once. He knew that his desperate feelings at the sight of the sufferings of this woman he loved, had trapped him.

"I must go now, Mon," he cried, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "I must fulfill my promise. You see my going to Calford is lucky, for I believe *our* Frank is there. If he is I shall bring him back with me. Good-by, my dearest. God bless you. Our Frank shall help you to get well."

"God bless you, Alec. You will come back to me — soon?" she cried appealingly.

The man stooped, and the woman's thin arms caught and held him in their embrace.

Beyond the door Phyllis was awaiting him. As he came out she raised a finger to her lips to enjoin silence, and led him down the corridor.

"I had to see you first, Mr. Hendrie," she said, in an excited undertone. "It's—it's about Frank. She's dying—to see him. Well, I've had a letter from him. I'd written him, telling him he must come, and it's his answer. He—he says he's coming right away, and I've to go into Everton to meet him. I—had to ask you first. May he come—and see Monica?"

A silent thankfulness went up from the millionaire's heart as he smiled down into the pretty, eager face before him.

"Why, my dear, I've only just given my solemn promise that he shall

come, and I was wondering how to fulfill it."

Then his manner grew thoughtful, and a touch of bitterness crept into it.

"I'm—I'm going into Calford right now," he said, "and—my absence will make it easier for him. Good girl."

He patted her shoulder and passed down the stairs.

Time had been when Frank believed that no chance of life could ever bring him to the neighborhood of Deep Willows again. Now, within a brief two years he was eagerly watching for the familiar scenes as his hired conveyance drew near the village of Everton.

However eagerly his eyes gazed out ahead, his spirit was sorely enough depressed. He felt that he hated the golden wheat fields as they came within his view, spreading their rich carpet over the earth far as the eye could reach. Two years ago it would all have been so different.

Fate had sternly decreed that his lot was still bound up with Deep Willows. There was no escape. Austin Leyburn had forced this place upon him, and, further, the subtle appeal of his affections had been played upon. There was mockery in the conflicting object, of his return to the place.

At last he drove down the wood-lined main street of the village. On the next corner stood the Russell Hotel. Yes, he could see it. There was a buggy outside it. There was some one in it. Ah, yes, a woman. No, why it was—yes, it was Phyllis.

His heart beat fast as his buckboard rattled up. His eyes had grown bright with something of their old boyish smile of delight as he noted the bent head of the girl poring over a book. For the moment, all his doubts and regrets were forgotten. Phyllis was waiting for him.

He called out a greeting as he drew nearer, and the girl looked up with a glad smile. Then, though many yards still separated them, he became aware of a marked change in her young face. She was thinner, the old freshness of her rounded cheeks had somehow sobered down to a delicate smoothness, almost thinness. The brilliant look of perfect, open-air health had given place to a delicate pallor. Her eyes seemed bigger and wider than ever. Then there was her change of attire.

"Why, Phyl," he cried, as he came up. "You waiting for me here like this? I might have been hours late."

The girl smiled happily as she closed her book.

"Certainly you might. But"—with a simple sincerity—"it would have made no difference. I have waited longer than this for you—before."

For once Frank detected that which underlay her words. He remembered she had said she would always be waiting for him, and his boyish heart went out more tenderly to her than ever.

Then he alighted and climbed into Phyllis's buggy, and the next moment they were rolling smoothly along in the direction of Deep Willows.

She looked round with a half humorous smile.

"I forgot you belonged to the—enemy, Frank. You said in your letter you'd got to get right here in your—work. It seems queer. I—I just can't fix you as an—enemy," she said in a tone of raillery.

"I'm—not an enemy, Phyl," he said, in a low tone.

"Aren't you?" She laughed. "I suppose it's just friendship to us all to come along, just around harvest, and tell the boys to quit work, so as to make us poor farmers lose our crops, and keep the boys who work the harvest from making a great stake for the winter. You see, we've had men around these weeks and weeks, telling the boys that way. They're men belonging to Leyburn, same as you do."

Frank looked up with hot eyes.

"I don't belong to Leyburn," he cried.

His sudden heat sobered the girl at his side.

"I'm real sorry I said that, Frank,

I am sure. Guess I didn't think—except about poor Monica. You see, dear, she's so—so ill, and I don't think she'll ever get better. When this trouble comes I'm afraid it'll kill her."

The man's resentment had utterly died out.

"Kill her? Oh, Phyl, you can't—you don't mean that. How—how can any labor trouble hurt her? It can't. There will be no trouble if Hendrie is—reasonable. That is what Leyburn said. He promised me that."

"Promised you?" said the girl quickly. Her mind was wide open and watchful. This boy was all the world to her.

"Yes, yes. He promised me before I accepted this work."

Phyllis gazed out ahead and nodded. "You, too, feared your work might hurt Monica," she said, "or you would not have made him promise—that."

Frank started. He knew that fear had been in his mind—was still in it. But Phyllis did not wait for an answer.

"Men are so queer," she said, with a quaint little smile. "I'd say they aren't a bit like women in—some things. I guess it wouldn't hurt you just a little bit if I'd set right out to carry on a war against everything that belonged to your life. To a woman that seems dreadful. It doesn't matter if trouble comes or not, you're leading the folks against your Monica. While she's abed sick to death, and can't help herself, you're—you're just going to hit her in the face."

"Phyl, Phyl! For God's sake, don't talk that way!" Frank burst out, a great, passionate grief in his honest eyes. "I'd give my life a hundred times to help her. I love her as never mother was loved."

"I know, dear," the girl replied soothingly. "I know all that. God is watching over her, and He would never permit you such a—crime. Then, dear"—she smiled her gentle smile up into his face and her pretty teeth clipped together as she spurred herself to her final thrust—"there's another watching over her, too. He's a big, strong man, who's just full of all the faults which belong to all strong human nature. He's anything but a saint. But he sets your Mon before all things in his life, before everything, and he's—her husband. He is there to protect her, as, some day, you may want to protect—me."

The buggy rounded the last bend in the trail, and the great house came into view as Phyllis finished speaking. Frank made no answer. He had nothing to say.

No, he had no answer for this wise girl he loved. How could he answer her? His eyes were opening to possibilities which had seemed so utterly impossible before. In his mind he had accused Hendrie and all others of his class of being monsters of inhumanity, devoid of heart, a race apart from those who toiled for the barest existence, and Phyllis was telling him how perfectly human were these hated creatures. A strange warmth of feeling rose up in his heart for him who could so watch and guard over Monica.

Phyllis sat watching him covertly. Perhaps she understood something of what was passing in his mind. She understood his doubt; that there was no mistaking. Presently she drew the horse up at the entrance porch. She flung the reins to the waiting servant and sprang unassisted from the vehicle. In silence they passed into the house; in silence Phyllis led the way up-stairs. At the door of the sick-room she paused and knocked. It was opened by the new nurse, arrived only that morning from Calford. Then Phyllis, signing to Frank to remain outside, passed in and closed the door behind her. The man waited. The minutes seemed like hours. Something of Phyllis's manner in entering that room had inspired him with a dread which no words could have given him. He felt that perhaps he was about to see her for the last time. The next moment

the nurse stood in the doorway, signing to him for silence; then she beckoned him in.

The door closed softly behind him, and he started at the great canopied bed. Monica was half propped up. Beside her was Phyllis, chafing her thin, almost transparent hands. He took a step toward the bed, but halted abruptly as he heard Monica's familiar voice, high pitched and strident.

"No, no; I don't believe it. I can't have won it. Why, you don't know what it means to me. I'm going to see the editor at once. Yes, he's my son, and what of it? You dare." Then followed a few mumbled unintelligible words. But in a moment her voice rose to a passionate appeal. "Oh, Frank, don't leave me. No, don't go—please don't leave me. He's gone! He's gone! They've taken him to prison. Five years. God have mercy, have mercy!"

Frank stood looking on in horrified amazement. He had not dreamed of such a thing. Suddenly he started forward, and Phyllis, watching, beckoned to him. He flung himself upon his knees at the bedside and tried to take one of the sick woman's hands. But Monica snatched it away.

"Don't dare to touch me," she cried, struggling into a sitting posture. "You—you have done this. You sent him to prison—and now I shall never see him again."

Phyllis caught Frank's hands and led him away. "Come," she said, and together they passed hastily out of the room.

"This delirium only started after I left this morning," the girl was saying. "She was quite—quite all right then. Oh, Frank, I don't know what to do. Mr. Hendrie is away, and—I'm afraid."

The man's face was ghastly pale and a light of utter depression and hopelessness had dulled his eyes. At the girl's final admission he suddenly looked up and a passionate light replaced the gloom of a moment before.

"Phyl, Phyl, I can't go on!" he cried. "I can't leave her. I must stay here. She—she is my mother. No, no. I can't go on with it. I must stay and help her. Phyl—tell me. Tell me what I can do."

The man's sudden passion stirred the girl's responsive heart. She suddenly placed one hand upon his as it rested on the balustrade beside her.

"You can't stay here, Frank dear," she said. "It would be wrong."

"Wrong?"

The girl nodded. "Yes," she said simply. "Your duty lies elsewhere."

"My duty lies here. My first duty is to my—mother."

The man's denial came with a deep thrill of passion.

"Does it, dear?" Phyllis said gently. "I think not—yet." Then she suddenly abandoned herself to all that was in her heart for this man's good, and her voice was deep with her own emotion.

"I tell you, you can't stay. You must go. Go right about your business. Frank, Frank, just fix it in your mind right away. Your pledge is to the workers now, and you must fulfil it. When you're through, when you've fulfilled your duty, then it's time to come around and think of those you just love—for yourself. Frank, I'd just love to have you stay, but I'd rather you do the duty you set yourself—now."

The man stared incredulously up into her face.

"*You*—*you*, Phyl, tell me to—go on? *You* refuse me when I implore you to let me remain with Mon?"

The girl looked down at him with her wise little smile. "Yes," she said, with a sigh. "I want you to go now."

CHAPTER XXXII.

The Strike.

ANGUS looked up into the faces of the three men standing beyond his roll-top desk. He leaned back in his

chair, and his cold eyes glanced deliberately at each man's face in turn. They were russet-hued faces, bearded and unkempt. They were three of his farm-hands.

Angus knew them well for willing, hard-working men. The men stood silent and uncomfortable under his scrutiny, but a surly truculence was in their eyes as they endeavored to return his stare.

"So this is your—ultimatum," the manager said at last, with something of his best snarl in his harsh voice. "Mr. Hendrie's got to cut out one hundred and eighty-three niggers from this place, all slap-up workers, who don't break up every blamed machine they put their hands on, because you white boys are kicking at their color."

"They're undercuttin' us in price," cried one of the men, with an oath.

"They're being paid the same wages as you are," retorted Angus sharply.

"See here, Mr. Moraine," cried another, "we come here like men to tell you what's doing; so it's up to you. We refuse to work alongside a crowd of niggers. Try and force it on us, and there's not a blamed soul among us whites'll handle a binder this harvest. Your crops can rot. Every white man on this layout quits at sundown to-day."

Angus rose from his chair, and his lean figure was bent forward as he supported himself with one hand on the desk.

"You can take your damned 'times' now," he cried fiercely. Then he shot one hand in the direction of the door. "There's the door," he shouted.

The three muttering figures retreated hastily.

Angus Moraine dropped back into his chair with the sigh of a man at high tension.

A moment later he picked up a tinted paper, and read the typewritten words upon it. It was a message he had received that morning from the millionaire. It was satisfactorily brief.

Fixed up everything.

HENDRIE.

The sight of those three words gladdened the Scot to an extent that brought a wintry smile to his lean face. Yes, he was satisfied. He knew that the deal in wheat had been made and that the trust affairs were safeguarded. It was this knowledge that had inspired the ruthless, autocratic fashion in which he had sent the workers' delegates about their business.

Angus quite enjoyed the work. He was really in his element. The prospect of a fight warmed his heart. Almost in the same breath he blessed and cursed what he characterised as Hendrie's bull-headed obstinacy. He sat back in his chair, lit his pipe, and prepared to compose a message to his employer.

After considerable thought, and several written attempts, he completed the message. But it was not altogether satisfactory. For some moments he sat considering it, and in the midst of his cogitations his eye lit upon his unfolded copy of the *Winnipeg Daily Times*.

It was lying on the top of his desk. He always received the paper a day late, but it was his custom to read it every morning, immediately after breakfast. This morning it had lain in its place neglected by reason of the coming of the delegation from the farm workers. Now he picked it up without another thought.

In a moment he was sitting up alert, his whole interest absorbed in what he read. The top head-line was in vast type, and half a column was devoted to lesser "scare" head-lines.

GENERAL RAILROAD STRIKE
THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

With hungry eyes he read down the list of inconveniences and terrors by which, the paper informed the public, they were beset. This was all for

the unsophisticated, the simple, and warned them that the bubble of civilization had burst as effectually as if it had been made of soap.

Angus read it all, and it impressed him. The possibilities were enormous. He pictured the state of chaos he and Hendrie had so often discussed, which might occur in a vast country, with a simple trunk route of communication running through it.

Further, his mind flew to the coming of the harvest. It was less than two weeks off. He read on:

The strikers hold the track from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, and it is understood that if the railroad company attempts to transport either passengers or freight, under military escort, at a given signal the permanent way will be torn up at hundreds of different points all along the line. Thus, even the mails will be held up. The intention of the strikers is to paralyze the entire trade of the country.

Angus looked from the paper at his message to Alexander Hendrie, and his pursed lips emitted a low whistle.

"It looks like—"

He was muttering to himself of the impossibility of the millionaire's return, when the door communicating with the house was unceremoniously flung open, and Phyllis hurried in.

"Mr. Moraine," she cried, a little breathlessly, holding out a telegraph slip. "I want you to get this off at once. I don't want to send it by any of the house servants. It's to Mr. Hendrie. He—he—must come back at once."

Angus scowled. He took the paper and began to read the message, but Phyllis gave him no time to finish it.

"He must get right back," she declared passionately. "It's—it's—Mrs. Hendrie. I've just left Dr. Fraser." Suddenly tears leaped into her distressed eyes. "He says—if—if we are to save her she'll need to be—be operated on right away. Oh, it's awful! You—you must just get him back, and he must bring a specialist with him. Ah—what's the

Angus pointed at the newspaper. Its head-lines were staring up from the desk in all their painful crudity.

"See that?" he demanded in his sharp way. "There." He pointed at the paragraph relating to the transport of passengers. "I don't see how he is to get back here with a doctor or anything else. He's wanted here for other things, too, but—"

"Other things?"

The man nodded.

"We'll have a strike here of our own—to-night. All hands."

But the girl was devouring the news. As she read, her heart sank and hope was dashed.

"But he must, he must, he must come," she cried desperately. "Don't you understand? It means Mrs. Hendrie's life. Don't sit there staring. Do something. You—you've got to get him here somehow—with a—a surgeon."

He leaned forward in his seat.

"Easy, girl," he cried. "You got to keep cool. You see, Hendrie's hung up—same as other folks. The wire's still open. Now, see here, if we've got time, maybe he can make it in an automobile. You find out what time the Doc gives her, and I'll wire. You see, sometimes these things—What's that?"

Angus held up a hand and sat listening.

Far away, it seemed, a low, soft note droned in through the open window. Suddenly the man went to the outer door and flung it open. The girl followed and stood beside him. The sound grew louder. At last the man shook his head ominously.

"That's Hendrie's automobile," he said. "If he's in it—there's a poor chance of getting a surgeon from Winnipeg."

But Phyllis made no answer. She was staring out down the trail. Then she cried out:

"Look, look! It is—Mr. Hendrie!"

A few moments later the great ma-

chine rolled up. The millionaire leaped to the ground and came over to them at once.

"I just made it!" he cried. "Got the last train out of Winnipeg. They've closed down tight. There's not a locomotive running in the country to-day—except to carry mails. I was dead in luck. There's going to be the devil to pay!"

"There sure is," replied Angus grimly.

Hendrie glanced sharply into the man's face. Then his eyes turned quickly upon Phyllis. But he followed his manager into the office without a word.

"Well," he demanded, looking from one to the other, "what's—doing?"

Angus picked up the message he had written out. He handed it to Hendrie.

The millionaire took the paper. As he read the long message it contained his eyes lit and a half smile stirred the corners of his mouth.

"Well," he said, "we've guessed that all along. That's not worrying any of us. You got my message? The deal's through. Every grain of wheat on Deep Willows is sold in the ear. I've sold no more, but I stand a personal guarantee for the rest. You see, I've a notion that the risk lies in my property—only. Nowhere else. My guarantee for the rest of the trust farmers, which includes your property, goes. The trust must get the full benefit of the market."

At that moment Phyllis, unable to contain herself longer, made a move toward the millionaire.

"Ah, my dear," he cried, still buoyant in his confidence, "guess I'd forgotten you—eh?"

Phyllis was holding up her message—the message she had brought for Angus to despatch.

"What, more trouble?" cried Hendrie, taking the paper with a laugh.

Phyllis made no answer.

She waited, scarcely daring to breathe, watching for the ray of hope she dared to think his expression as he read might afford her.

First, as she watched, she saw that ominous drawing together of the man's heavy brows, then the naturally cold gray of his eyes seemed to change. Their stony gleam shone like the pinnacles of an iceberg in the light of a winter sun. Then they lit with a sudden, violent emotion, and it seemed to her that the strength she was relying upon, when most needed, was about to fail her.

He looked at Angus for a moment in a sort of dazed inquiry. Then his gaze sought the girl, and the storm burst.

"God in heaven!" he cried. "Why was I not told? Why, in God's name, was it left till now? You, Angus! You, girl!" He turned furiously from one to the other. "Do you know what you've done? Do you?" He laughed wildly. "Of course you do! You've timed it. Timed it, do you hear? So it's impossible to get poor Mon the help she needs. Oh, as if I can't see! Am I blind? You, you rotten Scot, you've always hated her! I saw it from the first. And now maybe you're satisfied. As for you, girl"—he turned upon Phyllis with upraised arms, as though about to strike her to the ground—"you're as bad. You wanted your revenge for what your man has been made to suffer. That's it. You thought to hurt me, and, by God, you have succeeded!" he cried his voice rising to greater violence. "Oh, yes, you've succeeded between you! You've—you've killed her!"

He brought one great fist crashing down upon the desk. Then he rushed on:

"That fool doctor talks of hope. How can there be hope? I tell you there's none—not a shadow. There's not a train to go through. That woman'll be left to die. Do you hear me? Die!"

All this man's strength was swept aside by the passionate torrent of his

dreadful feelings. All power of reason was lost to him.

Phyllis understood something of this. Angus eyed him watchfully.

"You are talking like a child," she cried recklessly. "How dare you say such things to us—to me? It's you—you who've laid poor Monica on her bed of sickness. You, with your cruel wickedness, your vile suspicions. It is you alone who's responsible, and you know it.

"Say, Mr. Hendrie," she went on, her tone changing from passionate anger to one of taunting mockery, "you're a great man. There's no one can beat you when they get up against you. That's why you can stand there bullying and accusing us. Oh, you're a great man!"

Then in a flash her mockery was merged into a fierce challenge, the more strong for her very youth and girlishness.

"Prove it! Prove it!" she cried. "Prove your power against the fate barring your way. Don't stand there accusing folks who're right here to help you all they know. Save your Monica. There's time—yes, I tell you there's time—if you've the heart and courage to do it!"

She stood before him, her slim figure palpitating with the fierce emotion his madness had stirred in her.

The millionaire's reply came after a long pause. It came in hard cold tones.

"Run away, girl!" he cried harshly. "Run away and leave me to think this thing out. Guess I'm sorry for what I said— Now, I just want to think."

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.

FANTOMS

By Gladys Hall

METHOUGHT I heard a trail of fantom feet,
Passing me by in cadence soft and low;
They touched my brow with wraithly finger-tips,
And left a faint, unutterable wo.

They were the ghosts of things I left undone
To those gone now beyond my earthly reach;
Mayhap a little service all forgot—
A flower unbestowed—a kindly speech.

Ah me, they are the ghosts of things undone;
Some soul left lonely, some heart's aching tears,
Some little sacrifice, a cheery smile—
These are the flowers on the path of years.

Ah me, ah me, the things I left undone
To those I loved—the many weary hours—
Ah me, ah me, the sunshine—and the stars—
The sea—the song—the flowers!

The Sealed Valley

by Hulbert Footner

Author of "Jack Chanty."

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

NAHNYA, a beautiful half-breed Indian girl, asks Ralph Cowdray, an impressionable young doctor in a frontier town of the Canadian Northwest, to make a journey of three hundred miles to break and reset her mother's crudely set arm. Aroused by his interest in the girl, Ralph consents. They travel first on a primitive steamboat. Nahnya's charms attract attentions 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 leaves the valley, but vowing to 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 followed by Joe Mixer and Stack and a half-breed, Philippe; but throws them off the scent. Going down a rapids Ralph's cockle capsizes. He reaches shore with a dislocated shoulder. For a week he wanders, out of his head, and is nursed back to life by Kitty Sholto, daughter of Jim Sholto, a miner. Kitty falls in love with Ralph, and becomes jealous of Nahnya. Ralph is captured by Joe Mixer and his crew.

CHAPTER XX.

The Secret Escapes.

IT was only in Ralph's presence that Kitty's pride sufficed to bear her up.

When she and Jim returned to the shacks she collapsed again, and Jim had no difficulty in reasserting his parental authority. When the sudden hue and cry was raised after Ralph Jim ordered her to remain behind locked doors while he went to investigate. She dared not disobey him.

She awaited his return in a state bordering on distraction, her quick imagination running ahead to picture horrors overtaking the man she loved.

On his coming in she read in his face that the worst had not happened—but less than the worst was bad enough.

Little by little she wormed out of him all that he had learned.

This story began in the All-Story Cavalier Weekly for August 29.

Jim affected to make light of the matter, insisting that Ralph was getting no more than his due. Kitty's truer instinct warned her that the young man was in the hands of deadly and unscrupulous enemies, who would stop at nothing, so they thought themselves safe.

Supper in the shack was a ghastly pretense for her. Her hands shook so that she could scarcely lift the dishes.

Her distracted eyes saw nothing they were turned on, all her faculties being concentrated on listening for sounds from the point. Jim, exasperated beyond bearing by the sight of her distress, lost his temper and stormed at her with inconsistency worse than that he accused her of.

Fortunately for her it was Jim's habit to turn in almost immediately after eating.

Not even the extraordinary sequence of events this day could keep him up an hour longer than his time. He refused to return to the point, from a secret fear perhaps of learning something that would shake the philosophic stand he had taken.

He retired to his bunk in the kitchen and Kitty locked herself in her room.

Here she was at least free to listen without being sworn at. She flung herself across her bed with her head on the window-sill. The night was absolutely still except for the tireless voice of the brook. Its senseless chatter and brawl drove her wild.

She could hear nothing above it.

To be obliged to wait and listen, practically a prisoner with only her imagination free to create the worst—real madness lay that way. If they were going to carry him off bound and helpless, she knew she must follow or die.

She rose and listened at the door. Jim was snoring like an exhaust-pipe. "He can sleep!" she thought, amazed. Catching up a shawl, she slipped out of the window the way Nahnya had gone.

Her flying moccasined feet fell noiselessly on the earth.

She ran around the house and down the trail toward the river. It was not yet dark. Fearful of being seen, she struck off the trail and ran doubled up under the willow-branches like a partridge in cover.

Every few seconds she stopped short, holding her breath in the effort to hear.

The turmoil of the brook still drowned all other sounds. A suggestion of men's voices and coarse laughter only tantalized her ears. Yesterday if anybody had told Kitty she would be spying on a camp of rough men to-day and listening to their talk she would have covered her head in shame.

She never thought of shame now.

She came closer and closer by little runs until no more than twenty yards separated her from their camp. She could see the light of their fire reflected on the high branches overhead. Here she crouched down behind a thick screen of leaves prepared to spend the night if need be.

For a while she could hear nothing. She began to fear that they must have gone, after all, taking him. Suddenly a disembodied voice sounded:

"He's come to," it said. "Try him again."

Kitty's heart stood still at the picture this called up. There was a pause; then another voice said brutally:

"Will you tell?"

She had no clue to the scene of her previous knowledge, but her intuition told her what was taking place. Another pause, and a soft, torn groan reached Kitty's ears. She sprang up electrified.

Gone were all maidenly modesties and shrinkings. Fiery-eyed and self-forgetful as a mother-animal whose young are threatened, she crashed through the branches and stood among the men crying:

"Let him alone, you cowards!"

Joe Mixer, Stack, and Crusoe Campbell fell back dumfounded. The half-breed, who slept by the fire, woke up and partly raised himself, blinking at her stupidly.

Kitty saw only Ralph.

He hung limply on the rope that bound him to the tree. His face was ghastly, his breath came in gasps, and the sweat of pain had left wet channels in front of his ears and down his neck.

Kitty flew to him with a moan of commiseration, and fumbled helplessly with the knots of the rope.

The men recovered from their surprise. Knowing that Jim had a daughter, it was not hard for them to explain Kitty's presence. As men must needs do everywhere in the presence of a genuinely angry woman, they looked silly and sheepish.

"Stand away from there, young lady!" growled Joe.

"You unspeakable coward!" cried Kitty in her hushed and thrilling voice.

Joe flushed darkly. "Go back to your father," he said. "This is no place for you!"

Kitty paid no further attention to him.

"If he finds you here and cuts up rough, mind I warned you," blustered Joe. "These men will bear me out."

Neither the thought of her father's anger nor anything else could deter Kitty now. She worked desperately at the knots.

"Go back, Kitty," whispered Ralph between his pale lips. "You can't do any good!"

"Oh, my dear!" murmured Kitty on the passionately solicitous note of a mother to her hurt child.

"Campbell, take her away from there," ordered Joe.

The long-haired nondescript, grinning witlessly, pinned Kitty's elbows to her sides from behind and drew her away from the tree. She was helpless. Her eyes flashed

"I'm not afraid of you—any of you!" she cried.

"You get this matter wrong, miss," said Joe with an offensive servility. "This fellow did us an injury. He is our rightful prisoner. But I don't want to be hard on him. I offered him his release on fair terms. If he don't take 'em, 'tain't my fault, is it?"

"Tell this man to take his hands off me and I'll speak to you," said Kitty indignantly.

At a nod from Joe, Crusoe released her.

"What terms?" Kitty demanded to know.

"You tell him he's foolish," said Joe fawningly. "Maybe he'll listen to you. You tell him to tell me what I want to know, and I'll trouble him no further."

"What do you want to know?"

"Only where the girl Annie Crossfox lives."

The suddenness and completeness of the surprise almost undid Kitty. She swayed a little as under a physical blow. Her cheeks blanched. "Annie Crossfox!" she murmured.

"I have business with her," Joe went on. "I can find her, anyway, but I'm in a hurry. Let him tell me and I'll set him loose."

Kitty was torn into shreds by her conflicting emotions.

It nearly killed her to see Ralph suffering so—and it turned her into ice to think that it was for Nahnya's sake he was bearing it. She was terrified, too, knowing that the secret was in her own keeping.

Strange and dreadful consequences must depend upon it for Ralph to be willing to stake his life. Kitty saw plainly enough that they would kill him before he told.

Little Stack was watching Kitty with ferretlike sharpness. Suddenly he cried out: "She knows herself!"

Kitty felt as if a net had suddenly been cast over her head, entangling her inextricably.

Stack sprang up and, looking from

Ralph to Kitty with a timorous, malignant smile, whispered in Joe's ear. Joe nodded in high satisfaction.

"So you know where he got his gold and where the girl is hidden," said Joe, leering at Kitty.

"No! No!" she protested desperately. "I know nothing."

Her terror-stricken face betrayed her. Joe merely laughed. "Very good," he said; "you can make him tell us, then, or tell us yourself."

Kitty's first impulse was to fly.

She saw, however, that they meant to work on her through Ralph, and then nothing could have dragged her from the spot. Ralph's right arm had been freed, and it hung down outside the ropes that bound him.

Joe grasped the helpless wrist. Kitty saw a quiver pass through Ralph; saw him try to stiffen his fainting body; saw the tense muscles on his jaw as he clenched his teeth.

"Don't! Don't!" she cried wildly. "That's his hurt arm!" Crusoe Campbell's great hand pressed her back from rushing to Ralph's aid.

"I just give him a little osteopathy," said Joe, grinning.

Kitty had dressed that shoulder every day; a vivid picture of the angry, throbbing flesh was before her. She had hardly dared touch it with her delicate fingers, and now she saw the butcher about to wreak his strength on it. An agonizing pain struck through her own frame.

She nearly swooned.

Joe, watching Kitty with a sidelong smile, gave the arm a little twist. Kitty saw Ralph's eyes roll up with the pain. He made no sound.

"For a starter," said Joe. "Better tell before he gets worse!"

He lifted the arm again.

"Stop! Stop!" screamed Kitty. "I'll tell!" She sank to the ground and covered her face.

Ralph, half stupefied with pain and nausea, looked at Kitty with a dull wonder. He did not suspect that she knew the secret.

"Will you promise to let him go if I tell you?" murmured Kitty.

"I promise to let him go if you tell the truth," said Joe.

On the ground, with her hands clenched in her lap and her head bowed, Kitty began her tale breathlessly, as if she dared not pause to think of what she was doing.

"About half a mile this side of the Grumbler rapids there is a stream comes in on the north side. You will know it by a large, flat rock beside the river. That is where you land. You will find a trail up the mountain beside the stream. You follow it until you come out on the forest at the foot of a big peak that sticks up like a thumb."

The men hung breathlessly on her words. The painstaking details carried conviction. Little Stack wrote it down in a note-book. With her first words a new horror was born in Ralph's face. He forgot his weakness.

"Near the place where you come out of the forest," Kitty went on, "the trail crosses a ravine. You leave the trail at that place and follow the bed of the ravine up to the left—just a little way. There is a little bend in the ravine, and a drift-pile at the bend, and above the drift-pile three stunted trees are growing on a little ledge, and some bushes—"

"Kitty! For God's sake!" murmured Ralph.

She would not look at him. She went on faster than before. "Behind the bushes there is a hole in the rock. You let yourself down into the hole, and you come out into a cave. Turn to the left in the cave and walk a long way—half an hour's walk.

"You carry a torch to show you the way. You cross the hole where the water goes down. Half a mile farther you come out on the other side of the mountain. It is a beautiful valley. There is no other way to get in. That is the place!"

Kitty came to a stop and looked around her a little wildly.

Joe Mixer, Philippe, and Crusoe were all staring at her as if thunderstruck. From her their eyes turned on each other furtively. The same thought was in the mind of each, and each wondered if the others knew. Joe saw that it could not be kept a secret.

"By Gad! it's the Bowl of the Mountains!" he cried. "And it's ours!"

"Maybe she's lying?" said Stack.

"Who told you this?" Joe demanded to know.

Kitty nodded toward Ralph. She had not dared to look at him yet. "Now let him go!" she murmured.

Joe Mixer's little eyes glittered strangely; he was touched with a kind of awe. More than once he repeated "Bowl of the Mountains" under his breath as if he could not fully grasp the idea.

Stack's ferretlike glance darted from the face of one man to another trying to read the secret they shared; he was tortured by his exclusion. A strange sound of laughter broke from Ralph's lips, and all the men looked at him. At the call of his desperate need he had partly overcome his weakness. He was playing his last card.

"You're easily taken in," he said scornfully. "It's likely I'd tell her!"

Kitty timidly raised her eyes to Ralph's. The scorn that blazed on her shriveled up her soul. She wondered how she could go on living after it.

"How do I know you ain't lying?" Joe asked her. "How did he come to tell you about the other woman?"

"I'll say no more," murmured Kitty.

Joe made a move toward Ralph's arm, and she sprang to her knees with a cry. "I'll tell you! It is true! I swear it! He was out of his head when he came—for two days. He told me in his fever. Over and over he told me. I wrote it down. I thought it was just fancies—until Annie came to-day, and then I knew it was true. Now let him go!"

Hope died within Ralph's breast. His head fell forward. "Nahnya foresaw this," he thought. "She is always right. I have ruined everything. What is there left for me?"

Joe looked at Stack. It was clear that he come to lean on the little man's evil perspicacity.

"It's true all right," said Stack. "He'd have kept his mouth shut if it was a lie."

"Now let him go," said Kitty again.

"Hold your horses," said Joe. "I didn't say—"

"You promised!" cried Kitty wildly.

"I'll keep to my promise," said Joe—"in my own time. I'd be a fool to let him loose now to make trouble for us. We're going to push off at dawn. I'll leave him tied to the tree, and as soon as we're gone you can come and cut him loose."

"He'll pot us from the shore!" Stack piped up excitedly.

"He'll not raise a gun with that arm inside a month," said Joe, grinning. "Run back to your bed," he said to Kitty.

"I'll wait here until you go," she said.

"No, you don't!" said Joe. "And have your father down on us like a mad moose directly! You run along, or I'll go up to the shack myself and fetch him back to bring you."

The threat was effective. Kitty turned abruptly and ran back over the trail.

She ran until she was sure her footfalls had passed out of ear-shot. Then she stopped and listened to make sure she was not followed.

Satisfied of this, she crept into the underbrush and began to make her way back, feeling her way with infinite patience over treacherous twigs and dry leaves, doubling and circling to find a way through the thickly springing stems, drawing her skirts

close around her and insinuating her body softly through the leaves.

Kitty had never hunted nor practised woodcraft; it was pure instinct that enabled her to make her way through the undergrowth as noiselessly as a lynx. These soft natures have a boldness of their own.

She proceeded until, through the interstices of the leaves, she could watch every move of the four men around their fire, and watch Ralph, that they did him no further injury.

The half-breed had already laid himself down to sleep again. After the manner of his race, he held himself aloof, affecting a stolid unconcern with white men's matters.

The three white men talked together low-voiced. It was as if the very magnitude of their good fortune had sobered them.

Joe Mixer clapped his thigh and cried softly:

"Bowl of the Mountains! We're made for life! Millionaires, big-bugs, second to none! This means living like a lord, the real thing; steam-yachts, private cars, horses, automobiles, jeweled women! And eating and drinking of the best as much as one can hold—if it's handled right!"

He licked his lips greedily and shot a contemptuous and furtive glance at his two companions, the one weak-minded, the other a physical weakling. The look boded them no good.

Even in the prospect of such richness men must sleep, and one by one they wrapped themselves in their blankets and lay down. In time they lay all four in a row, feet to the fire, looking in their wrappings like four corpses ready for burial in the sea.

Kitty drew even closer, the better to see how it was with Ralph. He hung for support on the ropes that bound him, his head fallen forward on his breast. A fresh terror attacked her at the sight of his limpness; she crept toward him until she could see his eyes wink in the firelight and knew that he was at least conscious.

Her heart was wrung by the sight.

In reality Ralph had passed the extremity of pain, both physical and mental, and was sunk in a kind of lethargy. The effect of what had happened was to fill him with the same hopeless fatalism that Nahnya had.

What would happen was bound to happen. The powers were against them, and it was useless to struggle.

The brook made no noise where it emptied into the river, and in the stillness of the forest the breathing of the four sleepers became clearly audible to Kitty. It gave her an idea that caused her heart to set up a beating like a frightened bird's.

She listened and found she could distinguish the sounds made by all four—the stertorous snoring of the full-blooded butcher, the quick, gasping breaths of the ferretman, the wooden snores of the witling, even the deep, slow breathing of the half-breed youth who did not snore.

It was unquestionable that they were all sleeping deeply.

Kitty's tongue clave to her palate, and she nearly died with fright at what she was about to do; but she never hesitated. With infinite caution she made her way around through the bush to Ralph's tree, approaching it from behind.

The beating of her heart was the most sound she made, and she could not control that.

Arrived at the tree at last, she crouched behind it, not daring to speak to him. Rising to her feet at last, she softly touched his elbow. Ralph started violently, but betrayed no sound. Kitty attacked the knots with shaking fingers.

Ordinarily, she could never have loosened them, but there was no question of failing now; it *had* to be done. In the end it was done. Ralph steadied himself against the tree, while she lowered the loosened coil to his feet.

Ralph sank to his knees.

Instantly, aided by one hand, he started to drag himself toward the

edge of the bank. The other hand trailed helplessly. Kitty tried to steer him in the other direction, but he shouldered her aside.

She was obliged to follow him.

Once Joe Mixer's snore broke off short; he muttered in his sleep and changed position. Kitty's heart turned over in her breast.

Somehow they got down the bank to the sand below. Ralph made straight for his raft, which lay as he had left it, the paddle sticking between the logs.

Kitty put her lips to his ear.

"What are you going to do?" she whispered, apprehending the worst.

"Warn Nahnya," he returned. "In two hours it will be light."

"You can't!" she began with rising excitement. "You're not fit to—"

Ralph clapped his good hand over her mouth.

"How he hates me!" thought Kitty. Realizing the hopelessness of trying to dissuade him, she helped push the raft off the sand. Ralph climbed on board and Kitty followed.

"Go back," he whispered sharply.

For answer she took the paddle out of his hand and shoved the raft into deeper water. "You can't travel alone," she whispered. "You can't use the paddle. You'd only be carried down the rapids!"

He offered no further objection.

Kitty propelled the raft into the main current and laid the paddle down.

Thereafter they traveled without speaking. The raft was ceaselessly and slowly swung around and back in the eddies. The gigantic, shadowy mountain masses crouched and looked dumbly up at the stars, like gross, earthy creatures under the spell of fairy wands.

There was no air stirring, and the river was like oil stirred with a spoon. Occasionally the eddies burst beside them with a soft gush, immediately to reform again.

Though there was an arm's length between them, the two on the raft were separated by a wall more impenetrable than stones and mortar. On one side of it sat the youth with his hooded despair; on the other side the girl nursed her unrequited love and her torturing jealousy.

Her quick mind ran ahead to picture the meeting with the other woman that she must witness.

She knew that Nahnya loved Ralph, however she might repulse him. It was she, Kitty, who was the scorned outsider. Yet of the two the youth was the worse off, for under cover of the darkness she might weep and ease her heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Return to the Valley.

THE Indians of the valley were engaged at their morning tasks in front of the teepees, the women making and mending clothes and St. Jean Bateese showing the boys how to wind the grip of a bow, when, without warning, the haggard white man and white woman rose over the edge of the green slope.

The Indians dropped their work and broke into loud exclamations, which brought Nahnya quickly out of one of the teepees.

She silenced them peremptorily.

Nahnya herself betrayed nothing. She approached Ralph and Kitty with a hard and accusing face and waited for their explanation.

Despair made Ralph as callous-seeming and as laconic as Nahnya herself.

"The white men know about this place," he said abruptly. "Joe Mixer and his party. They are on their way here. I came to warn you."

Nahnya's mask was unbroken.

"How many?" she asked.

"Three white men and a native."

"Who told them?" she asked accusingly.

Ralph looked away.

"It was I told them," cried Kitty quickly and tremulously. She felt as if she were being ground to pieces between this stony pair.

"They tortured him to get it out of him! Look at him! He can scarcely stand. You would have told them yourself."

"He tell you?" asked Nahnya remorselessly.

Kitty's voice began to escape from her control.

"He was out of his head," she said. "It was when he first came. I told you that. He told me in his fever. He didn't know what he was saying."

Ralph turned on Kitty.

"I didn't bring you here to defend me," he said harshly.

This was the last straw. Kitty turned from them and wept bitterly. Neither Nahnya nor Ralph regarded her.

Nahnya said dully: "What matter who tell? It come, anyway. Always I know that."

There was a silence, broken only by Kitty struggling to master her sobs. Nahnya studied the ground with a line between her brows, and Ralph looked at Nahnya.

"What are you going to do?" he asked finally.

Nahnya flung up her head.

"Fight!" she said.

Ralph's dull eyes brightened.

"We pulled the bridge over to this side of the hole after we crossed it," he said eagerly.

She nodded brief approval.

"It will take them time to bring logs to make another. I will think all to do. You take some rest."

Nahnya issued her orders, and Ahahweh took Kitty in charge. St. Jean Bateese led Ralph to his teepee, and Marya came and dressed his shoulder and made a sling for his arm.

They left him to sleep, but Ralph lay watching through the teepee opening; and when he saw Nahnya start off in the direction of the cave with a rifle under her arm, he followed.

Nahnya ordered him to return. "They not come long time yet; maybe not till to-morrow. Anyway, you can't fire a gun. Get your sleep."

"There's no use talking about it," Ralph said stubbornly.

Nahnya shrugged and went on.

Kitty was likewise on the watch. She followed a little way after Ralph. Nahnya frowned, but said nothing.

Nahnya took up her post on the rocks above the entrance to the cave. She told Ralph coldly that she had decided to make her stand here. He approved it; her enemies must issue one by one into the daylight below.

She had armed St. Jean Bateese and Charley with rifles, she said, and the two boys had their bows and arrows. They were all coming directly with blankets, food, and ammunition sufficient for a siege, if required.

They prepared for a long wait.

Ralph sat down in the grass a little removed from Nahnya and bowed his head on his knees. By and by he fell over like an inanimate object and slept as he lay. Kitty sat still farther away, like an humble dependent.

She nursed her knees and stared over the valley with tear-stained, lackluster eyes.

Ralph was awakened by a sharp exclamation from Nahnya. She had raised and pointed the gun, but held her fire. Kitty knelt in the grass with her hands pressed over her ears, terrified in prospect by the expected shot.

Ralph ran to the edge of the rocks and looked over. Philippe Boisvert had just issued out of the cave. He held his hands over his head and came climbing up the rocks in that attitude.

Arrived within a dozen yards, the half-breed began to speak eagerly in Cree. His eyes burned on Nahnya strangely. At the sound of his voice surprise broke through the mask of her face.

"Philippe!" she murmured.

A flame of jealousy made Ralph's cold breast alive again. He had thought he was past all feeling.

"What is he saying?" he demanded to know.

Nahnya's eyes were troubled.

"I know him," she murmured. "From a long time ago. He is the boy I talk with at the mission school."

The half-breed continued his impassioned plea, and Nahnya was clearly not unmoved by it. Philippe was a handsome young creature, and the fire of his feelings was seemingly an honest fire.

Ralph ground his teeth. Kitty, creeping closer and searching Ralph's face, betrayed a reflection of his jealousy in her own.

Nahnya soon recovered from her surprise.

"Speak English," she commanded Philippe coldly.

Ralph's heart was lightened. The half-breed bent an offensive scowl on him and his lips curved into a sneer. Ralph's returning look was identical.

Philippe told his tale with a swagger.

"Joe Mixer hire me at the Portage to mak' a trip. I don' know what for. I don' care. I go for fun, 'cause he got plenty w'isky. Bam-bye he say he after Nahnya Crossfox. I lak to kill him then, but I say not'ing for 'cause I want to know where Nahnya Crossfox is. Seven year I look for her. She is promise to me."

"Promised!" cried Ralph, turning to Nahnya with stormy brows.

"It was a child's promise," she said coolly. "He soon forget it, and I soon forget it."

Philippe launched into Cree again, protesting energetically. Nahnya interrupted him in the same language. Her eyes flashed. Under the lash of her tongue the young man quailed.

"Now speak English," she said imperiously.

"I help Joe to chase the doctor," Philippe went on sulkily, "because the doctor know where Nahnya is. Las' night I find out where she is and I am through with Joe, but I bring him down the river to sell him good.

"I hate all white men. When we come to the other side the mountain I say to Joe: 'You wait here, and I go spy out the way. I come back soon.' Joe say: 'All right.'

"He think I am his friend. He is a fat fool. He want to kill us all to get the gold himself. He think I not see it in his eye. He is a fool!"

"You say you fool him," said Nahnya. "Maybe you fool me, too."

Philippe protested passionately in his native tongue. More than once Ralph heard the word *moon-i-yas*, which he knew was Cree for white man.

"How did you get across the hole?" asked Nahnya.

"I leaped it," said Philippe with a swagger.

"Are the others behind you?"

"Could the fat man leap it," said Philippe, "or the little scared one—or crazy Crusoe?"

"No, but maybe you put the bridge back for them," said Nahnya.

"Tie my hands!" cried Philippe passionately, "and if they come kill me!"

"Come here," said Nahnya coolly. "Hold up your hands."

Philippe obeyed, his eyes fixed ardently on Nahnya.

"See if he have a gun," Nahnya said to Ralph.

Philippe scowled furiously at the indignity — but kept his hands up. Ralph quickly satisfied himself that the other was unarmed.

"Good!" said Nahnya with an inscrutable face. She offered Philippe her hand. "We will be friends. Let us sit down and talk what to do."

"Nahnya!" cried Ralph jealously.

She bent the same towering look on him that had crushed the half-breed. "Must I ask you when I make a friend?" she said.

Ralph, forced to remember that he had brought all this trouble upon her, hung his head. They sat down to their council of war. There could be no question of who was the leader.

The dark girl had the bearing of a queen who had risen above her human griefs and passions.

"Where are they waiting?" she asked.

"They camp at the edge of the big woods beside the gulch," said Philippe. "Jim Sholto is with them."

"So!" said Nahnya.

Kitty, hearing her father's name, came closer.

"Jim is crazy when he find his daughter go," Philippe continued. "He come after us in the dugout and catch the raft.

"Jim say to me for say to him"—pointing at Ralph—"if he bring Jim's daughter back safe before to-night Jim not touch him. Jim let him go in his boat if he want. Joe Mixer say them two can go. He don' care."

Ralph expressed no great concern at this offer. "We can send her out to her father," he said.

Nahnya said nothing.

"Jim send a letter," continued Philippe. He produced a twisted bit of cotton on which some words were scrawled, and handed it to Kitty. Reading it, she burst into tears again.

"Let them two go," said Philippe, scowling at Ralph. "I take them back."

"Suppose I let them go," said Nahnya inscrutably. "What we do after?"

Philippe's eyes flashed and his white teeth were bared. He hissed a single sentence in Cree.

"You say you kill Joe Mixer and his men?" said Nahnya coolly.

Philippe, with a startled side look at Ralph, remonstrated with her anxiously.

"I tell you speak English," said Nahnya calmly. "He is my friend as much as you."

Ralph's sore and humbled heart took what comfort it might from this.

"Well, it's easy," said Philippe with a shrug of bravado. "One is fat and one is scare' and one is crazy. There was no man in our boat but me."

"Suppose you kill them," said Nahnya. "What we do after?"

He answered in Cree.

"You will stay here with me after?" she repeated.

Ralph's face flushed. "Nahnya—" he began hotly.

She ignored him. "There is no place here for you," she said to Philippe, cold and accusatory as a high priestess. "You are half white; you are bad like a white man and a red man together! I hear them talk of you around the country.

"You make yourself crazy with whisky and fight for nothing at all. Because you are strong you do what you like. You make trouble always where you go.

"You say you hate white men, but you can't stay away from them because they have whisky. You are not white, you are not red, you are nothing. There is no place for you here."

All this was balm to Ralph's jealousy. He looked on the ground to keep from showing any triumph over the discomfited young bravo.

After debating with herself Nahnya said to Philippe, pointing down the slope: "You go down there." To Ralph: "You wait here. I go by myself and think what to do."

While Ralph and the half-breed glowered at each other from twenty paces distance, and the heavy-eyed, dispirited Kitty crouched at Ralph's elbow, disregarded by all, Nahnya went away and sat on the edge of the rocks, doubling her back and digging her knuckles into her cheeks, while she struggled with her problem.

St. Jean Bateese, Charley Crossfox, Ahmek, and Myeengun approached over the meadow laden with the weapons, food, and blankets that Nahnya had ordered them to bring.

Arriving at the foot of the slope where the stream entered its rocky gulch, they cast down their packs and, with a glance at the sun, instinctively set about building a fire and preparing a meal. They looked with curious

side glances at the new stranger who had found his way into their domain.

After a long time Nahnya arose.

Ralph read in her face that her mind was made up. He hastened to meet her, and Philippe likewise came bounding up the slope. However, Nahnya was not yet ready to divulge her plans. All she said was:

"Let us eat."

Her look was unfathomable. They were obliged to contain their impatience as best they could.

All sat in the grass at the foot of the hill. It was a strangely assorted company: Kitty, Ralph, Nahnya, and Philippe sat on one side of the fire, with the four Indians facing them from the other. Nahnya's face was smooth and composed, Philippe looked sullen, Ralph reckless and despairing, while Kitty's lips trembled, and her eyes continually filled.

The Indian lads stared at the strangers with beady black eyes, expressing a mixture of animal curiosity and human unconcern. No one of the company had any disposition to talk except St. Jean Bateese, who, with his native politeness, felt that it was incumbent upon him to tide the meal over pleasantly.

He meandered on in his soft and deprecating voice, illustrating his simple remarks with quaint gesticulation. It disturbed him not at all when no one listened.

"There is a yellow ring around the sun to-day. To-morrow will be much rain at night. It is good. The berries will ripen good. This is a year of plenty for the people. When come the leaves fall the bearfolk will be fat and tender of the berries, with much thick warm coats, I think.

"The bear he is lak a man, him lak to mak' fun when him feel good. One tam I see a bear play beside a stream. He is alone. He think nobody see him. He feel ver' good. He run and dance and fall down and laugh and turn his head because he feel so good. I laugh me till my ribs are sore."

When Nahnya arose from the grass they all followed suit. Without any preamble she said quietly: "Now I will tell you what I have thought."

All hung on her words except the two younger boys, who knew no English.

She darted an inexplicable look on Ralph, and said with odd abruptness: "Ralph and Kitty will go out to Jim Sholto."

Ralph flushed painfully.

"I will not go!" he cried. "Send her! I know I've no right to dictate to you; I brought all this on you. But that gives a right to stay here and help you out of it as much as I can. Afterward I'll not trouble you. You needn't fear that. I'll go."

Nahnya lowered her head. "I sorry," she murmured. "You mus' go!"

Ralph argued desperately against his own convictions. He had had such proof of Nahnya's foresightedness that he could not but believe she was right now, as she had been before.

"I know I can't hold a gun," he cried; "but I can advise you. There are other things— If there is any risk to be taken it is my right. What is life worth to me?"

Nahnya turned from him sharply.

She issued a quick order in Cree, and Ralph was seized by the three Indian youths and Philippe. He was helpless in their hands. At the sight of his pain-distorted face Kitty screamed.

Nahnya spoke peremptorily, and thereafter they handled him more gently. Nahnya herself kept her back turned to him. They wound a rope loosely about Ralph's body, pinning both his arms. Ralph drained the dregs of his bitter cup.

He did not speak again.

"You take them out to Jim Sholto," Nahnya said in English to Philippe. "You tell Jim Sholto not to let him loose till he tak' him away from here, so he not make trouble."

After a pause she went on: "After,

you go to Joe Mixer. You tell him it is too late to come in to-night. Tell him come to-morrow. Tell him Annie Crossfox will not fight."

Philippe started to protest.

"It is my plan," said Nahnya coolly. "I tell you all when it is time. You mus' stay in Joe Mixer's camp to-night. Soon as light comes you mus' get up. You mus' leave their camp without wake them up. You mus' go up the gulch past the hole in the rock and around the bend. I wait for you there.

"Start now," she went on. "Take a blanket and plenty ammunition and dry moose meat. Cache it by the hole in the rock when you go out. Bring it in the morning. You are going on a long trip."

Philippe muttered sullenly in Cree.

"I tell you in the morning," said Nahnya coolly. "You don' have to go unless you want."

Philippe shrugged. He turned to make ready. "I have a blanket at Joe Mixer's camp," he said.

"Take mine," said Nahnya. "Leave your blanket lie there when you get up, so they not know right away that you go away."

Nahnya sent Ahmek back to the mouth of the creek for a double handful of gold-dust to give Philippe.

The preparations were quickly made. All this while Ralph stood still and silent, looking straight before him. There was something proud in his abasement.

His face was composed except for the eyes, which glowed with a kind of exaltation of pain.

He was thinking with a somber satisfaction of the bottomless black hole that sucked in the stream entire. "A step off the bridge ends it," he said to himself, and was impatient to get there.

As they turned to start down beside the stream, Nahnya, alarmed by Ralph's silence, stole a look into his face. To her foreseeing eyes his intention was written there as clearly as if he had proclaimed it. She became deathly pale.

"Wait!" she said faintly. "I—I will go with you through the cave. Wait for me inside." To Ralph she said without looking at him: "I want speak with you."

A spasm of reawakened hope, doubt, pain convulsed his face. It was the pain that a man peacefully dead of asphyxiation feels when the reviving oxygen is forced into his lungs, dragging him back over the border. Nevertheless, Nahnya saw that he had given up his grim intention.

Philippe, Ralph, and Kitty disappeared inside the cave. Nahnya drew St. Jean Bateese a little way up the slope apart from the boys, and made him sit beside her at the edge of the rocks. "St. Jean," she said quietly, "I go away now. I not come back."

The old man turned horrified eyes on her. He began to protest breathlessly. As he looked in her quiet, resolute face the uselessness of it was borne on him, and his quavering voice died away.

"It is the best to do," Nahnya went on. "I think it all out. I am half white. I not belong here. In this place we want begin a new red race, strong and free.

"I am half white. Look what trouble and danger I bring on you. I will go away. All shall go on as we plan."

"The white men will break in to-morrow!" wailed St. Jean.

"The white men will never come in —this way," said Nahnya from between firm lips. "I will fix that."

The tears coursed down St. Jean's withered cheeks; he stroked Nahnya's hand imploringly. "I am old!" he whimpered.

"You are wise!" said Nahnya. "Add your wisdom to Charley's strength and make him a man. He will be the head man when you are gone. Make him know all the tales of our people, and all that they knew how to do, so nothing is forgotten.

"Nobody mus' know but you that I not come back. Let them look for me while the summer passes. By and by you can say you have a feeling I am dead. The young ones will forget."

The old man groaned, and letting his head fall on his breast, wound his gnarled fingers in his sparse locks.

"The boys will see you," Nahnya said sharply. "It is from you they learn how to bear pain!"

After a brief struggle with himself he lifted his head. The tears had ceased to flow, and the seamed face was composed into the ancient stoic mask of the race—the old hands still trembled piteously and groped for Nahnya's hand.

"So much we talk together," she went on, "you know all that is in my mind. When the spring come again and the sap run in the trees it is time for the children to marry. You shall marry them with a cross. My mot'er mus' teach Ahahweh all there is to do when the time come for the girls to bear children.

"No man will ever come in or go out this way," Nahnya continued. "If ever there is a famine, or you have great need to go out, there is another way. Go across the divide into the valley to the north, and at the top of that valley there is a little stream going out between the mountains. After many days' hard travel it will bring you to the Stanley River.

"You mus' not tell Charley of this way until he is wise, or until you feel yourself about to die. The knowledge of this way must be kept. Many years from now more wives will be needed for the young men. The children of brothers and sisters must not marry. Their children will not be strong."

"All shall be done as you say," murmured St. Jean Bateese.

Nahnya dropped her hand over his. Giving it a quick pressure, she sprang up and climbed the hill until she was high enough to overlook the trees.

Here she turned.

There was no mask on her face now. Her eyes brooded with an infinite wistful yearning over the lovely panorama; the lake glimmering like a peacock's breast; the verdant, white-stemmed shores, the kingly mountains basking smokily under the westering sun. To the left were the tiny teepees with the delicate smoke-spirals and a suggestion of women's figures moving in front. Nahnya turned with agitated hands, and scrambling down over the rocks, disappeared within the cave.

The old man sat where she had left him staring on the ground, a trembling hand outspread on either knee.

Nahnya saw the yellow eye of Philippe's torch gleaming far within the cavern, and she did not pause to light one for herself. She came upon the three waiting beside the hole that swallowed the stream.

Philippe sat on a jutting rock, smoking quietly; Kitty was huddled on the sandy floor, and Ralph was moving restlessly up and down.

Hearing her coming, he sprang toward her, bound as he was, softly crying her name with a passionate relief and gladness in his voice. This was what Kitty had to listen to.

Even in the uncertain light of the torch Nahnya saw the yearning and the pain in his eyes. Kitty had to see it, too. Nahnya could not support the look.

"Let us get on," she said quickly.

Philippe had already replaced the frail bridge over the hole. He crossed first, followed by Kitty, then Ralph, with Nahnya watching him close. At the other side Nahnya, stooping, affected to busy herself with the lacing of her moccasin. Philippe and Kitty passed ahead a little. Ralph stuck close to Nahnya.

As the light went on he could not see what she was doing, but he heard the scrape of the logs as she pulled the little bridge toward her, and heard the structure knock against the rocky walls as it went down.

"Nahnya!" he cried, amazed. "Aren't you going back?"

"No," she murmured.

Kitty's voice came back sharp and peremptory: "Ralph!"

"I tell you soon," Nahnya said swiftly. She hastened to catch up with the others.

Arriving at length at the cleft whence a little gray daylight filtered into the cave, Philippe quenched the torch in the loose sand on the floor.

They started through the narrow place in the same order; Philippe, then Kitty. As Ralph was about to follow Nahnya laid a hand on his arm.

"I stay here," she murmured.

He flung about. "Nahnya!—is this —the end?" he faltered.

"Listen!" she whispered swiftly. "When Jim Sholto get his daughter back he not want stay in Joe Mixer's camp no more. He make a new camp, I think.

"Maybe he go down by the river. But it is too late to start on the river to-night. He mus' camp. When they are asleep, you lie down a little way from them. Lie in the trail where I can find you easy—"

"Nahnya!"

"I will come," she whispered. "Now go; go quickly!"

CHAPTER XXII.

Renunciation.

RALPH followed Philippe and Kitty through the narrow cleft in the rock, and the three of them stood huddled together at the bottom of the hole.

The opening was like an eye looking down on them. Philippe sent Kitty aloft by means of the pine trunk. Looking at Ralph, he scratched his head in perplexity. How to get him out with his arms bound was the question.

"Untie me," said Ralph mildly. "I'll let you tie me again."

This sudden tractability aroused Philippe's suspicions. He debated the matter scowlingly. However, Ralph, deprived of the use of his right arm, was not a formidable antagonist, and the half-breed decided to chance it.

As Ralph climbed he followed close at his heels, and quickly secured him again at the top.

They made their way down the bed of the ravine. No more than Philippe could Kitty understand the new light in Ralph's eyes. She glanced at him covertly, wondering with a fresh pang of jealousy what had taken place behind her back.

Ralph was walking on air.

He had suffered so much that he snatched at the prospect of happiness, however fleeting. Both the immediate danger and the hopeless future were put out of his mind; it was enough for him that Nahnya had promised to come to him; she was one to keep her word!

Jim Sholto saw them coming, and ran down the bank to embrace his daughter. Kitty's answering welcome was not overwarm; she was too bitterly concerned with another matter. Jim, hurt by her coldness, and ascribing it to its cause, turned angrily on Ralph.

"You young blackguard!" he cried. "You'll stoop to use a helpless girl to further your evil ends, will you?"

Poor Kitty, all day the helpless plaything of circumstances, asserted herself at last. She forced herself between the two men.

"If you abuse him any more I shall hate you!" she cried to her father, with an outbreak of passion that surprised herself. "It was not his fault at all! I set him loose of my own free will out of common humanity, which you lacked! He sent me back, but I would not let him go alone in such a state! I keep telling you it's Annie Crossfox he's in love with. He has made no pretenses to me!"

"Where's your pride?" cried Jim.

"It's you who won't let me have any pride!" she flashed back at him. "Never speak of this again!"

He took her arm. "Come away," he said grimly.

At the top of the bank they met Joe Mixer. "You've got him!" he cried gleefully to Philippe. To Ralph: "You— How do you feel about it now?"

Kitty apprehending blows to follow, wrenched her arm out of her father's grasp and turned on Joe. The flames still burned high in her cheeks.

"Let him alone!" she cried. "He's not your prisoner!" To her father she said passionately: "He was sent out in your care! If you don't take him and keep him from this cowardly bully you won't take me!"

All men dread a roused woman. "Softly with your epithets, girl!" said Joe, scowling. To Philippe he said sullenly: "Give him over to me."

Philippe yielded his prisoner, nothing loath. Joe Mixer, keen to learn what the half-breed had discovered, did not care what became of Ralph.

Stack and Crusoe had joined the group, and the three of them volleyed questions at Philippe.

Jim Sholto lingered to listen; he was a gold-hunter, too. Ralph, forgotten for the moment by all the men, sat down beside the trail and hugged his dream, deaf and blind to what was going on around him. Kitty watched him sorely.

"It was just like she told," Philippe said; "a long walk through the cave and a pretty valley on the other side. There is no other way to get in. It is Bowl of the Mountains, all right."

"Did you see any gold?" demanded Joe.

"Plenty!" said Philippe; "the bottom of all the little streams are yellow with it. I pick up a little. See!"

Digging his hand into his pocket, he brought it forth full of yellow grains, which he emptied carelessly into Joe's twitching palm. The heads of the four white men came together, and the four pairs of eyes showed the same insane glitter.

"This is the stuff!" cried Joe, pouring the stuff with a voluptuous pleasure from palm to palm. "Sweeter than booze, sweeter than women—it 'll buy you plenty of both! Gad! I'll keep a great chest of it always by me and come dig in it every day for the pleasure of the feel and the heft of it!"

"Can we get it out through the cave?" asked Jim.

"Sure!" said Philippe. "It's easy going."

"How about the girl?" demanded Joe.

"She is there with her family."

"How many?"

"An old man, a young man, two boys, and four women."

"H-m! They could make it awkward for us," said Joe, frowning.

"They not care for gold," said Philippe with an innocent, stolid air. "Wash a little, and let it lie. When I tell Nahnya you all here, him feel bad. Him say no use. Him say not fight you."

"Come on, then!" cried Joe excitedly. "Let's lose no time!"

"Come on!" echoed Stack and Crusoe Campbell. The desire was no less strong in Jim Sholto's face. He looked at Kitty uneasily.

Philippe hung back.

"I paddle half the night!" he said with an admirable assumption of the disgruntled servant. "I walk all day. Am I a steam-engine? I got eat and sleep now."

"Sleep!" cried Joe. "Man, there's a fortune waiting for every one of us in there!"

"I got sleep, me," Philippe repeated stubbornly. "The gold is there tomorrow just the same, I guess."

"Damn these redskins!" cried Joe. "They're all alike!"

"Go yourself," said Philippe. "The way is free. Don' blame me if you fall in the hole or get lost."

A heated argument resulted. Philippe was inexorable. He knew well enough that the white men would not venture into the bowels of the earth without him.

Philippe finally picked up his blanket, and carrying it apart, lay down and

affected to go to sleep. The others were obliged to resign themselves as best they could to wait.

Meanwhile Jim Sholto was in a quandary.

He could not bear to have Kitty camping with that rough crew, and he was jealous of leaving her a moment alone with Ralph, yet he could not tear himself away from the vicinity with such riches waiting to be gathered.

In his mind he compared the ease of washing gold in a stream with the strenuous labor of smelting ore in little home-made furnaces.

He compromised with himself by establishing his camp a few hundred yards away from Joe's. It was the spot where the operation had been performed on old Marya's arm.

Ralph was secretly gladdened by the choice of the spot.

It was not far for Nahnya to come. During the rest of the afternoon Ralph and Kitty slept. Jim occupied himself in building a shelter of branches to house Kitty throughout the night.

There was not much conversation around this camp-fire. It irked Ralph to be obliged to accept Jim's grim hospitality, but there was no help for it.

Immediately after supper Kitty disappeared within her shelter, and Jim soon lay down in his blanket athwart the entrance. He made no objection to Ralph's dragging his bed to a little distance. If Ralph had escaped altogether Jim would have been only too well pleased.

When Jim's snores began to displace the heavy stillness of the forest Ralph rose and dragged his blankets still farther away.

Jim had tied him in such a manner that his left arm was free from the elbow. He arranged his bed directly in the trail and lay down to wait. It was about nine o'clock.

It would not be dark until after ten. He knew that Nahnya could not venture out of the cave until then, and that he must give her time to make a détour of the other camp.

He lay in a kind of fever watching for evidences of darkness with avid eyes. One cannot measure the subtle stages of the passing of day any better than its coming.

It goes and it comes and all is said.

Thus to Ralph, counting the crawling minutes, it seemed as if the bright sky clung obstinately to its brightness, and as if the dim, spacious aisles of the forest refused to grow dimmer. Losing patience at last, he closed his eyes and tossed restlessly. When he opened them again, behold! it was nearly dark.

His heart began to beat and his mouth went dry.

In every whisper of the leaves he thought he heard the brush of her skirt. The tiny, furry footfalls that began to stir among the pine-needles suggested her creeping moccasins, now on this side, now that. A dozen times he started to a sitting position, sure he heard her, only to fall back disappointed.

The thought that something might finally prevent her from coming turned him sick with apprehension.

She came as softly as a breath through the forest and dropped on her knees beside him without his having heard her coming.

His eyes were well used to the darkness, and he could make her out faintly; her graceful head outlined against a patch of sky overhead, her two hands pressed hard to her breast in a way that he knew. He heard, or fancied he heard, her heart's quick beating. A great peace succeeded the torture of suspense.

"You've come!" he breathed.

"I am mad! I am foolish!" she faltered.

He apprehended that the slightest thing would send her flying back again. By turning a little he managed to reach her hand to pull it down to his lips.

Her fingers crept eagerly inside his as she had never allowed them to do

before. She had confessed nothing with her voice yet, but her whole being breathed a passionate warmth over him that made him dizzy with happiness.

"Nahnya, darling, untie my hands," he whispered.

"No!" she said tremulously.

He pleaded with her urgently.

Her trembling hand stroked his cheek with a touch like flower petals. "Ah, do not make me fight you now," she begged. "I so tire of fighting you, Ralph. You know, if I let you free, you not let me go back. I must go back! Do not make me sorry I come!"

"This is harder to bear than Joe Mixer's tortures," he bitterly complained.

"If you say that I must go now," she whispered sadly.

It terrified him. "No! No! Anything you want!" he said swiftly.

"Let me stay quiet by you a little," she whispered. "Let me love you quiet a little."

"Tell me you love me, and I'm satisfied," he said.

She sank down beside him and kissed him softly on the lips. "I love you! I love you! I love you!" she murmured with such passion as he had never dreamed of hearing on the lips of a woman. "I love you the first time I see you! Always it near kill me to make out I do not love you! I love you till I die!"

They were silent for a space, clinging to each other cheek to cheek in the darkness, their breasts tossing on stormy sighs.

He said brokenly at last: "Nahnya, this is the strongest thing in the world. Nothing else matters. You must not leave me!"

She partly raised herself and put a gentle hand over his mouth.

"In your heart you know I mus' go," she whispered. "In your heart you know ver' well there mus' not be anything between you and me! Do not spoil our little time together by speaking of it!"

His head rolled impatiently on the ground. "I cannot live without you," he muttered. "I will not live without you!"

"Yes, you will," she said softly. "You will promise me now to live the best life you can. Because I am going to live, and always I want think of you living brave and happy and curing the sick!"

"Happy!" he said bitterly.

"It will come," she said with quiet certainty.

She lay down beside him again, on the edge of his blanket, but not touching him, except that she caught his free hand and pressed it hard to her cheek.

"Often I am think the same," she whispered. "I think what is the use of living a life like mine! But always something stop me from ending it. Something make me to go on living, sad as life is. Death is for those who are shamed, I think. I am not shamed. You are not shamed."

"You're braver than I," he murmured.

"You're plenty brave," she whispered, kissing his hand. "To-day I see you think you are shamed because you think you bring trouble on me. You think you will jus' step off the little bridge—"

"How did you know that?" he cried, astonished.

"I see it in your eyes," she said simply. "I love you. Often I know what you are thinking. That is why I say I come to-night. I want tell you I love you!

"I want tell you I think you are strong and brave. I glad you love me! I glad you love me hard enough to come back when I tell you no. I not sorry for anything. It is not your fault that the other men come after you, or that you told the secret when you were sick.

"That was going to happen. Such things are not understood by us. You mus' not be shamed. I not have you shamed, because you are my brave, good man!"

"You're an angel of comfort," he murmured. "I was ashamed!"

"Promise me now that you will make the best life you can," she whispered.

"I promise," he said.

Her quiet voice broke. "Oh, my darling love!" she cried. "Always, always I will be thinking of you! Wherever you are my spirit will go to you to love you and make you happy. You are my husband and my baby, too! Oh! I cannot speak more! How can I let you go! How can I let you go!"

She clung to him, her warm tears running down his face.

He could not speak. He soothed her silently. She fought down the sobs. By and by she said quaintly:

"That is over."

"Nahnya," he said, "put your hand in my right-hand pocket."

Her hand closed over the jewel on the chain.

"I brought it for you," he said. "Wear it always."

When she got her breath back she partly raised herself and said: "Another promise, Ralph."

"What?"

"Kitty."

He moved restlessly.

"Be good to her," she pleaded. "She is jus' sweet."

"Impossible!" he said. "She's too much mixed up in this. I never want to see her again!"

"By and by maybe you change," said Nahnya softly. "If it was not for me you would marry Kitty. She is the one for you."

"Never!" cried Ralph.

The soft hand was clapped over his mouth again.

"Do not swear it!" she said. "Who can tell how you feel by and by? Take what comes. You will like her, I think. Not like this—"

Her voice shook again.

"I not want it just like this. But it will be good. And if you feel kind to her you will remember that I wished it, and it will not be false to me. Promise me if you feel good and kind to Kitty you will marry her!"

"It will never be!" he cried.

"Then what harm to promise me?" she said quickly. "It make me a little happy."

"Very well, if I change I will marry her," he said sullenly. "But I will never change!"

"Kitty will be good to you," murmured Nahnya. "And watch you and take care of you almost as good as me. Kitty—will have babies! I think of that—it is a pain and a gladness, too!"

"Nahnya!" he cried, "you hurt me!"

She clung to him again.

"No!" she breathed in a voice as tender and thrilling as starlight; "my love will not hurt you; it will make you strong! It will be a more wonderful love because we cannot be together. It will be more real than what you see!

"It will shelter you like a house over your head and comfort you like a fire in winter! Whenever you close your eyes I will be there, waiting for you! Good-by, my brave man—my darling love!"

She was gone before he realized she was going.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Last Scene.

JOE MIXER and his men sat up late counting the golden harvest they expected to reap; consequently the next morning the sun was high in the sky before the fat man woke.

The instant consciousness returned to him he thought of "Gold!" sprang up in his mind as if written in letters of the metal. He sat up, knuckling the sleep from his eyes. Instead of the breakfast that usually awaited him he saw Crusoe and Stack still slumbering beside him.

He awakened them with no gentle urgency.

"What's the matter with you?" he

bawled with his own picturesque expletives. "It's past six o'clock, and we were going to start at five!"

Crusoe, the cook, looked around him in a dazed way. "The breed said he'd wake me," he said; "I left it to him."

They saw Philippe's tumbled blanket on the ground beyond Stack. "He's gone off, damn him!" cried Joe. "Hunting a puny rabbit, most like! They're all alike! Look sharp with the breakfast!"

While Crusoe cooked Joe and Stack collected and packed the camp impedimenta.

In his eagerness to get away the fat man was as active as a stripling. When breakfast was ready and still the half-breed had not returned, his anger was boundless. The camp atmosphere was lurid.

As yet he did not suspect any treachery, for as a result of his experience with the race he had withheld Philippe's pay, and even a breed does not run off with money owing him. Besides, he had left his good blanket behind him.

After breakfast they scattered to look for him, awaking the forest with their hails. Crusoe found tracks made that morning in the ravine. Joe and Stack joined him, and they followed the tracks toward the mouth of the cave.

"Maybe he got up early to get in ahead of us," said Stack, paling at his own suggestion.

"By Gad! if he has—" cried Joe.

But the tracks led them beyond the drift-pile.

"It's game he's after," said Joe, reassured.

Crusoe, who was a pace in advance, had stopped and was examining the creek-bed attentively. "There's another track here," he said suddenly; "a small foot, a woman's foot! That's his game!"

The three men looked at each other with growing suspicions. "Get along after them!" cried Joe harshly.

But none of them moved. They had become aware simultaneously of a curious rumbling sound high above them. It approached with terrific swiftness, ending with a mighty crash above that caused each man instinctively to make himself small and guard his head with his arms.

A great boulder leaped across the ravine, high over their heads, and smashed into the forest on the other side.

Of one accord the three turned and fled down the ravine, little Stack in advance, leaping from stone to stone like an antelope. A shower of pebbles peppered their heads and shoulders. Outside the danger zone they halted.

"By Gad! that was a close shave!" said Joe, wiping his face. "They say those stones just naturally work themselves loose on the mountain, and no man can tell when they'll fall!"

"Maybe somebody started it," suggested Stack. His teeth were chattering.

Panic seized them again.

They did not stop running until they had climbed the bank of the ravine and stood in their own camp. From this point nearly the whole of the mountainside was visible. They searched it excitedly.

"It's true!" cried Stack at last. "I see him! I see two of them up there!"

"My binoculars!" shouted Joe.

His hands shook, and it took him a long time to focus the glasses. Stack stood at his elbow, instructing him shrilly where to look. Crusoe stood with hanging jaw looking up like a clown.

Immediately above the entrance to the cave there was a precipitous cliff some seventy-five or a hundred feet high. On top of that was a flat ledge or terrace reaching back. The floor of this terrace was hidden from them, but behind it rose a long, steep, bare slide of rubble fully two thousand feet in the air, ending in a ridge or hog-back of broken rock masses which extended up at right angles to the base of the final peak of naked rock, the thumb.

It was upon the ridge, working among the rock masses with pine poles for levers, that Stack's sharp eyes had spotted the two tiny figures.

Joe finally got them within the field of his glasses. A frightful rage took possession of him. His face turned purple.

He frothed at the mouth and stamped on the ground like a madman. Stack slyly took the binoculars out of his hand or he would have dashed them to the ground.

From his broken exclamations and curses the others gathered that he had recognized Philippe and Nahnya. Stack satisfied himself as to the identity of the figures.

Another great stone started to roll down the gigantic slide. They saw it coming before they heard the noise of its passage. They gazed, fascinated.

As it gathered its terrific way it started to leap higher and higher in the air like a mad elf. It struck the rock ledge with a deafening crash and, like its predecessor, bounded high over the ravine and shattered the trees on the other side.

The force suggested by the soaring of these tons of matter lightly through the air struck awe into the souls of the beholders. The silence following the final crash of the projectile was broken by a long, dull rumble of the smaller stones displaced in its course. A long cloud of yellow dust arose behind it.

Other rocks, small and large, followed.

Stack, through the binoculars, watched the two on the height working desperately with their levers. Joe Mixer had exhausted himself in his transports. He now looked up dumb and suffering with rage, his thick lips snarling and his nails pressed into his palms.

Suddenly a light broke in his face, and he cried out:

"There's no danger! The cliff makes a screen. Look, how all the rocks jump clear of the gulch. Come on back!"

Stack had seen this before, but had kept it to himself. Both Stack and Crusoe turned white with terror at the thought of venturing up the ravine beneath that bombardment.

"You white-livered cowards!" cried Joe; "you skulkers! you shivering curs! I'll go alone! And I'll keep what I find!"

No one denied Joe Mixer brute courage. Paying no more attention to the descent of the rocks, he methodically separated a portion of their food for himself, and, rolling it within his blanket, strapped the pack on his back.

Fastening a belt of ammunition around his waist, he picked up his rifle and went doggedly down the bank and up the bed of the ravine. All the gold in the world would not have tempted the others to follow.

While he was in the ravine the two on the mountain succeeded in wresting loose a bigger mass of rock.

It came down with a frightful impetus. The noise of its coming leaped out of nothingness and stunned the ears. When it struck the ledge of rock they felt the shock below.

Joe crouched under a boulder. The mass made a gaping wound in the forest where it earthed itself.

The succeeding rumble from above did not subside, but slowly deepened and increased in volume. Stack, looking up, saw an incredible, an insupportable sight as in some hideous nightmare. The whole face of the mountain was in motion.

He screamed and cast himself on his face, covering his head with his thin arms. Crusoe followed his example. Joe, hearing the ominous sounds above his head, wavered.

The shrill sound of terror decided him. He started to run back down the ravine, but too late. A cataract of broken rocks came pouring over the lip of the cliff.

When Jim Sholto found Ralph that morning he saw at a glance that he

had a desperately sick man to deal with.

The exertion and the terrible excitement following too soon upon his fever had brought about a relapse. Jim carried him into camp, and Kitty did what little she could for his comfort.

Humanity forbade Jim's leaving her alone with the patient, though he chafed to be away with the other men after the gold. To this he owed his life.

They were attending to Ralph when they heard the fall of the first stone. It was a sound they were not unfamiliar with in their own camp, and caused them no perturbation. When several others followed in close succession Jim looked up.

"That's funny!" he said. "I never knew so many to fall together!"

A minute later they heard Stack's scream. Jim jumped up.

"Somebody's caught!" he said grimly.

"Don't go!" cried Kitty sharply.

She had no need to speak. Jim was rooted to the spot. "A whole landslide!" he murmured.

During the next few seconds chaos succeeded. There was a rushing sound as of millions of great wings beating the air, and a shock under which the earth beneath them rocked nauseatingly.

The uproar was such that human ears could not encompass it.

It was like mountainous seas breaking over their heads. Kitty and her father clutched the earth. It shook under their bodies like a jelly. Ralph knew nothing of what was happening. A tremendous silence succeeded, broken only by the detached tapping of falling rocks here and there.

Then a brief, terrible wind swept screaming through the forest, and was gone. A strange, thick, yellow fog stole among the tree-trunks; it had an acrid taste in the nostrils.

As soon as the uproar subsided Jim was for going to see what had happened.

Kitty clung to him hysterically. Not until half an hour had passed would she let him leave her, and then only upon his repeated assurances that no further disturbance was likely to occur for the present.

Anything that had not been shaken loose by that terrible shock would stick, he said. Kitty herself refused to leave Ralph.

Jim had not gone two hundred yards before he began to meet with evidences of the cataclysm in the scattered rocks and broken trees. A little further on he came to the edge of the flood of rocks that had poured down from the mountain, entirely obliterating all trace of the forest up to this point.

He circled the base of the gigantic heap until he came to a point where he could overlook the entire height. This was on the edge of the ravine behind Joe Mixer's camp.

Jim stood, struck to the soul with amazement. The genii had waved their wands and the face of the earth was changed. There was no stream below him; above where he stood there was no longer any gulch or any cliff rising above it.

The mountain had stepped forward and stamped them out.

A great new spur of raw rubble reeking with yellow dust now reached across in front of him, blotting out the forest like grass as far as he could see on that side. The entrance to the Bowl of the Mountains was somewhere under the middle of the mountain; no man could tell now where it had been, so complete was the change.

Joe Mixer's camp had not been in line with the slide, but tons and tons of rock had overflowed at the sides like a liquid, and the place where the fire had been was drowned fathoms deep.

Jim remembered the scream they had heard. "Nothing to do here!"

he thought grimly. He returned to Kitty.

Nahnya and Philippe reached a little plateau of rock after a long climb, and sat down to breathe themselves.

Their faces were calm. For the moment they were concerned only with their journey. On every side great, snowy peaks looked down on them over each other's shoulders.

The white fields dipped almost to the level where they sat. Behind them and far below the forest ended in the throat of a valley, before them lay a shallower valley of a bleak aspect. It supported only a little scrub and a carpet of moss, and the gorges on either hand were choked with ice.

"This is a divide," Nahnya said. She spoke in Cree. "St. Jean Bateese tell me this trail. The water out of that valley go to the Burning River, he say. It is five days journey from here."

"I have heard of that river," said Philippe. "It goes to the place of the rising sun, and joins with the Great River of the Ice."

The sun had disappeared some time since behind the peaks on their left hand. Philippe cast a look at the threatening sky. "It will rain tonight," he said. "Let us go down. There is nothing here to make a shelter. There is no wood for a fire."

"Wait a little," Nahnya said. "We must talk—what we do after."

Her simple-sounding words had an electric effect. Both faces changed subtly; hers became wary; his sullen. They avoided each other's eyes.

"We will do what comes," said Philippe, feigning unconcern. "We will walk to the Burning River, and make a raft and float to the Great River of the Ice. Then we can go where we want."

"You know what I mean," said Nahnya quietly. "Why waste talk?"

Philippe's eyes suddenly blazed up. "You are mine now!" he said.

"Not yet," said Nahnya coolly. "I say you can come with me if you want. I make no promise."

"You are mine!" repeated Philippe louder. "There is nothing to say!"

"There is much to say!" said Nahnya with a direct look. "If you lay hands on me without I give you leave I will kill you!"

There was a short, fierce struggle between the two pairs of eyes. The man's eyes gave way.

"I not want quarrel with you," said Nahnya presently in a softened voice. "You helped me very much. I have a kindness for you."

His eyes stole back to her face furtively and humbly.

"I will marry you if you want," Nahnya went on. "Because I have learned a girl cannot be alone. And I have no people now. I will make you a good wife if you want me. I will always work hard. I will try to make you a rich, big man. But first the truth must be told."

"What truth?" muttered Philippe.

"I do not love you," she said.

"This is white people's talk," said Philippe. "What is love? You marry me. You keep my lodge."

"I love the white man," Nahnya said firmly.

He sprang up with a threatening gesture. In his simplicity he thought she was baiting him. His face was dark with wounded self-love.

Nahnya's eyes held his unflinchingly. "If you strike me I not stop loving him," she said.

The youth was no match for her. His eyes could not support the strong light behind hers. He turned away.

"Do you want to marry me?" Nahnya asked after a while.

He turned on her with the violent upbraiding of a man's jealousy, which is much the same Cree or English. Nahnya saw that he had misunderstood what she meant by "love."

Interrupting him, she made the point clear.

"No man has had me!" she proudly concluded.

He scowled, regarding her doubtfully. The boastful male in him was loath to confess it, but he was like wax in her hands.

"Red and white cannot mate together," Nahnya said, with her strange fatalistic calmness. "He is gone away. I will never see him again."

"*Swear it!*" demanded Philippe.

She raised her hand. "I swear it!" she said without a tremor.

He was much comforted. He scowled still, not knowing what to say.

"Do you want to marry me?" she asked again.

It was a kind of stricken look that he turned on her. "I want to marry you," he murmured.

"There is my hand," said Nahnya. "Deal straight with me, and I will do all that I say."

He fondled her hand clumsily.

Nahnya's eyes became kindly. "You were a good boy at the school," she said. "It was good talk that we talked together. Why do you want to be called a bad man now, and not work, and drink and make trouble everywhere?"

"I will tell you why I change," said Philippe boastfully. "I go among the white men thinking to find my brothers. My father was a white man, and married to my mother in church.

"But they think little of me because my skin is dark. They treat me like a slave, and give me hard work and little pay like a slave. So I hate them. I am bad! I make all the trouble I can!"

"White men only laugh at a bad man," said Nahnya, "and put him in jail. You are going to make yourself a wise, big man now."

Philippe's self-love made its last stand. "I am a man," he said scowling. "It is not for a woman to tell me what to do."

Nahnya made no answer. She was playing with some bits of broken stone.

"I will be the master in my own lodge!" Philippe said louder. "You will work and keep quiet!"

"If you want me to live with you you must live straight," said Nahnya with an ominous softness. "You think it is fun to be a bad man. It is not fun to be a bad man's wife!"

"I will do what I want!" said Philippe boastfully.

"Look!" said Nahnya, pointing to the stones she had been arranging. "Here I have made the sign of the cross. Kneel, and put your right hand on it and swear to live straight!"

Philippe laughed. Nahnya rose to her feet with the same dangerously quiet air. She did not look at him. Anxiety began to undermine his scornful smile.

"What are you going to do?" he asked sullenly.

"Swear!" she said. "Or I will jump off this rock into the valley!"

He sprang up. She was quicker than he. He saw her headed straight and determined for the edge. He stopped dead.

"Nahnya!" he cried hoarsely.

She stopped on the very edge, looking down into the gulf with a kind of wistful desirousness. One would almost have said that she was sorry he had cried out.

"I will swear it!" he cried quickly. He dropped to his knees beside the cross of stones.

She came back from the edge with a sigh. "I will do all that I said," she murmured, as if to herself.

The way down into the shallow valley on the other side was easy. As they proceeded Nahnya laid out their plans for the future with a kind of ecstasy in her sad eyes.

"All day I am thinking what we will do. We will gather those like ourselves who are not red and not white, and make a new people of them. First we will go to Cariboo

Lake and talk with the people. They have steamboats now on Cariboo Lake and the little river and the big river; the work boats are rotting on the beach and the half-breeds have no work to do.

"They are poor and sick and full of hate for the white men. I know a fine country where the Tamarack River rises in the hills. There are no white men near, and the Kakisa Indians who hunted there are all dead or gone away with other tribes.

"It is the best fur country there is left. We will tell the people about this country and make a village there. There is good hunting for all. The company will make a post there, and you shall be the trader."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Epilogue.

AT evening of a day early in August a raft landed on the beach below Fort Cheever. It bore a middle-aged man, a girl, and a young man. The last-named ceaselessly tossed and muttered in a fever; he was strapped to the raft to keep him from rolling off.

The older man carried him up the bank. The girl followed, tottering a little with fatigue. There were dark circles under her eyes, and her lips were white.

At the top they met David Cranston, the trader, in whose grim face surprise struggled with a welcoming courtesy. Seeing into the sick man's face, he started.

"Is it Ralph Cowdray?" he asked.

The other man nodded.

"The poor lad!" exclaimed Cranston. "He stopped here six weeks ago. He is much changed."

"I am taking him to a doctor," the other said. "I am Jim Sholto from Milburn Gulch. This is my daughter."

Cranston bade her welcome with clumsy, old-fashioned deference. At Fort Cheever a white girl was like a creature from another world. Looking at her, his grim face softened with commiseration.

To Jim he said: "There's no doctor nearer than the Crossing. I expect the steamboat on her last trip within a week. Will you wait here for her?"

Jim shook his head. "Too uncertain," he said. "He might die on our hands. We will raft it down."

"Ye do well," said Cranston. "It is two hundred miles; but you can do it easy in three days by traveling nights, too. The river is smooth all the way. There's a kind of hotel at the Crossing where you can make him comfortable, and the police doctor is there."

"We will go on as soon as we eat," said Jim.

"I will send the little boys to cut spruce boughs to make you comfortable beds on the raft," said Cranston.

"Have you any remedies?" asked Jim. "We came without medicines."

"I will ask my wife. She knows the simples of the country."

"Much obliged to ye," said Jim.

"The poor lad!" said David, looking into the flushed face and the sightless eyes. "I took a great liking to him. He had an honest way with him."

Glancing sidewise at Kitty, he said: "I wondered what brought him into the country. How did this happen?"

Jim looked at his daughter and bit his lip. The quiet tears were rolling down Kitty's face. "He capsized in the Stanley rapids and hit his shoulder on a rock," he said grimly. "He came to our shack much the same as you see him now."

"Was that the first you saw of him?" asked David in surprise.

"It was the first."

"He was in the country before. There is some strange tale behind this," said David, wagging his head.

"I believe you," said Jim grimly.

Two months later in time, and in distance five hundred miles from Fort

Cheever, the little steamboat Northern Belle was making her way blithely down on the current of the Miwasa River on her last trip of the season.

On the upper deck, Ralph, a shadow of the blooming youth that had first set forth from Fort Edward, lay sleeping in an invalid chair that the "boys" at the Crossing had made him for the journey. Beside him sat Kitty, almost as pale and wasted as her patient, but with a soft triumph in her eyes; he was safely on the mend.

He stirred and murmured her name.

"Yes?" she answered in her quick, hushed voice.

"Nothing. I just wanted to make sure you were there."

"Lazy!" she said. "Why didn't you open your eyes and look?"

"My eyelids weigh pounds," he said. "I can sleep twenty-three and a half hours a day!"

He lay musing for a while. "Kitty!" he said again.

"Well?" One could see "Dear!" on her lips, but it was not uttered.

"I was thinking—I'm glad I didn't hop the twig, after all."

She did not answer.

"It's just beginning to come back—the will to live, I mean."

Made curious by her continued silence, he raised his lids at last—and saw that her eyes were big with tears. "What's the matter?" he asked quickly.

"Nothing," she said. "I can't help thinking—all the time you laid there you wished to die. In your delirium you prayed to die."

"That's funny," he said with an air of calm interest. "I remember that. It was as if some force stronger than I kept me from passing peacefully out. How it hurt!"

"Don't think about it," she said.

"It's over," he said. "The sun feels good. I feel like a new-born babe with everything to learn and everything to experience all over again."

"You've talked enough!"

"Where are we?" he asked, defying her with a lazy smile.

"We will get to Miwasa Landing before supper. We will stay there until you are a little stronger. Then we'll drive the hundred miles to town in a democrat. Father made the arrangements on his way out."

"How good you've both been to me!" murmured Ralph.

Kitty let this pass with a private smile. "I got a letter from father at Silver Landing this morning," she said. "It was posted as they were leaving Fort Edward. They are all back at Milburn Gulch by now."

"What will they do without you?"

"They have taken a man cook in with them."

"Are you going in later?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Dad says after all it's no country for a woman."

"What will you do?"

"I shall go to live with my aunt in Winnipeg, and study something, so that I can earn my own living. A teacher, perhaps."

"That's a lonely life!" said Ralph.

She looked away. "Better than being idle," she said.

"I must begin to think what I am going to do," said Ralph.

"Plenty of time!"

"I shall go home for a while, of course. The mater will luxuriate in a convalescent son! Then I must build up a practise in some growing city. A doctor goes to seed in the wilds; there is not enough to do. I begin to feel a need of work!"

"Work!" said Kitty, looking at his transparent hands with a smile of affectionate scorn.

"Doctoring's a great job!" said Ralph. "Where would you advise me to establish myself?"

"How should I know?" murmured Kitty, head averted.

"What kind of a place is Winnipeg?"

A slow crimson tide crept up from her neck to her forehead. Fortunate-

ly Ralph's eyes were closed. "A busy, ugly town," she said. "But it's growing very fast. They say it has a great future."

"As soon as I am on my feet I'll come up and look it over," he said.

He soon fell asleep again. Kitty leaned her arms on the rail, and gazed dreamily at the brown flood with its squadrons of foam vessels sailing demurely under the steamboat's counter, and at the shore with its endless procession of pine trees wrapped in the delicate veils of October.

She chided herself for the little spring of happiness that welled in her breast, and sought to choke it with common sense, but it continually found new ways out.

Down-stream she saw a canoe lying on a point, and behind it a thread of smoke ascending among the trees. They had seen no sign of humanity since they had left Silver Landing sixty miles up-stream, and she waited curiously to see what manner of people these were.

Presently she distinguished two figures, a man lying on the ground and a woman bending over the fire.

The steamboat was traveling fast with the current, and she had no sooner made them out than she was upon them. It was a point of rock, and they passed close enough to toss a biscuit ashore.

The woman straightened, and Kitty instantly recognized the firm round figure, and the graceful, proudly poised head. As the steamboat swept by they looked directly into each other's faces.

A wild agitation shook Kitty; it was as if the terrible past had been fished up and suddenly placed before her.

The other woman's hands went to her breast in the old, quick way. She glanced quickly from Kitty to the sleeping form in the chair and back again. Then she smiled—a wonderful smile irradiating her sad face from within. Kitty experienced a quick revulsion. The tears sprang to her eyes. She stood up and, leaning over the rail, kissed her hand to the rapidly lessening figure on shore. A bend in the river intervened.

(The end.)

L O V E

By Hamilton Pope Galt

LOVE does not, like the twilight, fade
  Before the evening star,
But, ling'ring through the lonely night,
  Reflects the dawn afar.

Love is not like the fickle leaves
  That shrivel in the cold;
It clothes the heart and keeps it warm
  When limbs are weak and old.

Love is not like the changing tide
  That shrinks when the moon wanes pale,
For it never ebbs from the heart away,
  However the moonlight fail.

Double Trouble

by Albert M. Treynor

Author of "The Mantle of Nemesis," "The Flash-Light," "Trail of the Dog Star," etc.

CHAPTER I.

His Wedding Night.

THE white tie came away from the pinching collar with a jerk that surely must have throttled the red-faced wearer had not the lawn fabric parted at the back.

"That's the fifth!" The man sat down heavily upon the foot of the bed and regarded the crumpled thing in his fingers with abject despair. "I'm all in," he added hopelessly; "I haven't even the spirit left to curse."

There was a movement at the other end of the room, and, with a little laugh, a second man got up from a chair and began rummaging in the bureau drawer. "Here, you've got one more left. Try it again."

"I can't, I tell you! I'm so nervous and scared that my blanked fingers won't work. And to think, Greve, that I'm supposed to be a full grown man!"

"I guess you're all of that," was the solemn answer. "You certainly don't act like a full grown woman. There's Beryl, for instance — I'll bet she's as cool and serene at this minute as though getting married is a nightly incident. Think of Beryl, and buck up, old fellow."

"Do you suppose I've thought of any one else a single second for the last week? That's what makes me so frightened and happy, and so—so uncertain in my head and feet. I've got the hot and cold running shivers, and I can't tie those damned lawn ties."

"Oh, take a drink and shut up! Got any whisky?"

"There's a bottle in my grip, but I haven't any corkscrew."

"I'll pull the cork. You get your shoes on now, and you can have another go at the necktie later."

The bridegroom obediently took a new patent-leather shoe from beneath the bed and began laboriously working it upon his foot. "I can't wear this thing," he groaned after a moment; "the shoe is at least an inch too narrow."

"Put them on," ordered the other. "Let them hurt a bit. They'll take your mind off other things."

"We aren't apt to be late, are we?"

"The ceremony doesn't come off until nine o'clock. We've got over an hour. Here's your drink. Take a good, stiff slug."

With a grateful sigh the bridegroom accepted a half filled tumbler from his companion and gulped down a prodigious dose of raw whisky.

"I hope Beryl won't mind," he observed after a moment; "but it *has* done me good. I can stand one more." He strode across the room, gingerly picked up a fresh tie, and faced the

mirror with grim resolution. "I'll do it this time, so help me!" he muttered.

Geoffrey Buckstaff's nervousness on the eve of his wedding, perhaps, was not altogether unwarranted. Coming to New York City from Denver the week before as an unknown young mining promoter, he had suddenly found himself one of the most conspicuous figures in the country.

His approaching wedding with Miss Beryl Gardner, an only daughter of one of the oldest and wealthiest Knickerbocker families, had been treated by the newspapers as a romance of "page one" importance.

The fact that he was unknown, that the bride's parents had refused to accept him as a son-in-law, and that he was generally supposed to be poor but worthy, had only served to increase the public interest in the ceremony. He had been interviewed and snap-shotted and stared at for seven nerve-racking days, and, save for Beryl's cousin, Roger Greve, who was to be best man, he had not a friend to see him safely through.

Off in the mountains where he had met his bride there had been no hint of all this maddening publicity.

He had found her a woman to love, and it had not occurred to him to bother himself about her wealth, her social position, or the excitement which her approaching nuptials might arouse. He realized, of course, in a vague sort of way, that Beryl's father, Paxton Gardner, was a great old aristocrat; but this knowledge had neither spurred nor deterred him in his love-making.

The moment he found the woman he wanted for his wife he had set about winning her in his own quiet, stubborn fashion, without caring whether her family came first or last in the social procession. And Beryl, thinking him a poor mining engineer, had accepted him on exactly the same terms—just because she wanted him almost as much as he wanted her.

A quixotic fancy, which was undoubtedly excusable in one of his youth, had impelled him to mislead his bride-to-be in the matter of his personal resources.

Lucky investments in mines had made him rich. But this fact he had confided only to Beryl's cousin, Roger Greve, and under the strictest seal of secrecy. It warmed his heart to think that the daughter of such a proud family was willing to come to him for just love alone.

He cherished the notion of surprising her after their marriage with the showing of a financial standing almost as substantial as her father's.

Without her knowledge he had spent thousands of dollars in furnishing a honeymoon apartment for her on Riverside Drive. He had arranged unlimited charge accounts in her name at the best shops in town.

And he stood ready to indulge her in every extravagant taste that the daughter of her father could possibly have acquired.

The only rift in his happiness was the attitude of Beryl's people toward him. With the exception of Greve, her family had turned upon him as one supercilious person. Her parents had refused to receive him.

They had stormed and fumed with such effect when they heard of Beryl's engagement that the young woman had quietly left the family mansion and moved into a little apartment of her own, where she had been living with her maid until the time set for the wedding. As she possessed both an independent mind and means, she serenely went ahead with her plans of marriage, knowing that the parental forgiveness must come some day.

The ceremony, which was to take place in an obscure parsonage up-town, was to be extremely quiet.

The members of the bride's family had flatly refused to be present or to give countenance in any way to the affair, and no guests had been invited. Greve, who alone had stuck by his cousin, had consented to be Buckstaff's best man.

Beryl was to have a single attendant. There were to be no others—excepting, of course, the newspapermen, who would not be apt to miss the last scene of the extraordinary romance that had come their way.

Greve had come to Buckstaff's rooms at the Hotel Hanover to offer a final word of encouragement and instruction.

As the overwrought bridegroom struggled before the mirror with his sixth tie, the best man leaned against the foot of the bed and watched the operation with quizzical interest. It struck him that his cousin had picked out an exceptional type of man for her husband.

Buckstaff was not physically big.

He was really scarcely taller or heavier than the slender and somewhat foppish Greve; but there was a suggestion of enormous strength about the compact shoulders and the trim, supple body. A life of tremendous activity had left many successive marks of fitness in the clear, gray eyes; the lips compressed even in smiling, and the defined muscles of the lean, square jaw.

The hair, originally a light brown, but bleached almost to a nondescript yellow by the sun, seemed to have been electrified at the roots by some of the man's excess vitality, and persistently refused to lie smooth under any brush. The skin of the neck and face was permanently bronzed by continued exposure to the open.

In spite of his nervousness, the Westerner had with him a certain poise of adequacy that awakened the keenest respect of his companion.

With a gasp of relief Buckstaff finally mastered the knot of the white tie and turned to pick up his waistcoat. "There's a good job off my hands," he exclaimed. "I'll be ready in ten minutes now."

Greve lighted a cigarette and reached for his hat. "In that case I guess I'll be going over to the parsonage. I've got a lot of things to arrange before you get there. You come on as soon as you're ready. I'll have a taxi waiting for you outside."

He hesitated and looked around the room with an air of anxiety.

Buckstaff again dropped on the bed and, bending over, began tugging away at the second shoe. "Don't be uneasy about me now," he said between clenched teeth as he fumbled with the buttons. "Those drinks have done me a world of good. I'll be at the parsonage, all right, a few minutes before nine."

"You've got the ring safe? And the license?" Greve's hat was on his head, but he seemed reluctant about going.

Buckstaff felt quickly in his pockets. "They're both all right," he observed. "Hadn't you better take them?"

"No; you keep them till you get to the parsonage. But don't forget to bring them."

"Anything else to remember?" inquired Buckstaff plaintively.

"That's all," laughed Greve. "I'll attend to everything else."

He opened the door and turned with a reassuring glance.

"First I want to see the parson, and then settle the newspaper gang. There's sure to be a mob of reporters hanging around the door. But don't worry. And don't be late. Everything will work out beautifully. See you later."

He shut the door and started toward the elevator, whistling.

Buckstaff finished dressing hurriedly. Then he lighted a cigar and began pacing feverishly up and down the rug. He did not want to reach the parsonage ahead of time, and yet he was in a torment of impatience to get started.

As he strode back and forth his fingers kept straying unconsciously to the pocket which contained the ring, and several times in the next few minutes he pulled out his watch and examined the dial without the faintest recollection of the act.

To relieve the strain of the dragging moments, he paused twice at the bureau

to pour himself a generous drink. Finally he threw away his cigar and put on his hat and overcoat.

With a final inspection of his pockets to assure himself that nothing had been forgotten, he prepared to start downstairs.

Crossing the room, he reached for the button to extinguish the light, but as he did so he noticed a strange numbness in his finger-tips. He struck his hands vigorously against his body, but the sensation seemed to be creeping upward into his wrists and arms.

A little frightened by this odd feeling, he turned back across the room, and to his astonishment he found himself walking with an uncertain, lurching sort of movement. It was as though his legs were beginning to go to sleep.

"Good Lord, have I taken too much to drink?" he gasped aloud, and the thick, halting tone of his own voice startled him.

He set his teeth and started to shuffle heavily toward the door, but as he groped for the knob the thing seemed to evade his grasp. A mist came before his eyes and a cold fog seemed to mount from his heels to the back of his neck and then sweep like a dense, grayish cloud across his brain.

With a cry he brought his hands to his head as though in an effort to shut out the suffocating haze that was trying to envelop his consciousness.

"I mustn't let it! I mustn't give in!" he muttered hoarsely to himself, fighting with all the will-power he could summon to throw off the horrible feeling of faintness. He took a step forward. The floor seemed to reel and weave underfoot.

He became dizzy. Spreading his feet far apart, he strove desperately to hold his balance. He swayed backward and forward and suddenly felt himself falling.

With a last conscious thought, he threw out his hands to save himself from lunging against the door—and then all knowledge left him.

The morning sunlight was streaming through the window when the bridegroom opened his eyes. For a moment he lay perfectly still, trying to collect his vagrant faculties. With a painful effort he finally drew himself to his hands and knees.

He was wearing his evening clothes, his new shoes, his overcoat—even his silk hat, now jammed tightly over his ears. He was still in his room at the Hanover, and—

With a cry of consternation he struggled to his feet. "Beryl! *Beryl!*" he moaned in an access of horrified understanding. "My God, I've missed the wedding!"

Without stopping to change to suitable clothes, he threw open the door and ran wildly to the elevator. He did not even think of the telephone. His only mad impulse was to find a taxicab and drive as quickly as possible to Beryl's apartment—to tell her that he had been lying all night in a stupor in his bedroom; to plead her forgiveness.

He reached the lobby and, entirely oblivious to the sensation caused by his incongruous attire, rushed to the desk and demanded a taxicab.

"At once!" he shouted to the startled attendant. "Have it here this minute!"

On the desk before him was a morning newspaper. Something in the head-lines caught his attention. It was his own name spread across the "turn" column of the first page.

With a gasp of astonishment he seized the paper, staring at the sheet with widening eyes. It fell from his fingers to the floor and his hand caught at the desk for support. The paper contained an account of his wedding.

CHAPTER II.

"The Other Man."

FOR a moment Buckstaff was unable to credit his intelligence. He was stunned and bewildered; he felt weak

and giddy all over, and his legs almost refused to support him. A strange sense of unreality took possession of his mind.

A little group of curious persons had begun to gather about him, and he stared back into their faces with unseeing eyes, quite unaware of the commotion he was causing. It was not until he felt a heavy touch on his elbow that he succeeded in recalling himself to rational thought.

"Would you like to return to your room, sir?" A liveried flunky was addressing him.

"Yes," said Buckstaff dully.

For the first time he remembered that he was still wearing his evening clothes, and he became unpleasantly aware of the attention he was attracting. He felt his ears growing warm as he stooped to pick up the fallen newspaper; but he gathered himself together and, with all the self-possession he could muster, started back to the elevator.

The onlookers drew to one side to let him pass, and then the embarrassing silence was broken by a murmur of amused voices behind him. "Piped as a penguin, poor devil!" was the last word of comment he caught as he darted into the elevator.

As soon as he had regained his rooms Buckstaff sat down and reopened the newspaper. His own name confronted him violently in the headline:

BUCKSTAFF-GARDNER. TIED WITHOUT PAPA.

Society Belle, in Defiance of Parents, Marries Poor Man—Wedding Performed with No Guests Present.

There followed a full column in which the wedding was joyously described, the reporter dwelling with apparently the greatest delight upon the absence of the bride's parents and the seeming happiness of the bride when she definitely cast away from her wealthy people and gave herself to a plain American who worked on a salary.

The story of the ceremony was recounted in detail, not even forgetting the action of the bride in waving a friendly hand to the reporters as she drove away with her husband in a hired taxicab.

Buckstaff read the account through in a sort of daze. The story seemed to carry conviction with it. It was evidently written by some one who knew what he was talking about; and yet the whole thing was too preposterous for credence.

Unquestionably the marriage could not have been performed when the bridegroom had been lying unconscious in his hotel room during the entire night. The enigma was too much for him, and finally, with an exclamation of hopeless perplexity, he crumpled up the newspaper and stumbled to the telephone.

He gave the operator the number of Beryl's apartment and waited with thumping heart. He stood with the receiver to his ear for a long time, but there was no response. With growing apprehension he repeated the number. Still there was no answer.

After nerve-racking moments he inspected the telephone directory and then called Paxton Gardner's residence. This time the reply was prompt. He gave his name and asked anxiously to speak with Beryl's mother.

There was several minutes' delay, and then a voice at the other end of the line told him that Mrs. Gardner refused to have anything to say to him. And before he could ask a single question a cutting "Good-by" was snapped into his ear and he heard the receiver click back upon the hook.

Buckstaff backed away from the phone and stood for a moment in dreadful uncertainty. Then, with sudden fierce energy, he began tearing off his evening clothes. Hat, overcoat, waistcoat, dress shirt, shoes—he

slipped out of them any way, scattering the pieces over the floor, wherever they happened to fall.

He dug a light business suit out of his trunk, and in no time at all he had redressed himself, and seizing a soft hat he jerked it over his eyes and sprinted down the hallway to the elevator.

Reaching the street, he summoned a taxi, and, shouting Beryl's address to the chauffeur, he jumped inside.

The car started down Thirty-Fourth Street toward Broadway, and Buckstaff sank rigidly upon the cushions, his legs gathered beneath him, his fingers clutching the door handle —ready to spring out the instant he reached his destination.

They turned up-town through the crowded shopping district, and Buckstaff squirmed with impatience at every crossing jam that momentarily checked the reckless progress of the taxi. He had worked himself into a state of feverish anxiety when the chauffeur finally swung into a quiet side street near the park and drew up before a huge apartment-building.

The moment the car stopped Buckstaff was on the sidewalk.

"I'll be back presently," he shouted to the driver and strode into the building. He knew where to find Beryl's apartment, and without waiting to parley with the hall attendants he got into the elevator and was carried upstairs. When he reached his fiancée's door he impetuously pushed the electric button and stood listening with madly beating pulse.

The door opened almost immediately, and Buckstaff found himself confronted by a tall, bony woman in a gingham dress. He had never seen her before.

"Is Miss Gardner in?" demanded Buckstaff anxiously.

The woman regarded him with superiority. "There ain't any Miss Gardner no more. She got married last night, and now she's off on her honeymoon."

"Are you positive?" He searched her face wildly with his eyes.

"Surest thing you know. Didn't I see her leave here for the wedding with my very own sight!"

He stared at the woman in stupefaction. It seemed as though his mind must have deserted him. "Miss Gardner *married?*" he shouted. "How? When—"

"Don't get excited about it, young fellow." The woman plainly disapproved of him. "You bet she's married, and the whole town's talking about it. If I was her mother—"

"But who are you?" he broke in.

The woman started to close the door. "If that's any of your business, I'm the lady she hired to pack up her things for her. She's given up this apartment."

"Given it up!"

"That's what I said. And if you've got any business with her you'd better see her husband."

"Her *husband?*" He felt that he was choking. "Who in Heaven's name *is* her husband?"

"His name is Buck—Buck something or other. Look in the papers. Good-by!" And before he realized her intention she had slammed the door in his face.

Buckstaff's first impulse was to force his way back into the apartment; but, on second thought, he decided that the woman knew no more about the whole mysterious affair than he himself. In blank bewilderment he left the building and returned to his taxicab.

He climbed inside and ordered the chauffeur to drive him to Greve's rooms, off down-town in the neighborhood of Washington Square.

Greve was still in bed when the unhappy bridegroom arrived; but Buckstaff was in no mood to act on ceremony, and without even pausing to knock, he pushed open the door and flung himself into his best man's sleeping quarters. The young New Yorker sat up in his pink pajamas with a start, brushed his blond hair out of his eyes, and stared curiously.

Then, suddenly recognizing his visitor, he jumped from bed with an exclamation of astonishment.

"What in thunder are you doing here? Thought you were on your honeymoon."

He looked the other over from head to foot, as though he were not quite positive of his identity, his glance finally settling upon Buckstaff's tragic countenance.

"Greve, what in the devil is wrong with me? Have I gone crazy?" Buckstaff sat heavily in a chair and regarded his companion with lugubrious despair.

"Can't say, my boy." observed Greve judicially. He propped himself up in bed and, crossing one pink clad leg over the other, lazily reached for a cigarette. "The symptoms of matrimony seem to be cropping out on you early. They don't usually go crazy much before the first month."

Buckstaff jumped up with an inarticulate cry. "Be serious, damn you! Where is Beryl?"

Greve's face became sober. He paused with a lighted match in his fingers. "Beryl! Beryl! Why, what's happened to Beryl?"

"That's what I'm asking you." Buckstaff advanced toward the bed. "Don't torment me! Tell me, for Heaven's sake, what happened last night?"

"After your wedding, you mean?" Greve lighted his cigarette and flicked the burned match across the room. "Did you have trouble with Beryl? Say, what in the deuce are you driving at, anyhow?"

"I don't know," groaned Buckstaff. In his agitation he began pacing up and down the floor.

"Only, after you left me last night something happened to me. I must have drunk too much of that cursed whisky. I missed the ceremony. I didn't get there, understand. And when I came to I was lying on the floor of my bedroom, fully dressed. I hadn't been out of my room, and the papers this morning are full of my wedding. I'm asking you what it means?"

Greve's jaw slowly dropped, and he faced his companion with an expression of deepest mystification.

"Really, that's the strangest thing I ever heard. And you didn't show up at the parsonage?" He shook his head incredulously. "Why, man, you must have!"

"I couldn't have, I tell you!"

"But—but—" Greve checked himself and gave vent to a low, long-drawn whistle. "Then who in thunder was it that drove away from the parsonage?"

"Drove away? What do you mean?" exploded Buckstaff.

Greve reached out with his hand as though to quiet his companion.

"I mean," he said slowly, "that after I left you I went to the parsonage. When I had gotten everything arranged I began looking for you. You didn't put in an appearance, and I was afraid you were having some more trouble with your dressing and began to get worried. Beryl was due any minute. Finally I took a taxi and drove back to the hotel to see what had happened to you. I rang you on the phone, and finally went up and knocked on your door. I got no answer, so I figured you'd probably gone on to the parsonage and I'd missed you on the way."

He paused, and Buckstaff waited breathlessly.

"And then," he went on with a curious glance at Buckstaff, "I returned to the parsonage."

"Well?" demanded the other.

Greve met Buckstaff's anxious glance with sober eyes. "For some strange reason the ceremony had come off a few minutes before schedule. I got to the parsonage just as the taxi was driving away—the taxi which the reporter told me carried the bride and groom."

Buckstaff clutched the other's arm with a sharp cry. "Are you sure—are you sure of this?"

"Sure?" I even questioned the parson, and he showed me his copy of the marriage certificate with your and Beryl's names on it." He checked himself abruptly. "Say, what happened to your license and the ring? Have you looked for them? Have you still got them?"

"I don't know. I never thought to look this morning." He clasped his hand to his eyes and staggered toward the open window. "What does it all mean? What does it all mean, Greve?"

"It looks to me as though you must have married Beryl and don't remember anything about it."

"How could I? I wasn't out of my room, I tell you." He straightened suddenly, the muscles of his jaw tightened, and a cold, unpleasant light came into his eyes. "If I didn't marry Beryl," he muttered, "I want to know who in hell did!" He started swiftly toward the door.

"Hold on," cried Greve; "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to look for the other man."

CHAPTER III.

The Other Woman.

BY the time Buckstaff got back to the hotel his thoughts were in a most violent turmoil.

One moment he was torn with bitter anger, and without quite knowing whom to make the object of his wrath; then he grew cold with misgiving, fearfully picturing in his imagination all sorts of horrible things that might have happened to Beryl. Whether he was a victim of some wicked plot, or of some preposterous joke, or merely of some strange accident of fortune, he could not make up his mind.

Had Beryl repented at the last minute?

Had she made peace with her parents, and turned against Buckstaff without a single word of explanation? He felt that his faith in her should stand against any such conjecture. And then there was the wedding to explain.

The ceremony had actually taken place.

He was at last convinced of that. But who was the man who had assumed Buckstaff's name? And if Beryl had married another man, what revulsion of sentiment could have caused her to perform such an act, and without the slightest warning to her fiance?

Or had she been coerced into such a marriage? And who could wield such a power over her? Such questions flooded into Buckstaff's tormented brain, and search as he would he could not suggest the answer for a single one of them.

It was in this state of mental uncertainty that he reentered his hotel after the interview with Greve. He paused long enough at the desk to inquire for his mail, hoping that Beryl might have sent him some message. There were no letters of any sort, and with sinking heart he asked for his key, and went directly to his rooms.

As soon as he had closed the door he seized his dress-coat from the floor where he had thrown it earlier that morning, and ran his hand into the two inside pockets. Then he caught his breath sharply, and let the garment fall again to the rug.

The marriage license was gone!

With a cry of amazement he grabbed the rumpled waistcoat and frantically rummaged through it. He recalled the care he had taken the night before to see that the gold wedding band was safely in his pocket. And now the ring, too, had disappeared.

On his hands and knees he searched every inch of the floor, and finally the bureau drawers, the bed, the chairs, and his trunk. Neither the license nor the ring was to be found.

From the litter about the room he knew that the chambermaid had not yet come in, and he was confident that

nothing had been disturbed during his brief absence that morning. It was evident that the things had left his possession some time during the night.

But how?

Was it possible, after all, that he had not remained in the room all the time? Had he wandered out of the hotel in a state of mental aberration, and returned again without remembering anything that had happened to him?

He began to believe that such might be the truth.

At the thought he started violently. He questioned himself excitedly. What subconscious idea naturally would have possessed his instincts, even if his mind were blank? Why, the idea of going to Beryl—to be on hand at the time set for his wedding.

He felt himself trembling. Had he actually gone to the parsonage and married Beryl without knowing a thing about it? He decided that this was possible, even probable.

He knew the effects of whisky on the nervous centers when the man who drinks it is laboring in such a state of mental excitement as Buckstaff suffered the night before. The overstimulation even of a small quantity of alcohol might easily have affected his already overwrought brain, and resulted in a temporary lapse of memory.

Probably in such a condition of stupefaction he had blindly found his way to the parsonage, and had gone mechanically through the wedding service without consciousness of what he was doing. The more he thought of it, the more he was convinced that this was the solution of a part of the mystery. But there still remained to be explained why he had returned alone to the hotel and what had become of Beryl.

He decided to see the parson and learn what he had to say about the affair. It struck him as being odd that he hadn't thought of this before, and he set out with renewed hope of clearing away the enigma that was driving him mad.

The Rev. George Guide, the pastor of a little church near Broadway, was the man who had been chosen to officiate at the ceremony.

Greve, acting as best man, had made all arrangements for the wedding, and Buckstaff did not recall ever having seen the minister. The man who received him when he was ushered into the cozy little study at the parsonage was a tall, rather distinguished individual with gray hair, and wearing large tortoise-shell spectacles with thick, round lenses.

He motioned his visitor pleasantly to a chair.

"I should like to ask you," began Buckstaff uneasily, "if you married any one here last night?"

"Three couples," was the prompt answer. "One pair at eight o'clock, another a little before nine, another at ten. I am constantly at the service of the young people." He peered benignantly at Buckstaff.

"Do you recall seeing me before, sir?" Buckstaff asked the question with visible agitation.

"I can't say that I do; but that does not lessen my pleasure in your present visit," was the polite answer.

Buckstaff stood up. "Do you remember the names of the couple you married shortly before nine?" He strove to control his voice, but the tones trembled in spite of him.

"Very well, indeed, sir," said the minister. "The bride is a member of a very prominent family. Her name is Miss Gardner, and the man she married was a young Buckstaff, a gentleman from the West, I believe."

Buckstaff clutched the arm of the chair. "And you mean to say that you've never seen me before?" He was breathing heavily, like a man suddenly stricken.

"I didn't say I never saw you," returned the other mildly. "I only said I don't remember ever seeing you. In fact," he added with a deprecating smile, "I see so very little at any time." He touched his spectacles with his

finger. "I'm frightfully near-sighted, and even with my spectacles it's almost impossible for me to distinguish faces."

"Then you might have married me without recognizing me again?" gasped Buckstaff.

"Exactly."

"But are you positive—*positive* that you married Miss Gardner and Mr. Buckstaff last night?"

For answer, the minister put his hand into the pocket of his long coat and produced a worn leather wallet. From this he brought out a yellow slip of paper.

"Here's a check for five hundred dollars that Mr. Buckstaff gave me as my fee for performing the service," he said. "I consider it most generous. Look at the signature if you're curious about it."

And Buckstaff, bending forward with staring eyes, read his own name written in his own handwriting. There was no mistake about it. It was the check he had written the afternoon before and placed in the pocket of his dress-coat with the marriage license, and which, until this moment, he had entirely forgotten.

More mystified than ever, Buckstaff turned without a word toward the door.

"A moment, please," cried the minister. "What is it you are trying to learn? Is there trouble of some sort?"

"Just a matter of curiosity," said the other in weary accents. "Thank you very much for your courtesy, sir—and —and, good morning." He closed the door softly behind him, and passed from the parsonage to the street.

He had obtained absolutely no clue from his visit to the parsonage. The imbroglio was more baffling than ever. He decided next to try the reporter who had written the account of the wedding, and with this idea in view he took a subway train to Park Row.

In the reception-room of one of the large newspaper offices down-town he explained his errand to an attendant, and, after several moments of waiting, he faced the young man of his search. The reporter was a thick-shouldered youth with keen, dark eyes, and a plump, good-natured face.

He took a seat nonchalantly upon a wabbly table littered with old newspapers, lighted a cigarette, and looked briskly at Buckstaff.

"I covered the Gardner wedding," he observed. "Corking story, wasn't it?"

"Corking," admitted Buckstaff. He smiled faintly, wondering what the reporter would think if he knew the real story.

"What is it you want to ask about the wedding?" demanded the youth, as Buckstaff hesitated. "I'm a busy man," he added with an air that might have befitted his managing editor.

"You were at the wedding?"

"Right on the spot."

"See the ceremony?"

"I didn't get inside, but I saw the happy pair when they came out."

"See their faces?"

"Nope. The bride was veiled and the groom had his hat pulled down."

"Oh," said Buckstaff musingly. "Well, what happened when they came out?"

"Not a thing. The newspaper gang crowded around when they got into their taxi, and the bride stuck her arm out the window and waved her hand to us—like this."

The newspaperman lifted his heavy fist and flourished it, in what he evidently believed a happy imitation of the dainty Miss Gardner's most gracious manner.

"That's all you saw?" demanded Buckstaff who, for some reason, did not seem especially charmed by the other's mimicking.

"That's all. After that they drove away."

Buckstaff got up with a sigh of impatience. "All right," he said. "Thank you very much."

The newspaperman looked at him with sudden suspicion. "Say, who in thunder are you?" he demanded.

"Oh, just a friend of Miss Gardner's." Buckstaff started toward the elevator.

An expression of enlightenment crossed the reporter's face.

"I've got you now!" he exclaimed. "Old man Gardner sent you here to see what you could find out about his daughter. Well, tell him I'm for her all the time, and if he don't forgive her, he's an old duffer. Tell him that *I* said so."

And Buckstaff caught a cheerful grin as he stepped into the elevator and the door slammed between him and the newspaperman.

It was with growing despair that Buckstaff finally found his way back to the hotel. His frantic investigations had been productive of nothing. Greve, the minister, the reporter, the maid at Beryl's apartment — not one had seemed able to help him out of his difficulties.

None of them, apparently, knew any more about the obscure events of the night before than he did himself, and what little he had succeeded in learning served only to confuse him the more. He felt that if he could but see Beryl many inexplicable things might be explained.

But the problem was to find Beryl.

At the hotel desk, to his surprise, he found a letter awaiting him. He took the missive and tore open the envelope with trembling fingers. A narrow sheet of paper came out and he examined it—first, anxiously, then with disappointment, and finally with a gasp of amazement.

It was not a letter from Beryl, as hope had led him to expect, but a bill from a well-known Fifth Avenue jeweler—a bill for a diamond lavallière which he did not remember purchasing. And he saw that the bill was made out to "*Mrs.* Geoffrey Buckstaff!"

Mrs. Geoffrey Buckstaff! Mrs. Buckstaff that very morning had bought a two thousand dollar pendant and sent the bill to Mr. Buckstaff!

He made no effort to guess at the puzzle. It was becoming too great a tax upon his imagination. He merely stuck the bill into his pocket, hurried out of the lobby, and started up the street as fast as he could walk.

The jewelry shop was only a short distance from the hotel, but he was panting heavily when he entered the place and, with the bill in his hand, confronted one of the clerks.

"Can you tell me if this—this lavallière was sent any place, or did the lady who purchased it take it with her?" he demanded breathlessly. "I'm Mr. Buckstaff."

The clerk took the bill and went back to the rear of the shop. He returned after a moment, smiling affably. "It was sent, Mr. Buckstaff."

"Oh, yes, of course. And where was it sent?" Mr. Buckstaff flattered himself that he was acting in a most unconcerned manner.

"Why, to your home on the Drive, of course." The clerk seemed very much surprised at the question. "Didn't it arrive?"

"Oh yes, it arrived. Thank you very much." He rushed out of the store and looked about wildly for a taxicab.

Three minutes later Buckstaff was sitting in a car, driving up-town as rapidly as the chauffeur dared travel. His thoughts were in a crazy turmoil. The clerk had given him the address of the apartment which he had rented and furnished as a post-nuptial surprise for Beryl.

As he had not told Beryl of this place, he had not dreamed of looking for her there, now that she had so strangely vanished. Yet somebody seemed not only to have taken possession of this apartment, but to have availed herself of the charge account Buckstaff had established at the jewelers.

He recalled that there had been two keys to the Riverside apartment, and when he now inspected his key-ring, he discovered that one of them was missing. Buckstaff whistled sharply to

himself. Decidedly the affair was beginning to grow interesting.

The taxi finally stopped, and Buckstaff jumped to the curb and glanced up at a tall, brick building before him.

He recognized it as the place where he had leased his apartment and, with quick resolution, he strode through the hallway and stepped into the elevator. At the fifth floor he got out, walked down a long marble corridor, and paused before a closed mahogany door. He produced his key, inserted it in the lock, threw open the door, and passed into the apartment.

As he entered the large, cheerful drawing-room some one jumped up from a divan by the window with a little startled exclamation. It was a woman.

"Oh, you've finally come!" she cried. There was a welcoming note in her contralto voice.

He looked at her aghast. He had never seen her before.

She was tall and slim, and her figure lent itself to lines of supple grace with every movement. Her hair had in it a glint of copper, and was parted low across her forehead in a Madonna-like effect that contrasted strangely with the audacious brown eyes.

She wore a silk negligee, cut short in the sleeves to give freedom to her round, white arms.

At her bare throat blazed a gorgeous diamond lavallière.

For a moment she stood regarding Buckstaff with sparkling eyes and then, with a little joyous laugh, she advanced toward him.

"Who are you?" he demanded fearfully.

"Isn't that a pretty question to ask me." She gave him a reproachful smile. "But never mind. I'm so glad that you've come home that nothing else matters."

"I repeat my question. Who are you?" He felt that his face was growing very red.

She came close and looked him steadily in the eyes.

"Who should I be if not your wife, dear. I'm Mrs. Geoffrey Buckstaff."

CHAPTER IV.

The Diamond Lavallière.

BUCKSTAFF stumbled back weakly against the wall, while his hat fell from his nerveless fingers and rolled unheeded beneath the center table. He was so utterly dumfounded by the woman's astonishing statement that, for the moment, he seemed to have lost his power of speech.

He could only stare at her, appalled, and with the hopeless conviction that all reason at last must have forsaken him.

The woman did not appear to notice the effect of her startling revelation. She faced him an instant with her strange, enigmatical smile, and then tucked herself comfortably in a huge arm chair, indolently resting her feet upon a small hassock.

Her air suggested languorous contentment, as though she felt herself entirely at home and in perfect harmony with her luxurious surroundings.

She evidently fancied that Buckstaff's eyes were studying the lavallière at her throat; for, after a brief silence, she lifted a slender hand and held out the glittering trinket that he might see the better.

"Isn't it lovely," she murmured. "Fancy such a bargain! You don't know how good you are to want me to have such things." She seemed radiant with gratitude.

Buckstaff felt that he was choking. He looked from the lavallière to the woman who wore it, and a sense of outraged intelligence swept over him. She was proposing him as the victim of some grotesque farce, the meaning of which he dared not surmise, and he grew hot with resentment.

With a sudden access of anger he advanced toward her. "I demand to know, madam, why you are in my

apartment!" The tone was so menacing that she lifted her long lashes in surprise.

"You don't like me, then?" she questioned. "You don't want me here?" Her eyes sought his in plaintive anxiety and, in spite of himself, Buckstaff felt the least bit ashamed of his vehemence.

"Why should I want you here?" He was beginning to master himself.

"Why? Then you've changed your mind? You don't think I'm attractive any more?" With a lithe movement she left her chair and stood before him in wistful questioning, her red lips faintly parted, her hand clutching the front of her silk gown. She waited with seeming tremulousness under his scrutiny.

"Well?" she inquired finally, lowering her eyes.

Buckstaff turned away unmoved. "You are very attractive," he admitted. "You are charming. But you are not my wife."

Her artless expression changed swiftly to one of cold assurance. She laughed, and this time there was no coquetry in her voice.

"So you're going to try to play the game that way, my friend? And you deny that you're my husband?"

"In Heavens' name, madam," cried Buckstaff in exasperation, "I have no need of denying anything so absurd. And when did this wonderful wedding come off, if you please?"

She met his glance unsmilingly. "We were married last night."

Buckstaff looked at her with a start. "Well," he asked with a little less self possession, "who performed it?"

"The Rev. Mr. Guide."

His face paled. "You claim that the Rev. Mr. Guide married you and me last night?" he stammered. "And what name were you married under?"

"I assumed the name of Beryl Gardner," she said with a shrug of her pretty shoulders. "The license was made out in that name, and it did as well as any other."

At the mention of his fiancée he was seized with a chill of misgiving. "Beryl!" he exclaimed. "Beryl!" He confronted the woman with vague but horrible suspicion. "What has happened to her?" he cried. "Where is she?"

"You mean the other woman?" she asked indifferently. "How should I know?" She resumed her chair, placed her clasped hands behind her head and allowed her slim body to sink luxuriously into the cushions. "I've never met her," she added as she regarded him with provoking unconcern.

"Then what is the object of this silly masquerade? Who are you? Why are you here?"

He feared that he was reaching the end of his endurance. If she had been a man he would have had her by the collar long before this and shaken an explanation from her.

"I have told you that I am your wife, my dear."

"Prove it," he commanded.

She gave him another of her mocking smiles, and nodded toward the carved center table. "In the top drawer," she said. "Open it."

Buckstaff jerked open the drawer savagely and brought to light a folded paper. He opened this up, glowered at it an instant, and again faced the woman.

"It's my marriage certificate," he said bitterly. "Where—"

"Ours," she corrected with a tantalizing laugh.

"Is your name Gardner, then?" he inquired with angry sarcasm.

"My name is—or I should say *was* Lola Flourney," she observed lightly. "I was an actress before you did me the honor to give me a home—an actress out of work."

"Then if your name's Flourney it can't be Gardner, so if I married any one last night it couldn't have been you," declared Buckstaff eagerly.

"You are mistaken," she returned. "If you know anything about the law you'll know that a marriage contract

is binding, no matter what names the contracting parties may have assumed for the occasion. As long as you stand up before a minister and go through the ceremony in proper form you are legally married, no matter whether you call yourself his satanic majesty, and me—"

"His bride," suggested Buckstaff with a grim bow.

She laughed in frank delight. "Just so!" she cried. "I've already accepted the part, and if you are still in doubt look at this ring." She pulled off a plain, gold band which she was wearing on her finger and offered it to him.

Buckstaff was beginning to grow inured to surprise.

Within the last twenty-four hours so many inexplicable things had happened to him that he was learning to accept the unexpected as a matter of course. It was without the slightest sign of astonishment that he inspected the ring and saw it was the one he had purchased for Beryl and so carefully placed in his waistcoat pocket on the eve of his intended wedding.

He glanced at the engraving, and laid the band on the table.

"Well," he admitted, "it was my ring. Where did you get it?"

The woman coolly returned the ring to her finger. "You gave it to me," she said. "And you don't remember?"

"No."

He drew a chair near her and sat down. He was just beginning to realize that he was dealing with an extremely clever woman, and as long as he permitted his emotions to govern him he was playing at a great disadvantage.

With this thought he contrived to smile almost amiably. "Won't you tell me all about it?" he asked. "Honestly, I don't remember a thing."

Her brown eyes surveyed him pleasantly.

"Oh, I'm so glad you aren't going to stay hostile," she said with a sigh. "It makes the home life so awfully uncomfortable." She spoke with such an air of innocence that Buckstaff almost laughed in spite of himself.

"Well?" he urged after an interval. "I'm listening."

"I met you on Forty-Fourth Street at about eight-thirty o'clock last night," she declared with some hesitation. "You were wearing evening clothes, and I thought you quite good looking. I liked you the minute I saw you, and when you spoke to me—" She halted in seeming confusion.

"When I spoke to you—" he said encouragingly.

"Why, I spoke back." Her manner was so naive that Buckstaff for an instant felt that he might have misjudged her. He even fancied he saw her blush.

"And when you spoke back—what then?" he asked.

"Why then you told me that you had expected to get married, but that the real bride had failed you for some reason," she went on demurely. "You asked me if I would take the other woman's place, and showed me the license and the ring. You said the preacher was waiting for you and that you hated to disappoint him."

"Oh, I didn't want to disappoint the preacher?"

"No," she answered, dimpling. "And, for my part, I thought it a pity to disappoint either the preacher or yourself. You looked like such a nice sort of a person, and—and you swore to me that you had plenty of money."

"Really!" he echoed sarcastically.

"That's what you said."

"And when I told you that?"

"I simply took a chance and married you."

Buckstaff gazed at her fixedly. "If all of this happened the way you pretend, how is it that I remember nothing about it?" he demanded.

"You had been drinking," she retorted quietly. "In the condition you were in last night it isn't a bit strange

that you forget everything. You had drawn a blank for the evening."

Buckstaff stirred uneasily in his chair.

It struck him that the woman's story was beginning to sound very plausible. Undeniably she had supplied many of the heretofore unexplained gaps in the mysterious events of the previous night.

There had been a wedding beyond any doubt, and with both the ring and the marriage certificate in her possession, he was forced to admit to himself that her claims were not so preposterous as he had at first imagined. But he was not entirely convinced.

"Then I really placed that ring on your finger?" he said with a bitterness that he could not conceal.

She nodded with a certain impatience.

"And the marriage certificate?"

"Was given to me by the minister after the ceremony." She glanced at him triumphantly. "He was a tall, gray-haired man who wore tortoise shell spectacles."

"You've at least seen the preacher," he conceded. "But were there any witnesses?"

"Oh, dear me, yes. I've so often heard of poor, unsuspecting brides being repudiated by their husbands that I took no chances on my own account. There were two witnesses."

"Who were they?" asked Buckstaff.

"One was a Valerie Sargent. She's an actress appearing at the Dauphine Theater. The other's her husband. They're both friends of mine."

Buckstaff produced a note-book and carefully jotted down the names. "I'll talk with them to-night," he observed significantly. "And now about this apartment. How did you get here?"

She bit her lips.

"I'm getting tired of this catechism," she said. "You brought me here in a taxi after the ceremony and gave me the key to the door. Then you went away again, and that's the last I saw of you until now."

"And that?" His finger indicated the diamond lavallière.

"Oh, that!" Her fingers touched her throat. "You told me that I had charge accounts at the shops, and this is my first purchase. You really don't know how happy you've made me with it."

Then her manner underwent another of its bewildering changes. She leaned forward with a caress in her voice and mischief in her eyes. "Shall I kiss you for it?"

"No!" said Buckstaff decidedly.

"Why not?" The pretty face came tantalizingly near, but Buckstaff sat undisturbed.

"I'm afraid you might accept it as a promise," he rejoined.

"Of more kisses?"

"Of more lavallières."

With a grim laugh he got up from his chair and strode over to the window. He turned his back upon the woman and stood for some time gazing thoughtfully into the gathering dusk outside. When he finally faced about his expression was almost serene.

"Listen," he said quietly: "I believe you have me most beautifully hooked. I won't deny that I'm married to you—not now, at any rate. So, assuming that you're my wife, I'll talk plainly. In the first place I consider you an adventuress!"

With an angry exclamation she started from her chair, but he coolly placed his hands upon her shoulders and forced her back into the cushions.

"Don't interrupt," he smiled. "At least allow me that observation, and if you choose, let the lavallière recompense you. I also consider you very pretty and extremely intelligent. As an actress I have only the highest praise for you. You've staged a most interesting little farce at my expense during the last half hour, but now we're going to forsake art for commerce. In other words, what's your price?"

"My price! What do you mean?" Her eyes narrowed venomously.

"You very well know what I mean. I have a wife on my hands. I want to get rid of her. How much is it going to cost me?"

Again she tried to struggle to her feet, and once more he checked her. She relapsed into the chair, breathing quickly and watching him with growing fascination.

"If I've hurt you," he said, "I'm sorry. I was merely talking in the terms of our enforced relationship. You admit that you married me while I was mentally irresponsible. Well, please let's understand each other.

"You say you were willing to take a chance when I told you I had money. You thought you would make a good thing out of such a marriage. That was simply and solely your motive, wasn't it?"

"Please let me get up," she begged with unexpected meekness.

He moved a little to one side, and she stood erect and faced him. For a moment she regarded him earnestly. Then she sighed and shook her head.

"I don't know," she murmured. "I thought at the time it was for money, but—"

"Well?"

She caught her breath softly. "I—perhaps I like you a bit on your own account. Would that be so strange?"

"Please," interrupted Buckstaff impatiently. "I begged you to end the farce."

"Oh," she whispered, "you think it's still a farce? I'm not so sure—"

A bell in the hallway buzzed sharply, and she broke off in the middle of her sentence.

"It's the hall phone," said Buckstaff, welcoming the diversion. "You'd better answer it."

She turned away with obvious reluctance and left the room, while Buckstaff picked his hat from the floor and leaned idly against the table. He was unable to catch any of the woman's conversation over the phone, but when she finally came back he could see by her face that something had happened.

"Well?" he inquired. "One of your friends?"

"A woman down-stairs who demands to see Mrs. Buckstaff. I asked her to come up. She says she's Mrs. Buckstaff's mother."

"And is she?"

"I have no mother."

Buckstaff caught her wrist with startled intuition.

"What's this woman's name?" he cried.

"Mrs. Paxton Gardner."

CHAPTER V.

Wanted, the Bride.

BUCKSTAFF made no effort to guess how Beryl's mother had found her way to his apartment or what incomprehensible mission had brought her there. He only realized that she was about to appear at the door, and his single thought was to prevent her seeing Lola.

On the impulse of the moment he seized his companion by the hand and drew her into an adjoining room, hastily pulling the heavy portières after her.

"You'll keep out of sight, won't you?" he begged anxiously.

"Oh, yes. I'll stay here; but I'll be listening." She flashed him a saucy smile, and he moved nervously back into the drawing room.

At that instant the bell rang. With an agitation which he feared he would be unable to conceal he went into the hallway and opened the door.

The visitor was a large and rather plump woman dressed in a closely fitting suit of serge and wearing a feathered hat that might have been designed for a girl thirty years her junior. The fiction of youth suggested by the hat, however, seemed to find specious verification in the pinkness of her smooth cheeks and the brown hair untouched by a single thread of gray.

Although she had never received him, Buckstaff had seen the woman

from a distance on several occasions, and he now recognized her at once as Beryl's mother.

The blue eyes returned his glance, but without exactly seeming to concede his existence. The silent hostility of her manner only served to increase his uneasiness; but he greeted her politely, without betraying his feeling.

Without a word she followed him into the drawing room.

He noticed that the marriage certificate was still lying on the table, and quietly returned it to the drawer. Then, as she started to sit down in the cushions that had just been left by Lola, he hastened to offer her another chair. She accepted the attention with a stiff nod.

"I've come to see my daughter," she said coldly.

Buckstaff strove painfully to appear at ease, while his mind sought desperately for some expedient to help him out of this newest difficulty. He saw instantly that Mrs. Gardner believed Beryl actually married to him, and that she knew nothing either of the girl's strange disappearance or of the unfortunate ending of her romance.

And for the time being he did not dare undeceive the mother.

"It's odd that you succeeded in finding us," he murmured evasively, and playing for more time to think. "I suppose you got our address from Beryl."

"I got your address at the hotel where I knew you had been stopping. I was told by the clerk that you had ordered baggage sent here, so I naturally presumed this was to be your home."

She glanced depreciatingly about the room, and again turned frigidly to Buckstaff. "My daughter has not done me the honor to communicate with me since her—her marriage."

"But she would be extremely happy to see you now, I'm positive," observed Buckstaff recklessly.

"She *would* be glad?" questioned the mother sharply.

"Why, yes—certainly—that is to say, she undoubtedly would if she were here," he stammered. "But, you must understand, as she isn't here—"

"Where is she?" From the tone of her voice Buckstaff gathered that he was not on the high road to gaining her favor.

"I fancy that she may be downtown shopping." He had an uncomfortable feeling that he was flushing. "She didn't tell me exactly what she was going to do, you know, and I'm sorry I can't be more explicit."

Mrs. Gardner measured him with a disquieting glance. "Who was the woman who answered the house phone when I was announced a moment ago?" she demanded.

Buckstaff turned with an involuntary movement toward the adjoining room where Lola was concealed. "Oh, that woman?" he murmured with inward alarm. "She's — she's just the maid, of course."

He was wondering what would happen if Mrs. Gardner should insist on seeing this "maid," and Lola were to appear in her festive silk gown and two-thousand-dollar lavallière. But for the nonce luck favored him. The visitor seemed satisfied with his explanation.

"When will my daughter be back?" she asked.

"I don't know for certain," answered Buckstaff, breathing easier; "but she'll probably be quite late."

Mrs. Gardner flounced irritably in her chair. "This is very annoying," she declared. "It is very important that I see her at once, and I don't care to wait here until she returns."

"A message left with me, perhaps—" suggested Buckstaff, eager to get rid of her.

She eyed him severely.

"You may tell her," she said after a short pause, "that her father has had a sudden stroke and is now critically ill. He has asked to see her. He begged me to carry this request to her, and I could only consent."

"Oh!" gasped Buckstaff, mentally recoiling before this fresh crisis.

"You may tell her," went on the mother, and this time evidently adding her own postscript to the father's message—"you may tell her that a grave sickness may often shake the firmest resolution; but that as far as I am concerned personally, I am still in the best of health."

"Then," said Buckstaff bluntly, "I'm to tell Beryl that she's to be received in her father's house, but by her father only."

"You're to tell her just what I told you to say," snapped the mother angrily. She got up and moved toward the hallway. "I may add"—she said begrudgingly—"that Mr. Gardner has also requested to see you. He wishes to talk with you. Good afternoon, sir."

She swept out of the apartment, leaving Buckstaff almost distracted by the new complication of ill fortune.

Whether he had been right in allowing Mrs. Gardner to believe her daughter married, he was unable to decide. If he had really wed Lola, then Beryl had probably gone away some place to be alone in her shame and humiliation.

This would account for her disappearance. And pride, undoubtedly, had prevented her communicating with her people after she had left them for Buckstaff's sake.

The consciousness of the horrible wrong that Beryl had suffered struck him with crushing force.

He reproached himself miserably for having taken those three fateful drinks on his wedding night. The knowledge that during his entire life he had been a temperate man only increased the bitterness of his reflections. On the night of all others he had failed.

That was the sad injustice of it all; and the one he loved most in the world had to pay the penalty.

His single thought now was to act solely in Beryl's interests—to spare, at any sacrifice, her pride and her peace of mind. He realized how unfortunate her position would be if the newspapers ever learned the truth of the affair. In all probability the fear of such publicity was partially responsible for her seeking seclusion.

Later, he felt, she might find some plausible pretext for reappearing among her friends without a husband; but until the interest in her supposed marriage had died out secrecy could be her only protection.

But in the mean time Paxton Gardner was ill and demanded to see his daughter. If she did not appear explanations would be demanded—explanations which Buckstaff did not care to make without consulting the girl. He made up his mind that he must find her at any cost.

Resolved to lose no further time he went back into the drawing room to get his hat.

Lola was already there. In his concern for Beryl Buckstaff for the moment had nearly forgotten this other woman; but the sight of her impudent face speedily recalled him to old perplexities.

"Well," he observed wearily, "I suppose you heard. You can probably guess the sort of trouble I've gotten myself into."

"You mean that *I* have brought it upon you," she corrected frankly.

"It doesn't matter who's responsible," he rejoined. "I'm the one who's got to find the way out of it, and that's the only important thing now." He picked up his hat and started for the door.

"Are you going?" she asked with a pout of disapproval.

He hesitated. "I'm sorry not to finish our talk," he said, "but I won't be able to wait now."

He glanced wistfully about the room with its fine old furniture, the elegant rugs and tapestries, and the costly pictures which he had fondly collected to make a home for Beryl. An expression of the deepest pain crossed his face as the old memories

came flooding into his thoughts, and for the moment a spell of poignant sadness held him.

Then he looked at the auburn-haired woman in her garish silk gown.

"For the present you may consider this apartment yours," he said with a little tremor in his voice. "We'll reach some permanent understanding later."

"But you—when will I see you again?" she murmured.

"I haven't the faintest idea," he replied. "Maybe to-morrow, possibly not for a month. I'll arrange everything so that you may be comfortable here. You'd better get you a maid. And you're to have a monthly allowance. I'll see that you receive the first instalment to-morrow. If you want to reach me at any time you may phone me at the Hanover."

"But—" She did not finish.

"Well?"

"What is it you're going to do?" She seemed reluctant to have him leave.

He gazed at her sorrowfully. "I'm going to find the woman whom I ought to have married," he said.

Then he moved toward the hallway, but again checked himself on the threshold. "I neglected to say," he added, "that after to-day there will be no more charge accounts. Good-by." He smiled faintly and left the apartment.

For the next twenty hours Buckstaff did not close his eyes. He scarcely took the time to eat. Like a restless spirit he prowled about the city, searching ceaselessly for some trace of the missing Beryl.

But, whatever had happened to her she was well hidden, and apparently had no wish to reveal herself. His first concern had been to insert a discreet personal in all of the newspapers, with the hope that it might attract her attention, but the day dragged by without a word of response.

Inquiries which he caused to be made among the young woman's friends were equally unsuccessful.

As far as he could learn none of her acquaintances had the slightest intimation of her whereabouts, and naturally supposed her to be on her honeymoon with Buckstaff. Through Greve he succeeded in communicating with the girl who was to have acted as Beryl's attendant at the wedding; but she too seemed in ignorance of what had happened.

Shortly before the hour set she had received a telephone message from Beryl, telling her that the ceremony had been performed earlier than the scheduled time, but making no explanation of this singular change in the plans. Buckstaff ascertained this much from the bridesmaid without her suspecting that anything was wrong; but after all his finessing he found himself no nearer the solution of the enigma than he had been before.

Greve had aided his quest in every way possible, but the best man seemed as much mystified by his cousin's continued absence as Buckstaff.

The account of his interview with Mrs. Gardner Buckstaff confided to Greve; but, after reflection, he decided to keep the secret of Lola's presence in the Riverside apartment. The more he thought of it the greater was his reluctance to have any one know of Beryl's humiliation.

It was late in the afternoon when he finally returned dejected to his hotel after having exhausted every likely means of finding a trace of the girl.

A night and nearly a day had elapsed since he had seen Mrs. Gardner, and it was beginning to look as though he would be unable to fulfil the promise he had made her. He was trying to invent some excuse to offer the mother when he reached the desk and discovered a message from Lola.

The actress wrote that she had been trying all afternoon to reach him by phone, and urged him to go immediately to the Riverside apartment, as she had something of importance to

tell him. Buckstaff hesitated about complying with the woman's request, but finally decided to risk an hour in finding out what she wished.

Lola was waiting for him when he arrived at the apartment, and he thought he detected a trace of nervousness in her manner.

"Oh, I've been trying so hard to get you!" she exclaimed as he followed her into the drawing room. "What do you suppose has happened?"

Buckstaff regarded her curiously. "I can't imagine," he said. "What?"

"There's been a lawyer here today." She shook her head mysteriously.

"A lawyer! What lawyer?"

"Mr. Gregory he called himself. He's Paxton Gardner's attorney."

Buckstaff's jaw dropped. "The devil!" he gasped.

"That's just what I thought," declared the young woman.

"Well, what did he want?" demanded Buckstaff apprehensively.

"He wanted to see you," she returned gravely. "He insisted that you are keeping Mr. Gardner's daughter from him against her will—by force, and—"

"And what?" cried Buckstaff.

"And if you don't produce her by to-morrow morning he's going to take legal means to make you."

CHAPTER VI.

Face to Face.

BUCKSTAFF had anticipated some such move on the part of the Gardner family; but, nevertheless, he was greatly disconcerted by Lola's news. He had hoped, at least, for another day or two in which to continue his hunt for Beryl, and now that his worst fears were prematurely realized, he found himself in a hopeless dilemma.

He regarded Lola with gloomy foreboding. "Did this man say definitely what he was going to do?" he asked.

"No—only that he was going to make it very hot for you."

"I should think he could," grunted Buckstaff. "I doubt if he has any legal resort, but at the same time he can make it mighty embarrassing if he gets busy. What sort of a man was he?"

She smiled disdainfully. "He was a sort of a crabbish man, I thought. He wanted to know what the deuce *I* was doing here."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Buckstaff. "And what did you tell him?"

"I said I was the cook." She beamed with conscious virtue.

Buckstaff's horrified glance wandered from her tiny blue suède slippers to the crown of her auburn head, and noting on the way the violent pattern of her clinging, silk gown, with his lavallière glittering against the whiteness of her full, bare throat.

"Dressed like that?" he demanded.

She extended her arms and gazed down at herself with infinite satisfaction. "Why not?" she flashed. "You didn't expect me to receive a man in a gingham apron, did you?"

"Oh, certainly not," he murmured dispiritedly. "And I'm at least grateful that you didn't tell him you were my wife."

The remark was unfortunate. She turned upon him in swift resentment.

"Oh, as for that," she said tartly, "I played I was the cook just to amuse myself. It don't make a bit of difference to me how you get out of this affair with the other woman. From now on I'm your *wife*, understand? And if any one else comes here that's what I'll tell them."

With an unpleasant shrug of her shoulders she moved across the room, disposed herself leisurely in a chair, and watched Buckstaff with malicious eyes.

He stared back at her in exasperation. "Tell them anything you please, then!" he exploded. And without an-

other word he left the apartment and started back to his hotel.

Buckstaff felt little relish at the prospect of dinner, but when he reached the Hanover he went directly to the grill, realizing that an unfed man is not the best counselor. He felt that he had a stubborn problem to wrestle with, but he went at it manfully, along with the consommé.

The roast found him struggling helplessly before the manifold troubles that beset him, and a half-hour later he gulped down his *demi tasse* without having evolved a single plan to extricate himself from his hapless predicament. He lighted a cigar and sat a while longer at the table in dismal preoccupation.

After a time he got up and strolled out into the lobby.

He stopped for a moment at the desk, and was rather surprised to find that a note had been left there for him. The clerk handed him the envelope, and he balanced it thoughtfully in his fingers for an instant, looking curiously at the typewritten superscription.

Then he tore it open and examined the enclosure—a single sheet of coarse paper.

He gave a short, muffled cry that drew a startled glance from the clerk. There were three sentences in the note:

I am held by force at Prescott, Long Island. Look for the third house from the station on the right hand side. If you love me come at once. BERYL.

The signature, like the rest of the note, was typewritten.

Buckstaff wildly scanned the message a second time, glanced again at the envelope, and turned with whitened face to the clerk.

"When did this come?" he asked excitedly.

"Not more than three minutes ago," was the prompt answer.

"How was it delivered?"

"A messenger brought it."

The clerk looked at him inquisitively, but Buckstaff didn't wait for further conversation. Cramming the note into his pocket he hurried to the street. An empty taxicab was standing near the hotel entrance, and he opened the door and scrambled inside.

"Do you know how to get to Prescott, Long Island?" he called to the chauffeur.

"Surest thing," responded the man.

"Then let's see how quick you can get there!" cried Buckstaff.

Of the ride that followed Buckstaff kept but few recollections. His thoughts were too violently occupied with other matters to permit his noticing the events of the reckless journey.

One moment his terrified conjectures of what might have happened to Beryl drew him into the depths of anguish; the next instant his senses were exalted by the prospect of seeing her. He was overcome with misgiving, intoxicated with hope, and no matter how fast the humming taxi traveled over the smooth pavements his instincts cried for more speed.

The chauffeur evidently had felt a contagion in his passenger's mad haste.

He seemed to have taken Buckstaff at his word, and let the car run at a clip that would have made a traffic policeman open his eyes. Fortunately no officer happened to see them, and they reached Fifty-Ninth Street without interruption and turned toward the East River at a breakneck pace.

The long Queensboro Bridge was crossed like a shot, and almost before Buckstaff realized that they had started they skirted Ravenswood, and headed out across the open country of Long Island.

After that Buckstaff was vaguely conscious of a procession of lighted farmhouses and crossroad villages, interspersed with dark patches of timber, that swept past the taxi window like the panorama of a dream. And through it all the unanswerable question about Beryl's plight pounded ceaselessly in the back of his brain.

It seemed to him that he must have been traveling for hours when the taxi finally slowed up, and he heard the chauffeur calling to him through the front window.

"Where do you want to go now?"

Buckstaff opened the door and peered out into the darkness. They were standing before a low, brick building that fronted on a gravel driveway. "Where are we?" he asked anxiously.

"Prescott," replied the man. "This is the railroad station."

Buckstaff jumped out, his heart beating rapidly. He glanced quickly about to get his bearings, and handed the driver a bill.

"Wait here, please," he said. "I'll be back presently, and there may be another passenger."

His hasty survey of the neighborhood had showed him a single road leading away from the station. Some distance away he could make out the lines of a house that stood near a dimly burning street lamp.

This, he decided, was the first of the dwellings mentioned in the note. The house of his search, then, would be found a little further on. Confident that he had not mistaken the directions he struck out briskly up the road.

As he hurried past the first house it occurred to him suddenly that he had not thought to bring a weapon with him.

But he did not hesitate. He felt that if Beryl were in danger he would succeed somehow in fighting his way to her, and that he was not taking nearly so great a risk as the person who might dare to interfere.

The second house was nearly a quarter of a mile beyond its neighbor. He went by, almost at a run, and without giving it more than a casual glance. It was nearly five minutes later before he caught a glimpse of new lights through the trees and knew that he was approaching the next dwelling along the road—the third house.

He advanced more cautiously, and presently found himself within the hedged grounds of a rambling, white cottage, half hidden in the shrubbery a hundred paces from the highway.

With quickened pulse he made a circuit of the premises, trying to see in the first floor windows. Unfortunately he found all of the shades drawn, and he finished his reconnaissance without gaining any knowledge of the interior.

Disappointed he was turning back toward the front of the house when his attention was drawn by the light in a window up-stairs. The view here was not obstructed.

He could see a table near the window, with a small electric lamp and a vase of flowers, and as he stood watching he detected a slight movement behind the curtains. Then a woman's figure appeared before the window, and a white hand reached out and pulled down the shade.

It was but a fleeting vision, but in the instant a thrill of fierce joy darted through his being. With a smothered cry he dashed around to the front door and furiously rang the bell.

He heard footsteps in the hallway, the sound of a turning lock, and the door was opened. A tall, thick shouldered man blocked the entrance.

Buckstaff surveyed the other darkly "I want to see Miss Gardner," he declared.

The man shook his head. "There's no such person here," he said quietly.

"You lie!" roared Buckstaff.

He flung himself bodily upon the astonished individual, forced a passage through the door and into the hallway, and ran up the front stairs three steps at a time. In another moment he was knocking frantically at the chamber where he had seen the woman's face.

"Come in," bade a gentle voice, and Buckstaff threw open the door and entered the room.

A slender, brown haired woman in a white, loose sleeved robe, was bending over the table rearranging the

flowers in a huge pottery vase. She looked up questioningly, and in her dark, luminous eyes Buckstaff could see the trace of recent tears.

A great tenderness swept over him. Forgetful of everything now, held only by the sweet spell of her nearness, he took a step toward her.

"Beryl! Beryl!" he murmured in a throbbing whisper.

For the first time she seemed to recognize him. She recoiled before him. The color fled from her cheeks.

"You! *You!*" There was unutterable scorn and aversion in her cry.

Scarcely knowing what he was doing he grasped her delicate wrist, but she tore herself away from him and shrank back behind the table.

"Don't touch me!" Her eyes blazed with anger. "What are you doing *here?*"

"Beryl!" he protested brokenly. "What is it? What is wrong? Aren't you held here by these people? Didn't you send for me?"

"I! *I* send for you? What are you thinking of? What—"

"Here!" he interrupted. He produced the typewritten note from his pocket and offered it to her. She accepted the paper from his fingers, glanced at it hurriedly, and threw it contemptuously on the floor.

"That?" she said. "Why I never saw it before!"

CHAPTER VII.

"Good-by."

AS the slip of paper fluttered to the rug a panting, disheveled man thrust his way into the room and started menacingly toward the unwitting Buckstaff. He would have struck the intruder down from behind, but the girl foresaw the action and threw herself forward with a little scream of protest.

"Simpson! Don't!" She caught his arm and pushed him back toward the door.

"But you told me not to let any one see you," objected the man as he glared at Buckstaff.

"As long as he is already in, there is nothing further for you to do," she said bitterly. "That will be all, Simpson."

With a bow that only half masked his dissatisfaction the man withdrew, and Buckstaff and Beryl again found themselves alone. Cold and disdainful, the woman nodded toward the hallway.

"Now that you have found I'm not a prisoner, there is nothing to keep you. The next time you try to see me I hope you may find a more plausible pretext."

He winced before the cutting sarcasm of her voice. "I don't understand you, Beryl."

She touched the paper on the floor with the tip of her small foot. "I suppose you didn't write that yourself?"

"*I* write it?" It seemed to him incredible that she could accuse him of such a paltry expedient. "On my word of honor, it was delivered to me at my hotel. I thought it came from you."

"With a typewritten signature?" she smiled ironically.

"I didn't stop to put such questions to myself!" he exclaimed impetuously. "I came here as quickly as I could. Don't you realize that I've been searching for you for nearly two days—that I've been almost crazy."

A shadow of pain crossed her sensitive face. "I can scarcely believe that," she said. "But it doesn't matter. There is really nothing worth discussing, and I must beg you to excuse me."

"But—" he interjected miserably.

Her eyes contracted and her lips curled with a rancor that she made no effort to hide. "Do you know, sir, that your presence here not only is unpleasant, but insulting as well."

She spoke with measured deliberation, as though intending each word to fall with separate force. "What-

ever your motive in coming, you have no business here. Your place is with your *wife!*"

Buckstaff started as though she had struck him with her open hand.

"My wife!" he groaned. "Then you know her."

A shudder swept her slim body. "I have not had the honor of meeting her, but I know who she is. She's an actress, I believe."

"Then you know everything?" he asked with dull hopelessness.

"Everything." She turned her head away as if to spare him the accusation of her eyes.

"I was drunk when I married," he said brokenly.

"So I heard," she returned in a straining voice.

"And you can never forgive?" He gazed at her distractedly.

"Forgive?" She laughed sardonically. "You ask me that? *You?* Why, do you realize what you have done to me? I'm afraid you don't."

She advanced a step and met his glance mercilessly.

"I once loved you," she whispered —"or, at least, I thought I did." Her hands pressed tremulously against her breast.

"I gave you everything my heart had to offer—the best there was in me —all! I left my people, I left my home. There was nothing I was not ready to sacrifice for you. I would have done anything for you; I would have gone any place you wished to take me. I was altogether yours! And you—"

A tone of chilling scorn crept into her voice.

"You did the one thing that no woman can forgive. You violated my trust, you wounded my love. I might have been able to find excuses for that. But above everything else you have attacked my pride. You have so debased and humiliated me that I am ashamed to face my family or my friends.

"You have driven me out to this little village with only Simpson and his wife—two servants—for my companions. I do not dare see any one else for fear that the truth should be known. I feel that I should die if my mother or father should know what has happened. I have been cheapened and disgraced. *That* I cannot forgive."

Buckstaff's face was livid. He understood that she hated him, and he felt that he never wanted her or needed her more than he did now. "Beryl!" he choked, "I love you!"

She gave an exclamation of repugnance and drew sharply away from him. "You forget," she said frigidly, "that you're a married man."

He bowed his head dumbly, in despairing recollection. Her reminder crushed the last spark of hope from his heart. There was nothing further to be said.

An evil fate had decreed that he should do her the greatest wrong that a woman could suffer, and now it was too late to make amends.

He had no explanation that could alter circumstances, no apology that she could accept. Another woman was his wife, and now his presence in Beryl's home was a new affront. He must not remain near her, yearning as he did with every traitor impulse to reveal the love he had no right to offer.

He looked at her with the sadness of complete resignation.

"I will never make such a blunder again," he said. "I'll not try to see you any more. I'm going back West and if we never meet again I want you at least to know that the rest of my life will be spent in expiation of the misfortunes I have brought upon you."

She regarded him with swift inquiry. "You really mean that?"

"That I shall try to atone?"

"That you will leave New York for good."

"If you wish it."

"And take that other—take your wife with you."

An expression of distaste crossed

his face, but he nodded slowly. "If you want me to," he said simply.

"It is all I ask of you," she returned gravely. "My plan is this. You go back to your mountains and never try to see me again. I'll remain here quietly until our supposed wedding is forgotten by the public. That was my intention in coming here in the first place.

"After a time I shall travel—go abroad, perhaps. My old friends will gradually forget me, and my new acquaintances, I hope, will not be too curious about my past. Perhaps eventually I can build a new happiness from the ashes of the old. Who can tell?"

She smiled pathetically.

"I shall never want to marry. As for the rest it will be very easy. The truth never need come out. My family won't know anything, because they are no longer interested in my movements. The night I left home my mother told me that she never wanted to see me or hear from me again. And my father—"

Buckstaff stopped her with a sudden gesture of distress. "Oh!" he exclaimed contritely, "I had forgotten! In finding you again everything else was driven out of my mind. I have a message for you from your mother."

Her eyes opened incredulously. "From my mother? But—but, how—what is it?"

"It's about your father. He is ill and wants to see you."

The color fled from her face, and she caught at the table with her hand. "My father!" she murmured. "Ill? And—he sent for me?"

"For both of us," said Buckstaff uncomfortably.

She threw him a look of mingled horror and despair, and then moved in agitation across the room, twisting the lace of her gown through her nerveless fingers. After a moment she came back to him, and he saw a new-born resolution in her dark eyes.

"How did you come here?" she asked.

"In a taxi," he answered.

"I'm going back with you," she announced quietly. Please go downstairs and wait until I'm ready.

He started to leave the room, but she halted him with a movement of her hand.

"This may change everything," she said. "If my father has sent for me, it means that he wants to forgive me for—for leaving home. He thinks, of course, that you are my husband, and has asked to see you also. To tell him now what has happened might be too severe a shock. He must *not* know the truth until he is better or until—"

She did not finish, but Buckstaff understood what she would have said. "I'll do anything you wish," he volunteered.

It was only with a great effort that she steadied herself. "You'll have to go back with me," she said between her compressed lips, "and act out the lie I must tell my father." She motioned him to go.

He went down-stairs and waited in the hallway.

Beryl did not take long to dress. In less than ten minutes she appeared at the head of the stairs and came silently down to join him. She had put on a snugly-fitting street dress of gray and a drooping velvet hat that almost concealed her soft, brown hair.

The deep pallor of her cheeks served to accentuate the redness of her curving lips.

Her eyes held an expression of infinite weariness that the heavy, half-lowered lashes failed to mask. Suffering seemed to have suppressed all her old-time vivacity of manner, imparting, instead, a maturer dignity of grace—the finished charm of womanhood.

To Buckstaff she had grown lovelier and more desirable than ever. It was all he could do to keep from taking her madly into his arms.

But she moved past him with averted glance, and as he held open the door for

her he noticed that she instinctively shrank away from him. He closed the door and followed her down the front steps, almost overcome by the final evidence of her despite.

For a short distance they walked toward the station in silence, but Buckstaff finally unable to endure the strain any longer, at last attempted to address her. She turned upon him imperiously.

"My father's illness has forced me to submit to your company," she said in icy accents. "You will please have the goodness not to add your conversation to my other trials. There is absolutely nothing more to be said between us."

He turned away his head as though fearful even in the darkness she might see the suffering in his face.

She was without pity, but also she was just. It would, indeed, be kinder to both, he realized, not to renew the heartbreaking discussion when the time was past for mending. He could begin his atonement now by hiding his feelings from her.

"I shall not offend again," he said gently.

"Thank you," she returned, and this time there was a little quaver in her voice. "You are considerate."

Several minutes later they reached the station, without another word having been spoken.

The taxicab was waiting where Buckstaff had left it. He opened the door and offered his hand to the girl, but she climbed into the car unassisted and without seeming to notice that he was standing by the step. In a choking voice he gave the chauffeur Paxton Gardner's address, followed his companion into the taxi, and softly closed the door.

In strange contrast with his ride to Prescott, the ride back to the city was seared in Buckstaff's memory forever.

All the way to New York he sat huddled in his corner of the taxi, tense and distraught, determined not to break the promise of silence she had imposed upon him. He could not see her in the darkness, but the knowledge that he had only to extend his hand to touch her filled him with insane yearning.

The incense of her presence intoxicated him.

It required all of his self-restraint to enforce discretion. Once, when the vehicle lurched suddenly at the approach to the Queensboro Bridge, she was thrown lightly against him, and, mistrustful of himself, he recoiled fearfully from the warm contact of her body.

He drew back into his corner breathlessly.

Beryl, on the other hand, seemed utterly oblivious to her companion's existence. She maintained her attitude of aloofness to the very end of the journey, neither speaking nor appearing to think of him until the taxi finally drew up before her father's Fifth Avenue home.

"We are here," she said.

Buckstaff climbed out and held open the door while she followed him to the sidewalk, but he did not again make the blunder of trying to assist her. He dismissed the chauffeur, and followed her up the steps of the gloomy stone house.

Beryl rang the bell, and almost instantly she and Buckstaff were admitted by a grave-faced butler, who merely gave them a formal bow of recognition.

"Where is Mrs. Gardner, Bergen?" she asked in a low voice.

"I will see if she is here, miss," was the answer. "Will you wait in the reception-room?" And, followed by the silent Buckstaff, Beryl was escorted into the adjoining room with all the grave ceremony due an absolute stranger.

Bergen noiselessly withdrew, and, after a moment of painful waiting, a door at the end of the room opened, and a woman appeared on the threshold. Buckstaff recognized her as Mrs. Gardner and inclined his head politely; but she ignored him to turn a distant glance upon her daughter.

"How is my father?" asked Beryl,

"I am sorry to inform you that his condition is a great deal worse." There was no hint of maternal feeling in the cool voice.

"Oh!" gasped Beryl. Her lips trembled slightly. "May I see him tonight?"

"The doctor has ordered that no one may see him until there is a decided change for the better."

"And is there hope for that?"

"We can only pray for hope." Mrs. Gardner prepared to leave the room. "You will find accommodation here for the night. Bergen will see that everything is prepared for you. Good night."

Without relaxing the set expression of her plump face she turned away, closing the door quietly behind her.

With a little choking cry Beryl wheeled toward Buckstaff. Involuntarily he started forward, but she checked him with a glance.

"Go!" She pointed to the door with trembling finger.

"But—" he began in astonishment.

"I know! I know!" she interrupted wildly. "But you must go! I can't have you here. I can't endure it! If father can't see you there's no need of your staying! I'll explain. I'll tell him you've been called out of town on business—anything. I'll lie to them! Only go!"

He looked at her an instant with unspeakable sadness, and then turned slowly toward the hallway. "Good night," he said in a suffocating voice.

"No, not that," she faltered. "This time it is good-by."

CHAPTER VIII.

A Bourbon Highball.

DAXTON GARDNER died. For three days the old millionaire lingered with occasional intervals of consciousness, and at last one morning just before dawn the end came quietly. Beryl had remained with him to the last.

During this time Buckstaff scarcely left his hotel, but anxiously watched the newspaper bulletins from the sick room.

The physicians said that Gardner had been overtaken with organic troubles which had threatened him for years, and that it was only a marvel that he had managed to live so long. In this statement Buckstaff found a grain of comfort, for he realized at least that Beryl need not reproach herself for bringing on her father's last illness.

He held himself ready to answer any summons that might come from her, thinking that she might need him to help sustain her in the unhappy rôle she had essayed to play.

But as the days passed and he received no message, he concluded that she had satisfactorily explained his absence, and was really carrying out her resolve not to see him again. Even when the funeral was held no word was sent him, and he remained all day in his rooms the prey of gloomy conjecture.

For a time he felt that Beryl might even have taken her mother into her confidence; but then he reminded himself of the elder woman's relentless hostility and the daughter's fierce pride, and decided that such a result was improbable.

But whatever may have happened, he determined finally that he could be of no more service to Beryl, and reluctantly made his plans to leave New York, as he had agreed to do. He was on the point of sending for Lola to tell her of his intentions when he received an unexpected telephone message from Gregory, the late Mr. Gardner's lawyer.

Gregory requested him to go that afternoon to the Gardner home so that he might be present when the millionaire's will was read. He did not dare refuse.

Buckstaff dressed carefully, and set out with considerable trepidation to fulfil his luckless obligation. He was admitted to the Gardner house by the im-

perturbable Bergen, and escorted to the reception-room, which he so uncomfortably remembered.

Beryl was waiting there for him.

The old heartache came back with renewed poignancy as he gazed at her. She was wearing a simple, black gown that clung softly to the lines of her youthful figure. A sweetness of resignation touched the gentle lips, the great, dark eyes, and imparted a fuller beauty to her pallid face.

All of her former resentment seemed to have gone from her manner.

"I wanted to see you first," she said as she recognized Buckstaff.

He struggled against an emotion that threatened to overcome his sternest resolves. "No one knows anything, then?" he asked in a constrained voice.

"My mother still believes me married," she answered. "After the reception she gave me I had no desire to undeceive her. No, I have decided not to change my plans. To-night I shall go back to Prescott, where I can live without being questioned."

"Then my absence during the last few days has caused no comment?" he inquired.

"I told them that you had been called away on urgent business. I hoped that we would not have to meet again, but this morning Mr. Gregory insisted that you should be present when he reads father's will. So I had to tell him where to phone you for fear he might suspect something."

"But," interrupted Buckstaff dubiously, "is the—the will apt to bring about any new complications?"

"No, I believe not," she reassured him. "Your being here is only a formality which Mr. Gregory did not wish to dispense with. You need not fear any difficulties."

"And afterward?" He was watching her face dismally.

She lifted her eyes slowly. "Afterward," she said, "I shall expect you to keep your promise. You will leave New York, won't you?"

He nodded. "Yes," he muttered in a low tone—"yes, I'll keep my promise."

"Then we may as well join the others," she said.

Buckstaff followed her to a large, dimly lighted room on the other side of the house. Mrs. Gardner was already there, talking in a subdued voice with a tall, gray-haired man who was standing by the window. The woman favored Buckstaff with a perfunctory nod, but did not speak.

Beryl presented the man as Mr. Gregory.

The lawyer shook Buckstaff's hand, and then, without further preliminary, sat down before a table where the light was strongest, and produced a long, official looking document from his pocket. Mrs. Gardner sank into a chair near the window, and Beryl withdrew into a dim corner at the opposite side of the room. Buckstaff remained standing.

Gregory opened the will and swiftly read aloud through its pages.

He finished and looked up benignly. By his last testament Paxton Gardner had divided his estate equally between the mother and daughter, excepting for certain bequests for charity. It was a simply worded, straightforward document, and, with a sigh of relief, Buckstaff found that his name was not mentioned in it.

He guessed that it antedated by several years his supposed marriage to Beryl.

"Well," said the attorney after a moment's silence as he slowly folded up the papers, "if there is no objection I'll have this probated to-day."

Beryl nodded mute acquiescence, while Mrs. Gardner got up and moved toward the table. "That will be perfectly satisfactory," she said.

Gregory examined his watch and left his chair. "In that case," he observed, "I'll have to go down-town at once. You'll excuse me if I hurry away?"

"Oh, of course," returned Mrs. Gardner indifferently. "And you, I

presume, will be going too?" She turned curtly to Buckstaff, and it was impossible for him to mistake her meaning.

"There's no further reason for my staying," he rejoined quietly. He looked toward the dark corner, hoping for a last glance from Beryl, but to his surprise he found that she was gone.

She had slipped out of the room unnoticed while the others were talking; and Buckstaff understood that she had taken this precaution to avoid saying good-by. With a heavy heart he accompanied the attorney from the room.

As the two men reached the sidewalk Gregory turned with a chuckle to his companion. "The dowager doesn't seem exactly fond of you," he ventured.

Buckstaff looked at the other grimly. "I can't say that she's overloaded me with kindness."

"Well, that wouldn't worry me any," observed the lawyer with a sidewise glance. "With a wife like yours a fellow shouldn't complain about anything. Beryl's a wonder."

Buckstaff winced in spite of himself, and a half stifled groan escaped his lips. But the attorney was busy with his own thoughts, and did not seem to observe.

"Yes," he went on musingly, "that girl's pure gold. Old man Gardner was going to cut her out of his will if she married you, and she didn't care a snap of her finger."

He scrutinized his companion humorously as they turned down a side street toward Broadway.

"You look as though you might be an attractive chap, Buckstaff, but I'll bet there isn't one girl in a million who'd take a chance on losing a tidy fortune just for the sake of marrying you."

"I—I don't understand," said Buckstaff miserably.

"Great Lord!" exclaimed Gregory. "She didn't tell you. That's like her, too. Well, listen then. On the night of the wedding Gardner had me send a note to her in which he told her that if she persisted in getting married he wouldn't leave her a penny. The note must have been delivered a minute or two before nine o'clock—just as the ceremony was about to come off. A nice little moment to have such a thing arrive, wasn't it? But the old man would have it so."

Buckstaff recalled that, according to the minister, the wedding had taken place earlier than schedule, and the message then must have reached the church after the ceremony had been performed.

But it was probably Lola, not Beryl, who had received it. He was careful not to give the attorney any hint of what was going on in his mind.

"But how did Mr. Gardner happen to relent?" he questioned casually.

"He was bluffing from the start," laughed Gregory. "He had no intention of altering the will. I think it rather tickled him when Beryl stood pat. But of course she didn't know, so her action was just as fine as though her father had been serious.

"Well," he broke off as they reached the Broadway corner, "I've got to catch a car here." He clasped Buckstaff's hand in the friendliest manner. "Hope I'll see you again, and in the mean time I congratulate you on your wife."

"Good-by," murmured Buckstaff incoherently, and he moved off with an abruptness that savored of rudeness. He was really afraid to listen any further. Another word from the amiable attorney would have completely unmanned him.

When he reached his hotel Buckstaff stopped in the lobby to telephone Lola. After that he paused a moment at the desk. "I'm expecting Mrs. Buckstaff in a few minutes," he told the clerk. "When she comes will you please have her shown up-stairs." Then he went up to his rooms and started to pack his trunk.

It was nearly an hour later when

he heard a brisk knock outside. He dropped an armful of clothes on a chair and opened the door.

"Hello! How are you?" cried a woman's voice, and Lola, pink-cheeked and breathless, swept impudently into the room. "How do you like me?" she rattled on, and she revolved her body slowly before him so that he might not miss the full effect of her extreme costume.

It was evident that the gown and the aigrets were new acquisitions.

Without waiting for his answer she moved lithely across the room and, lifting her hands to her hips, she placed herself before a tall mirror in the closet door and regarded her trim figure with a little smile of satisfaction. Then, with another coquettish look at Buckstaff, she wandered over toward the window and sank idly upon a couch.

"Well," she observed flippantly, "I'm here. What do you want with me?"

As she spoke her glance happened to take in a small table near by, upon which was a tray with a siphon, a glass and a fat, brown bottle.

"Oh," she murmured, "that was thoughtful!" She reached for the siphon, and then turned to Buckstaff with a frown of petulance. "Why, it's hot!" she exclaimed.

Buckstaff decided that as long as he would probably have trouble with her later he might as well begin by humoring her; and with a disarming smile he went into the adjoining room and returned with a pitcher of broken ice. He watched her silently while she made a highball.

"Now," she said at last, "you can tell me all about it." She tinkled the ice in the thin glass. "I'll try to be awfully patient."

He closed the lid of his trunk and sat down facing her. "We're going to leave New York to-night," he said nonchalantly, as though he might be proposing a visit to the theater.

She took a long sip from the glass and met his glance unperturbed. "Our honeymoon trip, then?" she asked pleasantly.

He shrugged his shoulders. "You may call it that," he observed. "If you prefer traveling it's just the same to me. I'll send your allowance to you wherever you happen to be."

"*Send* it?" she ejaculated with puckering brows. "What do you mean by that?"

He met her glance serenely. "I mean that I'm going back to Denver. You may live wherever you choose and I'll foot the bills—providing it isn't in New York."

"Oh, indeed," she drawled in rising accents, while the last trace of her smile faded from her lips. "So you're going to get rid of me that way, eh?" She laughed with angry sarcasm. "Well, guess again, mister!"

Buckstaff's expression remained unchanged. "You are going to leave New York to-night," he repeated quietly—"that is, if you expect your allowance to continue."

With a sharp exclamation she put down her empty glass and stood up. "And why am I going to leave New York?" she demanded with flashing eyes.

"Because of a promise I—" He checked himself. "Because I've decided you shall," he corrected.

"Then listen to me!" she cried furiously. "I'm going to stay right here. You can't—" Her voice broke in the middle of the sentence and her hand pressed suddenly against her forehead. Her eyes sought his bewilderedly.

"Well, go on," he urged unmoved. "I can't what?"

"You can't—you can't force me to—" A strange weakness seemed to have seized her. Her hand clutched uncertainly at the table and she swayed slightly toward him.

Buckstaff looked at her in astonishment. "What's the matter with you?" he asked.

"I—I'm dizzy," she gasped. "The

place is going around! I can't see! I can't—" She stumbled heavily, and with a low-voiced scream pitched forward into his arms.

"Here! Wake up! What is it?"

He shook her violently, but she gave no response. He gazed at her white face and saw that her eyes were closed. He permitted her to sink slowly to the floor and she made no sign. She was unconscious.

For an instant Buckstaff stared wildly about the room. Then, with sudden comprehension, he ran to the little table, uncorked the brown bottle and sniffed eagerly at the contents.

"The whisky," he muttered—"the whisky I drank on my wedding night."

CHAPTER IX.

A Stage Door.

FOR a long time Buckstaff stood motionless in the middle of the floor, dazed by the startling import of his discovery.

From the strange manner in which Lola had been stricken he realized only too well what had happened to him on the memorable night of more than a week before. There was something decidedly wrong with his bourbon.

Some one had been tampering with the brown bottle, and for the first time it began to dawn upon him that a human agency, stealthy and remorseless, had been directing the tragedy of his affairs.

He shivered slightly as he looked at the insensate form on the rug, while his memory vainly tried to account for the mysterious enemy whose machinations now began to seem so grimly apparent. It seemed impossible to credit any fellow-being with having engineered such a plot against his happiness.

His mind could suggest no one who might go to such lengths to separate him from Beryl. And yet—

Like a blow from the darkness the truth suddenly struck him. With a species of horror he reviewed the events of his wedding night—how excited and nervous he had been, and how he had taken a drink at the suggestion of his best man.

It was Greve who had broken the seal and pulled the cork from the untouched bottle. Greve, and no one else, had had access to the whisky before the first drink was poured out for the bridegroom. And although such a suspicion seemed almost too preposterous, the force of reasoning had to prevail. Buckstaff had been betrayed by Beryl's urbane cousin.

Fully convinced on this score, Buckstaff was still at a loss to find a motive for such a base performance. He wondered darkly whether Beryl's mother had any hand in the affair; but after reflection he decided that if such were the case she would not have come to his apartments.

Then it occurred to him that his meeting with Lola might not have been so accidental as she had tried to make him believe. Was it possible that she was leagued with Greve in some devilish conspiracy?

He would have given a great deal at that moment to have been able to question her.

In bitter speculation he turned toward her, foreseeing that there was little possibility of her regaining consciousness for hours. She was curled up on the floor like a sleeping kitten, a coil of her hair tumbled over her forehead, and her cheek resting on an extended arm.

Her breathing was deep and regular.

As his glance rested on her pallid features a radiant thought flashed into his brain. Had he really married her, after all? She was evidently a victim of the same potion that had overcome him on his wedding night.

The symptoms must have been identical in each case. It did not seem a physical possibility for a person in her condition to leave that room. Could he then have wandered, stupefied, into the streets and stood up with her before a preacher in the manner she had claimed?

That question, at any rate, could be answered.

With a feverish impulse he stooped over the unconscious woman, raised her drooping body as easily as though she were a child, and placed her softly upon the couch. She murmured incoherently as he touched her, but her eyes did not open.

Buckstaff watched her breathlessly an instant, and then throwing open the lid of his trunk he drew out a heavy overcoat and spread it over her motionless form. For a space he stood watching her curiously, and she gave no sign. Satisfied at last that nothing could disturb her, he picked up the brown bottle, and slid it carefully into his pocket. Then he put on his hat and left the room, silently locking the door behind him.

From the hotel Buckstaff proceeded to the nearest pharmacy and exhibited his bottle to the prescription clerk.

"Can you tell me what this contains —besides whisky?" he demanded.

The man looked at him in mild surprise; but accepted the bottle and removed the cork. "Smells like pretty good whisky," he ventured after a tentative sniff. "What's the matter with it?"

"That's what I want to know," returned Buckstaff. "Couldn't you analyze it for me?" His fingers were drumming restlessly on the counter.

"I suppose I could," admitted the other with some reluctance, "but it would take me quite a little while."

"I'll gladly pay you for your time if you'll do it," offered Buckstaff eagerly.

"All right," agreed the clerk after an instant's hesitation. "I'll see what I can do for you." He took the bottle back of the prescription-case, while Buckstaff sat down on a stool and waited impatiently.

It was nearly a half-hour later when the clerk finally reappeared. Buckstaff arose hastily.

"Well?" he demanded in great anxiety.

The man smiled. "I wouldn't advise you to drink any of that stuff. It's doped."

"I thought so," said Buckstaff with tightening lips. He leaned farther across the counter. "How would it affect me if I did drink it?"

"In five minutes you wouldn't know a blamed thing," was the significant answer. "You wouldn't bat an eyelid for the rest of the night."

"But would it put me out of business physically? Would it be possible for me to keep the use of my legs and hands, and do crazy things without remembering about them to-morrow morning?"

Buckstaff waited apprehensively for the reply.

"It could have such a result," observed the clerk reflectively. "Yes, the drug might affect only your brain. And in that case you could walk around in a sort of dream without knowing a thing about what was going on. But such a thing would rarely happen."

"But it would be possible?" persisted Buckstaff with sinking heart.

"Oh, yes. I've known several such cases." He regarded Buckstaff facetiously. "Why? You aren't thinking of trying some of it, are you?"

Buckstaff shook his head with a wan smile.

"No, not at all," he replied sadly. "I was only curious about it, nothing more. I was merely wondering what sort of strange adventures a man might have if he chanced to drink some of it by mistake."

He paid the clerk and left the place with heavy steps, his mind still beset by gloomy uncertainties. It was disappointing to find only new doubts when he had expected confidently to gain definite proof that he could not have married Lola.

Yet the fantom of hope did not leave him. He was determined now never to rest until he had gone to the very bottom of the mystery.

And then there came the comforting thought that no matter what had hap-

pened he at least could right himself in Beryl's eyes. Even if he were Lola's husband the other woman could no longer hold him accountable.

There would be a grain of consolation in having Beryl know that she owed her unhappiness to her own cousin, and not to the man who loved her.

Buckstaff hesitated outside the door of the pharmacy in momentary indecision. He thought at first of going directly to Beryl, but upon reflection he felt it better to wait until he had gathered more positive information. With Lola virtually imprisoned in his rooms it struck him as being an opportune time to settle the question of their relationship.

Previously he had been forced to accept her pretensions, and in the stress of more urgent events he had neglected to interview the two persons whom she claimed had appeared as witnesses at their wedding.

Then Beryl's reproaches subsequently had dispelled all doubt in his mind, and he had not thought it worth while to investigate any further. But now fresh suspicions had been aroused, and he was resolved to satisfy himself as to the truth, no matter what the ultimate cost.

As far as Greve was concerned he could settle with him later. For the present he would see what he could learn about Lola.

He recalled the names of the persons who, Lola had said, were present at the ceremony. They were performers appearing at the Dauphine Theater, she had told him.

This play-house was not a great distance away, and a glance at his watch assured him that he could probably catch his people before the evening performance began. His decision made, he left the doorway of the pharmacy and turned briskly up the street.

Buckstaff found the theater without difficulty.

It was still early in the evening and the lobby was deserted. He paused for a moment on the sidewalk to study a huge, printed frame in front of the house. The names he sought were not listed among the dozen or more acts, and for some reason he felt vaguely disturbed by the omission.

He perused the bill a second time, and then proceeded around the corner to a dark, narrow passageway which led him to the stage door. He pushed down the latch and entered.

It was a musty and dimly lighted place in which Buckstaff found himself. He looked around curiously at the unfamiliar confusion of painted drops and ropes and heaped-up furniture. Then, as he started to pick his way forward, he found the passage blocked by a dark-visaged man in shirt-sleeves who was leaning against a brick wall reading a newspaper.

The man lowered his paper and regarded the intruder with deep disfavor.

"Well, what do you want?" he growled.

"I'd like to talk with one of the performers—Valerie Sargent," said Buckstaff ingratiatingly.

"Nothing doing," returned the man gruffly. "Nobody gets through here unless they're known. That's what I'm here for."

Buckstaff had an inspiration. "Do you know Lola Flourney?" he questioned.

The doorkeeper grunted. "Tall, red-headed woman with the devil's own eyes? Yes, I know her. What of it?"

"Oh, nothing much," returned Buckstaff carelessly. "Only, as long as you know her, I thought it might be a sort of introduction for me. I'm her husband."

An expansive grin slowly overspread the man's face. "Aw, quit your kidding," he admonished playfully. "Say, what do you take me for, anyway?"

"I don't understand you," said Buckstaff a bit resentfully. "It seems

to strike you as being humorous that Miss Flourney should be married."

"Oh, not at all," the doorkeeper reassured him. "It's the most natural thing you ever heard of. Only—" He broke off with a chuckle.

"Only what?" demanded Buckstaff, beginning to feel exasperated.

"I knew she was married," rejoined the other; "but this is the first time I ever heard she had two."

"Two?"

"Yes, two husbands."

Buckstaff stared at the other incredulously, while a strange excitement possessed him. "There was an—another husband?" he gasped.

"There never was but one that I knew of. He used to hang around the theater with her all the time."

"But what was his name?"

"I've forgotten his name, if I ever heard it. We used to call him Mr. Lola."

"How do you know he's her husband?" persisted Buckstaff, fearful that there must be some mistake.

"Say, everybody knew that," replied the doorkeeper loftily. "He used to draw her salary for her, and if that ain't marriage, why you can ask me to stay single and I won't say a word."

"But perhaps they've been divorced," suggested Buckstaff anxiously.

"If they were I'd have heard about it." The man got up and glanced meaningly at the door. "So as long as you ain't anybody's husband I don't know you, and you might as well beat it."

"And there's no chance of my seeing Miss Sargent?"

"You couldn't see her if I'd let you. She hasn't been here for a week." The man picked up his newspaper and resumed his chair, while Buckstaff left the theater, his heart pounding with malicious joy.

He dined hastily and went back to his rooms.

Lola had not moved during his absence. She was lying on the couch, still covered by his overcoat, and so quiet and even was her respiration that she seemed merely to have fallen asleep. But when he tried to arouse her he realized how potent was the drug which had overcome her.

He regarded her piquant features a moment, and then moved into the adjoining room and closed the door behind him, a deep, inscrutable smile touching his lips. Presently he picked up a book and settled himself in a chair for a night's reading.

He proposed to be on hand whenever she recovered consciousness.

CHAPTER X.

A Patent Leather Tip.

IT was late in the morning when Buckstaff stirred in his chair and finally opened his eyes. He glanced about uncertainly and noticed that the electric lamp was still burning, although the bright sunlight was now streaming into the window. Evidently he had fallen asleep in his chair.

Yawning, he stood up slowly and started to stretch his cramped muscles. As he did so he detected a movement in the adjoining room—the sound, probably, that had awakened him.

Instantly the feeling of drowsiness left him.

His brows lifted eagerly, a keen, incisive expression flashed into his eyes, while faintly humorous lines suddenly appeared at the corners of his mouth. For a moment he stood listening, and then he stepped across the room and opened the door.

"Good morning," he said politely. "I hope you had a nice sleep."

A figure struggled from the couch, and he found himself looking into Lola's feverish eyes. She presented a ghastly appearance in the searching light of day. Her face was colorless. The heavy hair, now tangled and unkempt, had fallen about her shoulders.

The flimsy gown in which she had taken such a delight the previous evening was wofully wrinkled. In spite of himself Buckstaff was touched with pity. From experience he knew exactly how she felt.

She caught a deep, quavering breath and passed her hands over her face. "What has happened?" she moaned. "Oh, tell me what you've done to me?"

"There must be a fatality about this room," he observed casually. "You apparently had some sort of a stroke. But don't be alarmed; the same thing happened to me not so very long ago. It seems to have no serious consequences."

He smiled.

"That is," he added significantly, "it has none if you don't leave the room while the spell is on you. In that respect your luck was better than mine."

She watched him vacantly without replying, and her fingers wandered instinctively to her disheveled hair. Buckstaff understood the action and nodded toward the inner room.

"You'll find a comb and brushes in there," he volunteered. "In the mean time I'll have breakfast sent up. You will feel better after you've had something to eat."

By the time a waiter finally appeared with a tray Lola had managed to make herself presentable. She had smoothed the wrinkles out of her gown and recaptured the straying coils of hair; to her lips and cheeks she had applied a new touch of color. And with the external change her old, impudent personality seemed to have come back.

Buckstaff dismissed the waiter and placed the tray on the little center table.

From a chair he swept a litter of collars and cravats which he had started to pack the night before, and offered Lola a seat. A second chair he relieved of his dress shoes and coat and drew up to the table facing her.

They breakfasted almost in silence and did not finish until Buckstaff had forced the woman to eat a third poached egg and drink a second pot of coffee.

"Well," he said as she returned the empty cup to its saucer, "how do you feel now?"

"I'm all right again." She looked him full in the face. "And now I want to know what happened last night. Why did you send for me in the first place?"

He returned her gaze genially. "I sent for you to tell you that we were going to leave New York," he reminded her lightly. "I supposed you would recall that."

"Certainly I remember." She pushed the cup away and threw her napkin on the table. "I also told you that I wouldn't go," she reminded him, with a return of her sullen manner. "Maybe you've forgotten that."

"Oh, no," he rejoined mildly, "that was exactly what you said. So, as long as you're so set on it, you won't have to go. I find I've no right to order you to do anything."

"Indeed?" she sneered. "I congratulate you. You are growing most intelligent."

"And well informed," supplemented Buckstaff. "I've also learned that I've not even the right to give you money. It would be very bad taste."

"What's that?" Her eyes flashed dangerously, but Buckstaff's face still retained its guileless expression.

"It merely strikes me that I'm an interloper," he drawled. "The pleasure of supporting you belongs to another man—to your husband, in fact."

She jumped to her feet with an inarticulate cry, and her coffee-cup crashed to the floor. "What do you mean?" she screamed.

Buckstaff leaned quietly back in his chair. "I mean that if you have really married me your position is most unfortunate. There is a law, I believe, which looks with disfavor upon any superabundance of husbands." He smiled softly to himself.

"You lie!" she cried; but she could not stifle the note of terror in her voice.

Buckstaff stood up. His jaw squared and the humor faded from his eyes.

"I am not lying," he said coldly. "I can prove that you had a husband before you ever saw me. You either never married me or else you've committed a very serious crime against the laws of this State. I want to know which. I want to know why I was drugged on my wedding night. I want to know whether you have had any dealing with Roger Greve. I want the truth, and I think I shall get it."

She turned away with a shudder. "I haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about," she faltered.

Without another word he walked across the room and reached for the telephone. She looked wildly about and made a movement toward the door, but he stopped her with extended arm.

"What are you going to do?" she gasped in growing alarm.

He studied her face a moment. "I propose to bring a very grave charge against you," he said slowly. "I'm going to telephone for witnesses." He took up the receiver.

"Don't! Oh, don't do that!" She caught frantically at his wrist.

He checked himself and waited questioningly.

"I'll tell the truth—everything," she murmured with drawn lips.

"Good!" exclaimed Buckstaff. He went over to the couch, and pushing to one side a heap of clothing which he had piled there, he sat down and regarded the woman with interest.

She remained standing. Her fists were clenched and she was breathing rapidly. He noticed that she avoided his glance as she began to speak.

"I deceived you," she said in a low voice. "I did not marry you."

A profound sigh escaped him and his eyes sparkled, but he did not interrupt.

"I was hired," she went on, "to pretend I was your wife. I'm not the woman you really married."

It was his turn to betray anxiety. "Who was this other woman?" he demanded sharply.

She shot him a covert look and seemed to hesitate.

"Well?" he insisted in growing dread.

"The one you married—who hired me to take her place afterward?" She paused deliberately, as though it were her intention to tantalize him. "If I tell you won't try to hold me here? You'll let me go?"

"If you tell me the truth," he answered quickly, "you're free to go. But tell me, *tell* me!"

"The woman's name," she said, "was Beryl Gardner."

Buckstaff sprang from the couch and seized her by the shoulders. "What are you saying?" he growled incoherently. "I don't believe you!"

She pulled away with a little cry of alarm. "I'm telling the truth," she persisted. "But if you're going to—if you're going to act like that—"

His hands fell and he drew a step backward. "Pardon me," he muttered. "I forgot myself. Go on."

She worked her shoulder and softly rubbed the spot where his fingers had pressed. "You hurt me," she complained resentfully.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But don't stop now. Did you know I had been drugged?"

"I knew something was wrong with you, but I wasn't certain what."

"But you knew that my best man—Greve—had tricked me?"

She was watching him nervously. "I guessed he had something to do with it," she answered with apparent frankness. "It was he who took me to Miss Gardner."

"And Miss Gardner sent for you after she had married me?"

"Scarcely an hour afterward."

"Hired you to make believe you were my wife?"

She nodded.

"But what for?" he demanded incredulously.

"It had something to do with money—an inheritance, I think."

"What inheritance?"

"Her father's will," was the glib reply. "It seems that a minute or so after the wedding was performed Miss Gardner received a note from her father saying he would cut her off without a cent if she married you."

Buckstaff started.

This much, at least, he had learned from Gregory. But the attorney had praised Beryl for ignoring the threat. Had she really sacrificed her husband for her father's fortune? Buckstaff put the thought from him contemptuously. It was impossible.

He eyed Lola narrowly. "So she feared to have her father know she had married me?" he questioned in a chilling tone.

"She didn't want to lose the money," rejoined the other in a half whisper. "She figured that if I could convince you I was your wife I would have no trouble afterward in establishing such a relationship before the world. She intended to hide herself some place for a while, and after things had quieted down to go to her father and make him think it was I and not she whom you had married."

Buckstaff turned away, his mind swept by a storm of conflicting thoughts.

He did not know what to believe. Her story was extremely plausible. It matched with startling fidelity the few scanty facts that he had already been able to glean from the mazes of uncertainty.

It was the only explanation that might possibly seem to account for the mysteries of the last few days. Even the recollection that Beryl had presented him at her home served in no way to refute the other woman's assertions.

She had not taken such a step until after she had learned that her father was ready to forgive her marriage to Buckstaff.

Lost in thought, he moved toward the couch and sat down. As he did so he felt some stiff object beneath his leg, and with a movement of irritation he drew from under him one of his dress shoes which he had tossed there a while before. He was on the point of dropping the shoe to the floor, but instead he seemed suddenly to find something very interesting in the leather sole.

Lola was watching him with a faintly mocking smile, but as he continued to gaze in silent absorption at the shoe she began to grow a bit impatient.

"Well," she reminded him, "you said if I told you the truth you'd have no objection to my going." She laughed unpleasantly. "I think I'll say good-by."

Buckstaff's expression changed so abruptly that she drew back in surprise. He stood up and advanced toward her, still holding the shoe in his hand. "Oh, no, you're not going!" he exclaimed with a strange excitement in his voice.

She recoiled fearfully. "But you promised—"

"If you told the truth," he interrupted exultantly. "But you've lied! Thank Heaven, how you've been lying!"

"No!" she cried, backing away. "No! *No!*"

"I say *yes!*" he contradicted fiercely. "Here, see this sole?" He thrust the shoe almost into her face. "Look at it! Examine it! The gloss is smooth—it's unmarked! There is not a scratch or a scuff on that sole! Do you know what that means? It's the shoe I wore on my wedding night. And it's never been out of this room! The sole proves it! And I know now—positively—for all time—that I have never married *anybody!*"

She shrank further into the corner.

"Oh!" she stammered. "I—if—" With a palpable effort she controlled herself, and as he stood looking at her

with a triumphant smile some of her old audacity seemed to struggle back into her eyes. Her lips curled with a hint of contempt.

"Then if you didn't marry her," she asked, "who do you suppose did?"

It was the question Buckstaff had asked himself long before in Greve's rooms. And now, after days, Lola had resolved the maddening mystery back into it's original premise. *Who had married Beryl?*

Buckstaff stood for a moment as though he were completely dazed. Then with a shout that sounded more like a roar he threw the shoe across the room.

"I'm damned if I know who married whom! But I mean to find out! To-night you and Greve and I are going to call on Miss Gardner, and there's going to be one hell of a reckoning!"

CHAPTER XI.

Uninvited Guests.

BERYL had finished her lonely dinner, but lacking any means of escaping the tedious hours before her, she still lingered at the table. As there was no possibility of any visitor coming to Prescott, she already had dismissed Simpson and his wife, and wearily faced another of the blank, hopeless evenings that were beginning to spell the monotonous periods of her existence.

With her arms resting on the white cloth, she was leaning slightly forward, gazing into that vacant other world where of late she had lived so much.

Her lips were half open, her eyes half closed. The delicate shoulders drooped pathetically, as though under a weight of crushing memories.

She seemed scarcely to breathe. A spell of silence brooded over her. She had given herself altogether to preying thoughts.

Beryl may have been sitting motionless at the table for an hour or more when the faint ringing of a bell recalled her from her reverie. She stirred in her chair and lifted her head in surprise.

Again she heard the ringing, and with a little frown she got up and moved slowly toward the hallway. For a second she debated whether to call Simpson, but finally went herself to the front entryway and opened the door.

With a brisk word of greeting a man stepped into the hall. She recognized her cousin.

"Oh, good evening," she said civilly, but with a noticeable absence of enthusiasm. "You're unexpected."

He followed her into the drawing-room and smiled at her chidingly as she waved him to a chair. "How can I be unexpected," he protested, "when you've just sent for me?" He placed his gloves and stick on a table and leaned back comfortably.

Beryl opened her eyes. "You must be dreaming. I didn't ask you to come."

"What?" demanded Greve. "That's mighty strange." He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, produced a slip of paper, and gave it to her. "How do you account for that, then?"

She glanced at the paper and returned it to him.

"It is mighty strange," she admitted with an echo of sarcasm. "Some one seems determined that I shall have callers. However, I never sign my invitations with a typewriter. And, as I said not long ago to another man, I didn't write the note."

Greve looked at her a moment in surprise. "Then somebody's been playing me for a fool!" he exclaimed indignantly. "It isn't a pleasant joke. If I knew who it was I'd like to—"

What dreadful thing he proposed to do to the mysterious note sender Beryl was destined never to hear. His speech was interrupted by the sound of footsteps on the porch and the front door being thrown violently open.

Voices were heard in the hallway, and before either could move the por-

tières were pulled aside and a woman suddenly entered the room. Behind her, so closely that she was not given the slightest opportunity of retreating, followed a man.

With an angry movement Beryl turned toward the door, and then caught herself with a gasp of amazement. One of the intruders was Buckstaff. She tried to speak, and the words died in her throat.

The flush in her cheeks faded to a deathlike pallor.

Greve had struggled from his chair, but after that the power of motion seemed to have deserted him. "Lola!" he muttered, as though the name choked him, and he stood rigid, staring at her like a man confronted by a specter.

As far as Lola was concerned, she did not appear any happier than Greve. There was a haggard expression about her mouth which plainly told of the mental strain under which she had been laboring during the day. She seemed almost on the point of a nervous breakdown.

Buckstaff alone retained his composure.

He drew the portières carefully behind him, swept the room with a cool, deliberate glance, and turned to Beryl. "I must apologize," he said, "for entering your home without ringing. But the last time I called I came near not getting in. This time I took no chances."

He cast Greve a satirical smile. "I see you got the note I wrote you," he drawled. "If I was forced to use Miss Gardner's name, I justify myself by the fact that it has brought you here."

Beryl stiffened with angry resentment.

"By what right?" she demanded in a quivering voice. "What do you mean by sending notes in my name? How dare you force your way into my home?"

Not a muscle in his face changed. "Because," he said, "I'm tired of playing the guileless victim. I've left off being the dupe. I've taken things into my own hands. From now on *I'm* going to conduct this little affair!"

He swung savagely upon Greve. "And *you*," he averred, "are going to start in by telling me why you drugged me on my wedding night!"

Greve tried to laugh, but the effort was hideous. Twice he opened his mouth to speak, but without finding his voice. He looked toward the doorway as though measuring his chances of escaping from the room.

Buckstaff read the other's thoughts, and his face lighted with a strange satisfaction.

"Try to leave here now," he said menacingly, "and you will afford me the pleasure of settling our little score on the spot." He paused invitingly. "Well, then," he pursued as Greve shrank away, "you may answer my question. Why did you drug me?"

"I didn't! I swear I didn't!" protested Greve wildly. He moved behind the table as though feeling the need of some sort of barrier.

"Oh, yes, you did," returned Buckstaff coolly. "You gave me a soporific, and when I had fallen unconscious in my room you came sneaking back and robbed me of my marriage license and my ring. You gave these to—to this woman here."

He nodded toward Lola, who was watching him with an odd mixture of fear and fascination in her eyes.

"You gave them to her," he continued, "and between you, you made me believe that I had been drunk and had married her without knowing anything about it. Now I'm asking you why. She refuses to tell the truth. But from you—well, I think I shall have an explanation. Why did she pretend to be my wife?"

"Pretend!" There was a note of amazement in the interrupting voice. Buckstaff turned and saw that Beryl was gazing at Lola with dilated eyes.

"Why, yes," he said softly. "And she claims that it was you who bribed her to do it. But, of course, I don't

believe her, Beryl. You didn't ask her to pretend she'd married me?"

A look of dull misery came into her face. "Oh," she murmured, "I didn't bribe her to *pretend!*" She laughed hysterically. "I paid her five thousand dollars to *marry* you!"

CHAPTER XII.

The Reckoning.

BUCKSTAFF looked at Beryl in momentary stupefaction.

Then, as the full force of her confession broke upon him, a choking groan escaped his lips. "My God, it was true, then!" he muttered. "You gave me up for your father's fortune! You tricked me, cheated me to save your inheritance! I wouldn't believe it! I couldn't! I can't, Beryl, even now!"

An expression of fierce revulsion came into her face.

"You accuse *me* of cheating *you!*" she cried bitterly. "After what you've done, you say that to me! You—who have traded on my name! Who have pawned my love, my pride—for money! You couldn't even wait until we were married! And now—and now—"

She regarded him with terrific scorn. "Now you tell me that I gave you up for my father's fortune!"

Buckstaff stared at her wonderingly. "I don't understand," he said blankly.

"Then you force me to revive a thing I've been trying to put out of my mind—to name your offense. I intended never to mention it or to reproach you with it. But you will have it otherwise. Very well."

Greve came suddenly from behind his table. "Don't, Beryl," he pleaded wildly, his features drawn and distorted. "Don't harrow yourself. This man already knows what you think of him; let him go."

"This man proposes to stay here until the last word has been said," returned Buckstaff roughly. "And you, Greve, will please not open your mouth again until I order you to." He turned his back contemptuously on the other man and quietly regarded Beryl. "Won't you go on? What is it you think I've done?"

"Perhaps your notions of chivalry and decency differ from mine," she began in scathing accents. "But to borrow money, with the promise to pay it back when you've married an unsuspecting heiress—a woman you pretend to love—"

He stopped her with a commanding gesture.

"Beryl!" he protested in a voice of infinite sadness. "You didn't — you believed that of me? You thought me that sort of a man—one of the fortune-hunting hounds? You imagined I borrowed, intending to pay back with your money? Beryl!" He shook his head wearily.

Without a word she crossed the room, opened the drawer of a desk, and began rummaging through a small bundle of papers. In his interest in Beryl's movements, he failed to observe the terrified glance exchanged between Lola and Greve.

Beryl closed the drawer and disdainfully handed Buckstaff a handful of narrow paper slips. "Perhaps you'll claim those aren't your signatures," she observed icily.

He sorted through the little packet with the deepest curiosity. To his surprise he found that the papers were promissory notes amounting altogether to nearly forty thousand dollars. All had been canceled, and without an exception they bore the signature of Geoffrey Buckstaff.

He caught his breath sharply. "Where did you get these?" he demanded.

"You know where I got them. I took them up—repaid the loans to spare myself any further humiliation. Your part of the bargain was to help save the scandal of it all by marrying another woman who had been paid to assume my name.

"The two of you were to have dropped quietly out of sight, and the newspapers, my family, nobody would have known that anything had happened to prevent our wedding. It seems that you haven't kept your part of the bargain."

Buckstaff listened to her in growing astonishment. "No," he admitted after a breathless pause, "I haven't kept it, because, until this minute, I had never heard of it."

"Never heard of it?" she whispered incredulously.

"Never," he repeated. "I—" His teeth set suddenly. A great light of comprehension was beginning to dawn upon him. "Whom did you entrust with the details of this bargain?"

He did not wait for her answer, but with a swift impulse he seized Greve's shoulder with a grip that made the man wince, and dragged him, struggling, in front of Beryl. "I fancy this was your agent, wasn't it?" he demanded gratingly.

Without seeming to exert himself, he forced Greve into a chair.

"Well," he demanded as he stood threateningly over Beryl's white-faced cousin, "will you tell the story, or shall I?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Greve sullenly.

"Don't you?" rejoined Buckstaff sweetly. "Well, listen, Miss Gardner. Please check me up if I'm wrong. A short time before our wedding was to be held a relative came to you with a story that I had been borrowing large sums of money.

"He said that I intended to pay back with the money you would bring me as my wife. He said I was a blackguard, a rotter, the orneriest kind of a fortune-hunter—that I wanted to marry you just because I was poor and needed the money. But you didn't believe him. You didn't, did you?"

"I couldn't," she faltered—"not at first."

"No," he answered sadly, "you didn't believe it at first. But during your entire life your mother has been instilling in your heart a sort of fear that you might some day be married for your money. Such doubts are one of the inherent afflictions of all wealthy women.

"I don't say this reproachfully, only to justify you. Your heart had told you that I wasn't that kind of a man; but when this relative offered you what seemed the positive proof that I was nothing after all except just plain crook, you had to believe. It hurt awfully to think that you had been so tricked and betrayed and cheapened. But you had to believe. Your love fell just short of the blessed blindness of the supreme faith."

Her dark eyes sought his piteously. "Oh," she murmured, "I— Oh, don't, please! Please!"

"Don't think I blame you," he pursued mercilessly. "You believed. The evidence was there. You couldn't help it. You were too proud to let your people know what had happened to you. You shrank from the cruel publicity of the truth's coming out. On the wild impulse of the moment you formulated a mad plan to save your pride.

"You sent this relative of yours to me with an offer to pay all my debts if I'd consent to accept a substitute bride. He reported to you that I had agreed to everything, and you gave him nearly forty thousand dollars to discharge the obligations. Then you came into the country to live apart from the world and to try to forget."

He paused for an instant and smiled toward Lola.

The actress had found a seat in the corner, and was leaning forward with flushed cheeks and heaving bosom as though anxious not to miss a word of his speech. Her attitude was that of the thrilled spectator rather than the interested performer.

"Your relative chose a pretty woman to play the part of the bride," Buckstaff added. "You didn't see her. You merely sent her a check, and as far as

you were concerned the matter was ended. It was hard, but it had to be. Am I right?"

Beryl nodded miserably.

"Yes, it was ended," repeated Buckstaff musingly—"that is, as far as you were concerned. In reality, though, you had seen only the beginning."

He fingered the notes in his hand for an instant and then suddenly threw all but one to the table. The slip he had retained he thrust into Beryl's hand.

"This," he said sharply, "I signed. It's my personal note for ten thousand dollars that I borrowed when I first came to New York. I wanted the money to furnish an apartment on Riverside Drive as a surprise for you. I acknowledge this one note. The others—every one—are forgeries. The money you gave to pay my supposed debts remained in your agent's possession. He has stolen thirty thousand dollars from you!"

"Stolen it!" cried Beryl brokenly, while Greve sprang to his feet with a sort of a snarl.

"Yes, stolen it!" reiterated Buckstaff in a chilling voice. "He had planned the whole devilish business from the start. He deliberately killed your faith in me, gave you the idea of paying my imaginary debts, and accepted the money.

"Then, to consummate his scheme, he let me believe that the wedding arrangements were unchanged and pulled off a fake marriage. He had previously seen to it that we had chosen a near-sighted preacher who couldn't tell one face from another, and who wouldn't remember the next day whom he had married the night before.

"It was very simple," he rushed on. "We both trusted him, and gave him absolutely free rein to carry out his project. He gave me a drug the night of the wedding, knowing that I would have no way of proving the next morning whether I had left my rooms or not.

"Then he stole my key to the Riverside apartment and installed our charming friend there. When I found her in the home I had intended for you, Beryl, I went nearly mad. But, for the time, I was forced to accept her claims.

"Then came your mother," he continued. "She demanded to see you, and threatened to begin some sort of legal proceedings if I didn't send you home. While I was frantically searching for you I received a note telling me that you would be found at Prescott. Greve undoubtedly feared that your family might start an investigation, and sent me the note himself." He laughed. "At any rate, we are quits on that score. He was as completely taken in by my note as I was by his."

His jaw suddenly squared, and his eyes became hard and repellant. "And now, Greve," he said, "the time has come for our accounting. I'm going to—"

He felt a gentle touch at his elbow, and he saw that Beryl had stolen to his side and was standing with bowed head.

"Don't do anything. Please let him go," she whispered.

"With the money he has stolen?" He looked at her incredulously.

She nodded. "I—the disgrace would be in the family. I can afford to lose the money. Please—just for this last time—may I have my way?"

"Very well," he conceded reluctantly. From the girl he glanced at the man. "You're at liberty to go, Greve; but if you wish to avoid the whipping I've promised myself to give you, you will answer one question."

Greve moved discreetly beyond the other's reach. "Well?" he asked morosely.

"Who, in the name of Heaven, *was* married that night?"

For answer Greve nodded silently toward Lola.

"And the bridegroom?" demanded Buckstaff.

"I was the bridegroom."

Buckstaff gave a low whistle. "Why, didn't you know she was already mar-

ried?" he exclaimed with a suppressed laugh.

Greve exchanged a rapid glance with Lola. "Yes, I knew that," he admitted. "She was secretly married, about three years ago—to me."

A look of grim satisfaction came into Buckstaff's face. "I might have guessed it," he declared. "And I don't know but what that makes everything all right. It looks to me as though my revenge had been anticipated—my revenge on both of you." He pulled back the portières. "Good night."

Greve hurried to the door, but Lola lingered an instant. "Shall I keep the lavallière?" she asked in a low voice.

"If you like," he returned.

"I will keep it, then," she answered slowly, "just to remind me that there may be other things in the world to want sometimes besides—besides lavallières. And remember what I told you: it is no longer farce for—for the understudy." With a laugh that seemed to end in a sigh, she left the room.

Buckstaff and Beryl found themselves alone.

"I'm sorry that I didn't forewarn you," he said. "I could have told you that I would have no motive in hunting a fortune. I really have almost as much property as your father had—mines and things like that, you know. I gave that one note because I wanted some ready cash, and for the time being I didn't want to tap any of my Western resources. But I can easily repay it a thousand times over. I hadn't told you this before, because it had been so sweet to know that you were taking me for just what I was, and thinking that I was poor."

"Don't!" she moaned piteously. She buried her face in her hands and sobbed like a child.

He moved closer, softly encircling her wrists with his fingers. Slowly he forced her to lift her head until he could see the dark, tearful eyes.

"I—I have no right to beg your forgiveness," she faltered wistfully.

"It was nothing," he reassured her gently. "There was a moment tonight when I nearly felt distrust myself. We were neither of us to blame. We had still to learn the wonderful lesson of faith—the sort of faith that neither sees nor reasons, but just holds on, through everything, to the very end."

"No," he murmured tenderly, "there is nothing to forgive. There is only something to amend."

"Yes?" she breathed tremulously.

"Beryl Gardner and Geoffrey Buckstaff were married two weeks ago."

"But not really," she protested, smiling at him through her tears.

"Oh, yes! It was done by a preacher in tortoise-shell spectacles. He told me so himself. But, unfortunately, the job was only half done. Neither bridegroom nor bride was present."

"Well?" she whispered with a little shiver of happiness.

"Will you go back to him with me to-night and give him a chance — to make good?"

Her eyes sought his, wavered, and slowly closed. "Yes," she murmured —"for a chance to make good."

(The end.)

REVERIE

By Mabel J. Bourquin

THE quiet summer night, ten thousand eyed,
Above this western world broods tenderly;
While, on a gory cross beyond the sea,
Again the Prince of Peace is crucified.

HEART TO HEART TALKS

BY THE EDITOR

IF you were to go to Sheringham, Norfolk, England, get off the train and ask the question "Who lives here?", every individual who responded would say "E. Phillips Oppenheim." Of course there are other people in Sheringham—lots of them; desirable, interesting, intelligent, cultured — people of various nationalities. But Oppenheim is the best known resident of that historic village, where he turns out more readable, dramatic, stirring fiction than any other living writer. The soldiers of England, France, Germany, Belgium, Austria, and Russia will come upon his works in every hamlet in Europe. He is translated into every tongue. His stories appeal to all classes. His method is universal.

Oppenheim deals with the deep impulses. He writes about men and women as they *are* under all suns and all climes. His adventures all seem realities. Each hero suggests some one you have known intimately. His heroine is just the kind of a girl you want to know whether you do or not.

Oppenheim is the great humanizer who forges fact and fiction so adroitly that one cannot see the mark of the welder's hammer. He is a world-traveler, a cosmopolitan at heart, a polyglot interpreter, writing with the same facility about foreigners as he does about his own countrymen. All of his stories contain an agreeable mixture of the things we understand.

When the ALL-STORY CAVALIER succeeded in securing his most recent novel, it was a stroke of genius which the editor of this publication is not averse to admitting. I went as far as Hyeres, the south of France, where he summers, in order to see Oppenheim and negotiate for a series of his novels. We played golf on those violet-trimmed, sun-lashed links of France, and Oppenheim beat me. But I brought back with me his best fiction. Hence I am the real conqueror.

The first of the serials that will appear in the ALL-STORY CAVALIER is entitled

THE CURIOUS QUEST OF MR. ERNEST BLISS

BY E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Bliss was a rundown rich youth, so sad that he called upon the best doctor in London and asked for advice.

"The trouble with you," said the physician, "is that you have never done any work. What you need is some good, hard knocks, a little adversity, a dose of hunger, and a life more or less like the common people live. Things have been coming too easy for you. But you haven't the courage to go to work. You're an idler." Or words to that effect.

Whereupon the young plutocratic patient got hot under the collar and bet the doctor a large sum of money that he could go out for one year and earn his living by the sweat of his brow. And what is more, he did go out and earn it, and it is with this year of toil and labor and pain and adventure that Oppenheim deals in "The Curious Quest of Mr. Ernest Bliss."

Ernest found not only his health, but the love of his life. He found out

where the sun comes up and why the world is beautiful to live in; why some people are evil and some are good. And he found himself.

When Oppenheim handed me this manuscript, he said, "I have tried to live the life of *Mr. Bliss* myself in this story, and I have worked just as hard in writing it as *Mr. Bliss* did in living it. It is the best I can do. I hope the readers of the ALL-STORY CAVALIER will like it."

I hope you will like it, too. In fact, I know you will. It is a great story and you will feel better after you have read it. It is really the highway to happiness in modern fiction.

"The Curious Quest of Mr. Ernest Bliss" will run through six issues of the ALL-STORY CAVALIER, beginning with the issue of October 3.

It was a typical Californian seacoast village. It had lived its peaceful life with no more than the usual untoward events of such a settlement for many years—just as far back as *Betty Converse* could remember.

And then came the fog.

It was seen at sunset one afternoon, lying off shore. It was like a huge mountain of cotton wool piled from the waters of the Pacific to the sky, and extending to right and left as far as one could see. Everybody went to look at it, and the tourists were delighted.

And then, moving slowly and majestically, the tremendous fog bank shut down on the scene. Somehow it seemed menacing, and there was a threat in its grandeur.

Fogs were not unknown to the village; they rolled in and they rolled out. But this fog was different. It rolled in—but it did not roll out!

That's the beginning of

THE FOG MAN

BY EDWIN L. SABIN

which you will find complete next week in the ALL-STORY CAVALIER.

After three days of this fog, which was so heavy, so impenetrable that business was almost suspended, strange things began to happen. There were petty thefts in the stores, thefts of beef, of fruits, a butcher's knife. Then other things began to disappear in the village—a blanket, a basket, an Indian-hollowed stone in the *Browns'* front yard. This was on the sixth day, and the fog had not lifted.

Roger Rudd, Betty's fiancé, headed a patrol of the young men which would search the village and keep guard at night. *Betty* was nervous at his going, but finally she went to bed in her open-air room, practically a screened porch.

In the middle of the night she awoke suddenly. And then against the screen she saw a face—a large, blank, immobile face, staring at her!

Yes, you guessed it; it was "The Fog Man." But what he was and the very strange and wonderful things that happened to *Betty* because of him you must find for yourself next week.

"LUCK IN OLD CLOTHES," by E. K. Means, is another of those extraordinary popular negro stories—stories which are fast becoming famous in the magazine world.

Vinegar Atts, one of his best characters, has a sour name, but he's a sweet old character. *Ludie Barlow* goes to *Vinegar* and complains as follows: "I ain't got no chawin', I ain't got no money—nothing but some notions in my haid, an' ef I don't watch out I's gwine go into bustrupsy right brief. Ef I could find some old nigger to loant me her washtub an' her iron I could clean up dis suit I's got on an' look like a new nigger."

Whereupon, *Ludie* starts out to acquire the two articles desired. When you follow his fortunes from this moment you will have more than enough laughs to repay you for your trouble.

"HIS HEART'S DESIRE," by Elizabeth Irons Folsom, is a full page from the Book of Life. Its human note has an appeal which is not to be denied. The characters live, and I'll wager you can find their counterparts in your own little town.

It's all about a country doctor who married his second choice. Then the woman he thought he loved once upon a time comes back to her native heath after years abroad. Her appearance creates a sensation in the little village where the doctor has become the physician of almost every family in it. The doctor meets his first love again; so does the doctor's wife.

The doctor's wife is worth looking at. She is half a head taller than her husband, and her shoulders are square and big. Her thin, gray hair is smoothed back from a forehead that might have been laid out by an architect. Under her gingham waist she has enough flesh to make her breathe heavily when she walks. Can't you see her? Ponderous and set.

Of just the opposite type was the woman who came back from abroad, lithe and willowy, not looking within ten years of her age, clothes in the height of fashion, and last, but not least, a faint odor of violets!

I guess you'll say that the good old doctor is in a pickle now, all right. It certainly does appear as though he is in for a tough time. What does he do? Well, he does the right thing; but your idea and my idea as to the right thing under these circumstances may be entirely different.

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"THE WATER CURE," by Roy P. Churchill, is a nice, readable little story about a landsman who joins the navy. After a time he gets to be a capable seaman; but he doesn't understand the sea. He is afraid of it! The first lieutenant finds out his weakness and dubs him a coward. So, of course, it's up to the hero of the story to prove he is not what they think him. That's why the yarn is called "The Water Cure," and it's the queerest cure you ever heard of.

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A READER AT THE FRONT

To the Editor:

I am a regular reader of your valuable magazine and I make it a point to have it every week if possible. It certainly is great to have such a good book when one is out here on border patrol duty.

Wm. J. O'Connor.

Troop C, 14th U. S. Cavalry,
Del Rio, Texas.

STRONG FOR SEQUELS

To the Editor:

I am a constant reader of the All-Story Cavalier and must say that I think such authors as Jackson, Burroughs, Fisher, and Harold Titus should be especially praised.

Will you not ask Mr. Fisher to write a sequel to "The Quitter," as I think that is one of the finest stories that has appeared recently. It ended all too abruptly.

Also ask Harold Titus to give us a sequel to "To the Victor," as these Western ranch stories are always full of interest.

M. A. Simon.

Los Angeles, California.

INTERESTED IN PSYCHIC STORIES

To the Editor:

I have just read Mr. Frank Blighton's excellent psychic story "For Love of the Princess." I am pleased that you are giving us something along these lines, as many of your readers are interested in this line of study.

(Mrs.) Mary J. Stephens.

402 A Street, Southeast,
Washington, D. C.

A ROOTER FOR "THE QUITTER"

To the Editor:

I have just finished reading "The Quitter," by Jacob Fisher, and I want to say that I think it is one of the best stories I have ever read.

"The Crooked Stick" and "Foolish Francesca" are both fine.

I do not like Edgar Rice Burroughs's stories. It is beyond the human mind to imagine such things as he writes.

All of Zane Grey's stories are fine.

T. O. D.

New York City.

CONCERNING VERSE

To the Editor:

Everybody seems to like your stories—and mark me ditto. But I want to say a word about the poetry. It is not all my kind, but such poems as "The Chosen Way" and "The Jilt," and other serious lyrics by Stokely S. Fisher, and the more serious work of Amanda B. Hall and Faith Baldwin, are worth more than your best stories. Let us have more of this and less of the nonsense in verse which you sometimes print.

Edith Brown.

Columbus, Ohio.

VIEWS FROM SOUTH AFRICA

To the Editor:

A copy of the May issue of *The Cavalier* has just been presented to me by an

old Johannesburg pal, D. H. Van der Vyver.

The stories published in *The Cavalier* I find to be most interesting. "Beauty to Let," by Fred Jackson, was especially so. Jackson is simply a splendid writer, and I shall, in future, make it my duty to keep a keen lookout for more of his work, for I intend adding *The Cavalier* to my set of over-sea books supplied to me once a week by my stationers.

Being a South African, and, I may add, a young and sociable one, I should like to correspond with some of your real Yankees.

In concluding, kindly allow me to wish you success and good luck; and rest assured I shall certainly recommend *The Cavalier* to my friends.

B. SMITH.

Cambridge House,
126 Vermeulen Street,
Victoria, Transvaal, South Africa.

PRAISE FOR P. P. SHEEHAN

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of your magazine for a number of years and have been most interested in the letters you publish from your readers. Although I never expected to be a contributor to that department, the publication in the issue of August 8 of "We Are French," by P. P. Sheehan, has furnished me with the motive of becoming one. It is so far superior not only to anything that I have ever read in the magazine, but to anything I have ever read by that author, that I take this means of congratulating you both.

W. L. VAN SCHAICK.

Springmeade,
Huntington, New York.

HAVE "DELIVERED THE GOODS"

TO THE EDITOR:

It affords me great pleasure to join with the numerous readers of the ALL-STORY CAVALIER in singing the praises of your A1 magazine.

Although I am not a subscriber, I read every issue of *The Cavalier* for the last two years, having procured same at the news-stands. During that time you have certainly "delivered the goods." You have given us some fine stories since the amalgamation, which goes to show that the magazine has not deteriorated.

Give us some more stories like "The Lone Star Rangers," "The Outlaw," "To the Victor," "The Lost Hearthstone," and "The Crooked Stick."

The shorts, "One Hundred in a Day," "Up in the Air," "Futurist Music," and "Bongo Bees" were all O. K. Let us hear again from Donald A. Kahn; his "George-Get-on-the-Job" was a scream.

P. A. SCHMELING.

Horicon, Wisconsin.

COMMENDS THE COMBINATION

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of *The Cavalier* for two years, and also *The All-Story*. I think the combination of the two magazines will prove a great success.

You are certainly giving the public some of the best stories on the market. Such authors as Zane Grey, Fred Jackson, Lee Robinet, and numerous others are the utmost in fiction to-day. I particularly liked that story by Victor Bridges entitled "Another Man's Shoes." The plot was very ingenious and full of thrills. But it seems he has kept in the background since then.

I am reading "The Crooked Stick," and have just finished "The In-Bad Man" and I wish to say they are fine.

J. CARLISLE WEBB.

Woodward, Oklahoma.

FROM A JUNIOR READER

TO THE EDITOR:

I have read a great many of your stories in the ALL-STORY CAVALIER with interest and enthusiasm and I like them fine. I work on the Great Taft Ranch, driving auto truck No. 2, and I sometimes get lonesome when I have to sit and wait for orders. So I am going to subscribe for your magazine.

I cannot remember the date on the first number I read, but it had the story of "Tarzan of the Apes" in it, and I have not missed a book since.

I moved down here about four months ago. Until then I got the magazines at the book stands in Houston. Now I have to get them on the trains.

Everywhere I go I seem to see the ALL-STORY CAVALIER.

Thirteen years old may seem very young to you, but just the same I like to read magazines, and of them all I like the ALL-STORY CAVALIER best.

Enclosed you will find remittance.

Well, so-long, and a whoop for your weekly.

NEVILL ISBELL.

Taft, Texas.

My Friend Peterssen

By James B. Hendryx

PETERSSEN *was* peculiar. At college the fellows called him the Surly Swede.

I awoke one morning to find him comfortably installed in the big room across the hall in the Hampton; and it was a long time, as college acquaintance is reckoned, before I found out that he was neither surly nor Swede.

After that I liked him.

He was extremely reticent, but of a kindly disposition and, in his way, sociable. His was an extraordinarily delicate and esthetic nature, with a keen appreciation of the beautiful in color and music. He always dressed expensively and in good taste and was a connoisseur of culinary triumphs.

I have seen him fly into a rage over a few grains variation in the seasoning of a curry, and a two-minute overroasting of a canvasback made him unhappy for the rest of the day.

While Peterssen roomed at the Hampton in order to be near the college, he took his meals at the most expensive and select club in the city, and during the course of our acquaintance I was frequently his guest.

He was never regularly matriculated, but selected a course of his own which embraced several of the sciences and the higher mathematics.

Upon his shelves was a dray-load of books—mathematical and scientific treatises for the most part, in English, Norwegian, Icelandic, and German; and when he wasn't attending some lecture or puttering about one of the laboratories he could generally be found in his room, clad in a long, toga-like affair, with his feet elevated upon the mantelpiece, a cigarette between his lips, and one of his outlandish books open upon his knees.

Take it first and last, Peterssen did a lot of solid reading. He read Schopenhauer and Fichte for fun.

I got in the way of dropping into his room of an evening. Not that we had much in common—football and Ibsen and just enough work on the prescribed course to keep my marks up was about my gait—but, somehow, Peterssen interested me. Often during the course of a whole evening not a word would pass between us, I playing Canfield on one end of Peterssen's table, and Peterssen working out the fourth dimension on the other end.

He wasn't what you would call an ardent sportsman. He refused to attend the annual fall races because, he said, the fact that one horse could cover a given distance more quickly

than another was commonplace and uninteresting.

And then he went on to explain that if out of, say, four horses starting, all of them or even any three should cover the distance in exactly the same length of time, that would be an extraordinary occurrence and well worth seeing.

He took a pencil and showed that, inasmuch as there had been 4,037 races run on that particular track, and that the average variation in the time of the different horses was so many fifths of a second per mile, the chance of any three crossing the wire at precisely the same fraction of a second was only one in several million four hundred and some thousand three hundred and seventeen, and was therefore too remote for him to expect to be present at the particular race in which this happened.

At another time he declined to go to a football game on the ground that if eleven men were opposed by eleven other men in an effort to advance a certain object a given distance in a specified time, each side being governed by the same set of restrictions or rules, the problem involved could be much more interestingly worked out mathematically, and that practical demonstration of any theorem is crude and savors of barbarism.

He explained that the problem was simply a matter of taking 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, of course taking into consideration the law of probabilities as it applied to extraneous conditions such as weather, condition of the ground, etc., and making the necessary allowance for psychological phenomena due to excitement, exhilaration, or depression of the individual players and the telepathic influence of the crowd, when, by subtraction, the score could be calculated to a certainty.

I went to the game alone, and that evening three or four of the boys dropped around to my room for a little session of quarter limit jackpots. I invited Peterssen to join us, but he pleaded ignorance of the game; nevertheless, about midnight he strolled in and looked on for an hour.

The game broke up about three in the morning, and as the boys tiptoed down the hall, incidentally carrying my last simoleon with them, I noticed a light in Peterssen's room.

I loafed across, lighted one of his cigarettes, and sat before the open fire. Peterssen was busy, and the table-top was littered with sheets of finely penciled figures.

At the end of a half-hour he looked up. "When you raised Mr. Cutting's openers on a queen full," he asked abruptly, "why didn't you discard the pair and draw to the three queens?"

"I don't know," I replied, surprised at his glib use of technical terms. "A queen full is a good hand, and I was almost certain to win the pot—I did win it, in fact."

"Oh, yes, you won $3.75, whereas if you had discarded the pair you would have won just $9.25."

"How do you know?" I asked, puzzled.

"Worked it out, of course. See here," he began. "The probabilities of any one having a better hand than three queens and a pair of sevens on the deal were exactly .00024355, while the probabilities of their beating three queens on the deal were .00759355. Therefore, by discarding your pair you lowered your chances by only .00735. As against this, your expectancy in the draw would have been as 1 to 12 for bettering the hand, while the combined expectancy of the other hands of beating your three queens was only as 1 to 83.

"In case you did better your hand, their expectancy would have been reduced to 1 to 635 of beating a full hand, and 1 to 1363 of beating four queens.

"So much for the simple mathematics. I will not bore you with the rather more complicated process of reducing the psychological status of the game at that moment to an exact mathematical formula and its application to what we are pleased to call the pure mathematics of the law of chance.

"But the fact is," he continued, with a glance at the carefully figured sheets, "that, reduced to a mathematical certainty, the method of play I suggested stands in relation to the method you adopted as 9.25 to 3.75. You play rather badly, I think."

And so it was with Peterssen; he went through life viewing the most trivial incidents seriously in the light of their psychological beginnings and their mathematical results.

But it was on waves that Peterssen doted. Water waves, sound waves, light waves, heat waves, thought waves—it was all the same.

Let him once get started figuring on anything that vibrated, and he could go into a trance—a sort of intellectual jag that sometimes lasted for three or four days, during which time he would neither eat nor sleep, and emerge nervous, shaking, furtive-eyed, exhibiting all the symptoms of having been on a protracted alcoholic spree.

He believed implicitly that every human emotion was the result of vibration. He endeavored to explain to me that love was a mere matter of the vibrations of one personality acting upon those of another similarly attuned, and predicted that within a very short time these vibrations would be recorded in much the same manner as finger-prints; the principal difference being, that while no two persons have finger-prints exactly alike, the vibrations of the love emotion would be found to exist always in pairs.

Each individual of one sex would radiate vibrations perfectly attuned to the vibrations of one, and only one, individual of the opposite sex.

He informed me that he was even then nearing the completion of a mechanical device for receiving and recording these vibrations with a view to establishing a vast central bureau or exchange.

He dilated in glowing terms upon the commercial possibilities of the enterprise as well as its great benefit to the human race in the elimination of all matrimonial discord and divorce.

"Just stop and think," he said, "what a vast saving in time, money, and worry would be accomplished by this system. Should any person desire to marry, all he or she would have to do would be to communicate with the bureau. The communication would be referred to the proper department, where, by consulting an elaborate card index system, the name and address of the person with whom the applicant was perfectly attuned would be readily ascertained. This information would then be furnished upon payment of an agreed fee."

"How do you expect to collect these vibrations?" I asked. "Many people would object to the system and refuse to have their vibrations recorded."

Peterssen smiled.

"They could not help themselves. It is much more simple than the recording of finger-prints, because these vibrations are unconsciously and continuously radiating from every living person, and while in many respects they are the most delicate and elusive of all waves, yet they are also the most far-reaching, except, perhaps, those of light.

"Every known substance acts as a conductor, their range being limited only by the ethereal void. Therefore it only remains to erect a vast receiving station for the recording of the vibrations of every person in the world—the telepathic receiver in connection would, of course, furnish the name, address, and whatever information was desired."

"But," I objected, "it will destroy the romance—"

"Romance!" scoffed the matter-of-fact Peterssen. "Romance must ever give way before the advance of civilization."

"But suppose these two people didn't *love* each other?"

"My dear friend," he smiled, "I have just been at some pains to explain that this *is* love. Two persons so attuned could no more help loving each other than they could change the color of their eyes."

"But many people really are in love with each other—or think they are—at one time, and are decidedly out of love at a later time. If love were a matter of fixed or constant vibrations these people would either never have been in love at all, or if they were, they would, perforce, remain so."

"Rather well taken," he said; "but superficial and absolutely wrong. And therein lies the value of the system—in the elimination of just such mistakes.

"Those are people who rush headlong into matrimony, having only, what we may call, the first symphony of vibrations attuned. Mere sex attraction is the least delicate, or grossest, of the entire series of symphonic vibrations, and therefor, numerous individuals are attuned to respond to the attraction of this first symphony. It is only when two persons are attuned to the ultimate symphony that marriage becomes ideal, and this is possible in only one individual of each sex in all the world.

"For instance: some place upon the face of the earth at this moment is one certain representative of the fair sex with whom I am attuned to the ultimate symphony; she, and she only, will I marry. But, at present, I know nothing whatever about her, and in the law of probabilities my chance of finding her are approximately one in 750,000,000. In other words, I have 749,999,999 chances of becoming unideally married to one of becoming ideally married. You see, it is a long shot.

"Of course the number of so-called happy marriages far exceed this ratio, but upon analysis we find that this is not natural, but acquired happiness; the happiness that is the result of experience. Each deliberately determines to be happy whether or no, and so force himself to overlook or ignore those vibrations of the other which are unattuned to the corresponding vibrations in himself.

"Had these people been perfectly attuned there would have been no jarring vibrations—they would have been spontaneously happy."

It was shortly after this interview that Peterssen disappeared. He disappeared completely and as suddenly and unobtrusively as he had arrived. He informed no one of his going, nor did he leave any message of explanation.

After he had gone I tried to remember what I knew of him. He once told me that his father had been a Norwegian sea captain and his mother an Icelander, but that both were dead. He was always well supplied with money and never received any mail.

Aside from these meager facts I found I knew no more of Peterssen than I knew of Prester John.

I had stepped into the hall one morning and found Peterssen comfortably settled in the room which had been vacant the night before. I stepped into the hall another morning and the room was vacant in which Peterssen had been comfortably settled the night before—and that is all.

II.

THE big north *gets* a man. I don't know — maybe it's the silence of the frozen desert, with its far-off blue fog, which is not fog at all, but just air, so cold you can see it; maybe it's skirting along ranges that no man has ever climbed — nor ever will; maybe it's the aurora that booms and whistles overhead and looks like all the

blue and red and green fire in the world had been touched off to light up the land of the kingdom of ice; maybe it's a bug that gets into your brain; or, maybe it's all of these things put together—I don't know.

Ask any old *tillicum* that's wintered north of sixty-five—but don't believe all he tells you. Just let the bug crawl.

Anyhow, this is the way it was:

I wintered that year at old Fort Confidence, just inside the circle, where Dease Bay forms the northmost reach of Great Bear Lake, intending to strike across by way of the Dismal Lakes before the ice went out of the Coppermine, and so on along the coast of Coronation to Bathhurst Inlet, where I was to join Fennel, F. R. S., and help him map a few rivers.

The big ice was moving, and before we were within twenty miles of the coast we could hear the crash and thunder of it. About a hundred and fifty miles east of the Coppermine, where the hills break sharply to the coast, we located the grub cache that Fennel made two years before.

One of my boys, Kahlakme, an Anderson River Eskimo, told me of a strange white man who lived on the high promontory where the spur of hills was swallowed up in the cold waters of Coronation. Some unpronounceable name, he called him, which means "He-who-listens-to-his-hat."

I was anxious to meet this man, as I had heard of him before. Two years back, over on the Mackenzie, some Smith Island Eskimos told me a long lingo about freighting many sled-loads of stuff that was neither grub nor rifles nor fish-hooks from a whaler to this man.

I didn't pay much attention to the yarn at the time — you can't believe anything an Eskimo or an Indian tells you, anyway.

I knew that most of the whalers who winter north of seventy buy a native wife for the season, and I supposed this fellow was one of them, though what he was doing so far east I couldn't figure out. But, finding myself practically at his door, I decided to give him a call; anyway I would be amply rewarded for my trip by the view of the moving sea-ice which I could obtain from the elevation.

Leaving the two Eskimos encamped at the grub cache, I set out alone. Within a mile or so of the coast I made out a dark object moving toward me among the ice hummocks and ridges of the glacier that leads from the west slope.

It soon resolved itself into a man—a white man, tall, heavily bearded, and covered with the regular winter's accumulation of grease and blubber soot.

"Hello!" he greeted; "I knew you were coming, so I decided to meet you."

Noting my surprise, he hastened to add:

"Picked up your waves. You were curious to see me and, while the vibrations of curiosity—"

It was Peterssen!

That night, for the first time in years, I sat again with my strange friend.

In a snow igloo without windows or chimney, amid smoke and soot and the reek of raw skin bedding and the stench of rancid blubber, we sat down to supper—and such a supper! Strips of blubber, scorched to a greasy crispness, warm, fatty musk-ox suet and cold caribou tallow, to which adhered particles of flesh and dried blood, prepared and served by Peterssen's cook and general utility man, an undersized native of filthy personality.

It was with a feeling of distinct repugnance that I watched my friend convey great chunks of the unpalatable food to his lips, in his fingers, and wolf it greedily down.

Could this be Peterssen, I reflected: Peterssen — the immaculate, the epicure, the esthete?

The meal finished, my host reached into a grimy black hole under a pile of skins and withdrew a long, white candle. He motioned me to follow and together we crawled out into the pure, cold brilliance of aurora land.

He led the way to the extreme end of the promontory and entered a low building of corrugated iron. Inside was a stove whose makeshift pipe of petrol cans conveyed most of the smoke out through the moss roof which supported an intricate network of wires and antennæ.

At one end of the room was a low table upon which was rigged a complicated system of selenium disks, solenoid magnets, and brass instruments connected with a confusing series of storage-batteries and tiny motors.

Around the walls were ranged his books — the same that once reposed upon the shelves of his room in the Hampton.

I passed over my tobacco and Peterssen filled a short pipe and settled himself upon a huge white bear-skin before the table and adjusted a peculiar head-piece connected by wires to the various instruments. I sat upon a similar skin near the door.

"I caught your vibrations — those of curiosity," he began. "They are not very far-reaching, so I knew you were near at hand. Among other things I have discovered that ice is a non-conductor of the waves of fear and curiosity, while it offers no resistance whatever to the vibrations of love and hate and, as you know, only a partial resistance to light waves."

"Damn your waves!" I blurted, exasperated beyond measure that he could sit and calmly discuss waves as if continuing the thread of an interrupted conversation. "What I want to know is, why you disappeared, and what you are doing in this God-forgotten country, living like a savage?"

Peterssen smiled:

"I did leave rather abruptly. It was this way: I completed my telepatho-vibro receiver, and the first thing I did was to pick up the vibrations of the one woman with whom I was attuned—my soul-mate, or affinity, you would call her.

"At first I was rather staggered to find that she was a Kimilimuit Eskimo who lived with her tribe near the mouth of Backs River. But, from the minute I picked up her vibrations perfectly attuned to mine, I found myself absolutely under the spell of her attraction—violently in love, you would say, and nothing would do but I must go to her.

"Under the circumstances I did not care to make explanations, but went directly to New York, where I stored my effects and proceeded to Backs River. It took me nearly two years to locate the woman, but, as you shall see, it was worth the effort."

Shade of Jehoshaphat! Was the man crazy, I wondered, as I thought of the squat, greasy squaws who are the women of the country.

"Worth it!" I cried.

"Certainly," he answered. "Wait until you see her and note the state of perfect accord which is only attainable through the ultimate symphony of attunement. She should arrive tonight with a party of her tribesmen, for to-morrow we are to be married."

Poor old Peterssen; the north's got him, I thought, and turned the subject off his *klooch* bride.

"But, you don't intend to *stay* here?" I asked.

"I have no choice," he answered. "I early realized the utter impossibility of adapting my future wife to conditions as they exist down there," he waved his hand toward the south; "so I sent for my books and instruments and set up an experimental station here."

"Then you still believe in your theory of attuned vibrations?" I asked wonderingly.

"Believe it! Why, man, I have *proven* it!" he cried. "Else why would I marry a squaw?"

Suddenly he leaned forward and his eyes held mine in a wildly intense gaze. He pointed a begrimed finger at me, and his voice rang high and thin:

"I have attained happiness—the perfect happiness of which you know nothing. But you shall know! My friend, what I have achieved for myself I will achieve for *you!*"

He turned eagerly and began to adjust his instruments, moving a switch and releasing a tension spring.

Instantly I was seized with panic. Crossing the intervening space at a bound, I grasped his arm and at the same time drew my heavy revolver.

"Peterssen!" I yelled, "Quit it, or I'll shoot your whole shebang into kingdom come! I'm all right the way I am!"

Before my eyes flashed a vision of the fair-haired girl who was waiting for me to come out of the big country that I might read in the depths of her blue eyes the happiness of all the ages.

"Wait!" he cried. "Vibrations!"

"Hers?" I yelled again, making a wild pass at his outlandish head-piece. "You mean my—"

"No, no!" he interrupted. "Fear vibrations. Be quiet, can't you?"

I felt uneasy. I didn't really believe in his nonsense, but, knowing Peterssen as I did — well, I wasn't taking any chances.

After listening intently for a few minutes he threw off the hood.

"Come!" he cried, and dashed through the door.

All about us the air was filled with the roar and thunder of rending ice. Snatching up a coil of *babiche* rope, Peterssen struck westward at a run.

In a few minutes we were upon the surface of the glacier which we had crossed during the afternoon, only now it was riven by a great crevasse which had opened scarcely a quarter of a mile away, and yawned in sinister gloom across the shimmering surface of the aurora-lit ice.

At its edge we halted and peered into the depths. It was rather shallow, as crevasses go, not more than fifty feet to the bottom, with sheer sides in which were embedded stones and bits of scrub timber from the hills. Huddled upon the floor we made out two dark, indistinct objects.

Peterssen calculated the distance, made one end of the line fast to his waist, handed me the coil, and lowered himself over the edge. The rope went slack and I heard the tap of the ice ax.

Presently his voice reverberated from the depths:

"Haul away!" And a million echo voices up and down the chasm repeated the eery cry, "haul away!"

I hauled, and presently over the edge of the crevasse appeared a face. I started and nearly dropped the rope at the horror of it. I had expected to see Peterssen, and instead I was staring into the frozen eyes of a man long dead.

Depositing the body on the snow I lowered the line, and again Peterssen's voice sounded: "Haul away!"

And again the million ice devils shrieked in mockery, "haul away!"

I laid the second body beside the first, and hauled Peterssen to the surface, and together we stood looking down upon the corpses—wide and thin they were, grotesquely flattened by the tremendous ice pressure until they resembled nothing so much as a couple of frozen flounders.

The eyes of both stared wide with an unnamed terror. Their faces showed chalk white above their beards, like the foolish face of a harlequin.

Here, indeed, was death—but death robbed of her dignity and rendered hideous. One does not open a tomb to find a mountebank, and the faces of these men seemed congealed in an act of foolish pantomime. The jaws of one gaped open, while the lips of the other were writhed into a silly grin of horror as he clutched tightly in his frozen hands a long-barreled gun.

It was an H. B. muzzle loader of seventy five years back.

III.

"But how did you know they were there?" I asked, when we were again seated among Peterssen's books and instruments.

"Waves," he answered laconically. "Vibrations."

"You don't mean to tell me that dead men have waves!"

"Undoubtedly, but not radiating from their bodies. I am about to perfect an instrument, however, by means of which I hope to establish communication with the spirit world.

"In this instance I picked up the vibrations of fear or terror, and the explanation is simple enough. Some three-quarters of a century ago these two men, probably explorers, quite possibly members of the ill-fated Franklin expedition, sought to cross this crevasse. They gained the bottom and were seeking a point of egress when the disturbance occurred that forced the sides of the crevasse together, inclosing them in a vast ice tomb. The grinding or trembling of the ice warned them of their danger and terrified them with its awful import.

"Following this, the collapse must have been frightfully sudden, entombing the waves, or vibrations, of the last emotions of these men. You recollect that I told you that ice is a nonconductor of the vibrations of fear. The telepathic and other waves passed out into the atmosphere, the fear waves alone remaining imprisoned.

"This doubtless occurred in the hills, and the old crevasse, moving down with the glacier, reopened as we sat here and released the waves which I picked up."

He was interrupted by a loud commotion at the door of the shack in which we could distinguish the voices of men and the yapping and snarling of dogs.

Rushing outside, we encountered a band of some fifteen or twenty Kimilimuits grouped excitedly about the two bodies which lay in the snow. In the center of the group a very old man jabbered and gesticulated, pointing at the wires on the roof, at the flat forms on the snow, and then at Peterssen and me.

The old medicine man was sure enough in earnest. I caught a word now and then, and I didn't like the drift of his talk — nor the undershot looks that the rest of the gang bent our way, neither.

Even the dogs bristled and minced around us stiff-legged and growled way down in the back of their throats.

"That is *she*," whispered Peterssen, pointing to a swart, thick figure in a heavy skin garment who stood surrounded by several young huskies that toyed rather lightly, I thought, with their very capable-looking harpoons.

"The old one is her grandfather," he added.

Somehow the information didn't ease me any. Some of the words he was using I'd learned over on the Mackenzie, and there are some things even a man's wife's relations oughtn't to want to do to him.

The old gentleman seemed to be doing right well with his oration. He was getting warmed up by this time, and he jumped up and down and swung his voice into a kind of a chant that got under a man's hide about his nerve centers.

When he turned his face our way he looked for all the world like a fighting bull walrus, with his little red eyes and the two tufts of long, white hair that grew downward from the corners of his mouth. They were stiff with frozen grease and gleamed like a couple of tusks.

I edged closer to Peterssen.

"Can't you manage to get grandpa out back of the shack and slip him a chew of candle or a schuper of fish-oil?" I asked. "Because, as near as I can make out, if you and I lose this

debate we'll shortly be working your new invention from the wrong end of the line."

Peterssen looked thoughtful.

"He is telling them," he said, "that with my instruments here I am bringing to life those who have died. He points to you as a finished product and regards the other two as stock on hand. He tells them that soon there will be so many people that there will not be food enough, and then all must die."

"Look here, Peterssen," I said, and you bet I was in earnest, "you got us into this mess, and it's up to you to get us out. Personally, I don't like that old man, but you can sling their lingo, and if I were you I'd kind of say something soothing—and say it quick," I added, for out of the tail of my eye I noticed a certain free-handedness in the way the men handled their spears.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Peterssen. "His position is absurd, and I consider his attitude unfriendly in the extreme. In fact, he is advocating drastic measures, and I shall ignore him completely. I will explain to Nannuit—she will understand perfectly."

He advanced a few paces toward the stocky *klooch*, who, all during the old medicine man's proclamation, had been eying me with a strange, intense stare, as if she were hypnotized. Somehow the look she slanted Peterssen didn't exactly gibe with what he had been telling me of the perfect accord thing.

Quick as a cat she grabbed a copper-tipped harpoon from the hand of the nearest husky and whizzed it straight at Peterssen. Peterssen ducked and the harpoon ripped through the corrugated sheeting of the shack as if it had been paper.

From the inside came the thin jangle of springs and the sputter of sparks.

After that things blurred up some. The moon-faced *klooch* came at me on the run, and the next thing I knew her short, thick arms were around my neck and she had planted a loose, greasy kiss square on my mouth.

By the sounds I knew that something was happening there on the snow, but I couldn't wriggle free from the strangle hold, and I couldn't see around the wide, flat face with its two narrow black eyes that were looking into mine as though I were something she wanted.

"Hey," I yelled, when I got my breath, "Peterssen! Quick! Your wires are crossed! Something's busted and your family's floating on the bosom of the wrong wave!"

At that the *klooch* let go and stood holding onto one of my arms. Peterssen lay bound hand and foot glaring at his captors who were jabbering excitedly among themselves.

"This is a pretty kettle of fish!" I growled, ambling over to where he lay. He paid no attention, but turned to the girl who was holding back.

"Nannuit," he said in a sort of surprised tone, "I do not understand."

She gave him one look, and in spite of the nasty fix we were in I had to snicker. I remember once back home they moved out the sofa and my sister found something the cat had brought in.

Well, that's the way she looked—just like that.

The huskies stood around in an undecided semicircle, and I wondered why they didn't grab me, until I remembered what grandpa had told them about my being brought back to life.

This gave me my cue. They are a superstitious lot, the Kimilimuits, and I figured that if I could out-orate grandpa we had a chance.

I picked up a harpoon that had been dropped during the fracas.

"Peterssen," I said hurriedly, "when I touch you with the business end of this fairy wand you play possum—and play it *right!*"

He looked at me, but I could see he wasn't paying much attention.

"The symphony of vibrations seems to have become disarranged," he began; "I think—"

I was mad, and I broke in with a roar:

"I don't give a damn what you think! And what's more, if you ever say 'vibrations' to me again I'll punch your head. I'm running this show now, and you don't get even a thinking part!"

I turned to the natives, bowed low, and stepping off a few paces, drew a wide circle in the snow with the harpoon. Stepping into the center, I made a few hocus-pocus passes and began to declaim.

I am no orator, and there are a whole lot of Chautauquas I never attended, but just the same I carried the strength of my convictions, and realized that it wasn't so much what I said as how I said it.

"*Ora pro nobis,*" I began, to the accompaniment of a double shuffle. "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people, or person, I should say, to dance jigs in front of a gang of pie-faced, mackerel-mouthed, knock-kneed ignoramuses—Maxwelton's braes are bonnie, where early falls the dew—*Gallia est omnes divisa in partes tres quorum unum*—"

I switched onto the half of the Virginia reel.

"*Sic semper tyrannis*—in the shade of the old apple-tree—*recoje tu heno mientras que el sol luziere*—oh, say, can you see by the dawn's early light—"

I paused for breath and noticed that about half of them were coming around to my way of thinking.

I could hardly keep from laughing. Surely no comic opera manager ever conceived a more bizarre setting.

Overhead the aurora flashed and flickered like a kaleidoscope running on high gear. The moving sea ice filled the air with the thunder of continuous explosions, and the snow-fields and ice crags showed green in the changing lights.

The little group of fur-clad natives scowled respectfully as they leaned on their harpoons. The eyes of the two flattened corpses stared straight into the zenith from the whiteness of their chalky faces, and Peterssen, bound hand and foot, looked on in pitying silence, while Nannuit simpered sillily and I danced and orated in the center of the circle.

But I didn't dare to stop too long.

"On with the dance, let joy be unconfined," I led off with a cross between a sailor's hornpipe and the Highland fling. "Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places, and if I ever catch one of you alone I'll take the price of admission out of your greasy hide until you realize you are hoist on your own petard, whatever that is—I am dying, Egypt, dying—and there'll be a hot time in the old town to-night.

"*Sic transit gloria mundi!*" I yelled for a climax, throwing a handspring that brought me up facing them.

In that moment I knew that I had won. The majority of the crowd were intelligent enough to see the force of my argument, and they greeted me with friendly glances and nods of approval.

I was quick to press my advantage, however, because I noticed that grandpa was scratching his head, and I was afraid he had found a weak point in my argument.

Grabbing up the harpoon, I walked over and touched the forehead of one of the corpses, then turned and performed a like office for Peterssen; and, much to my surprise, he proved a good actor.

Rolling his eyes, he stiffened convulsively and lay still.

I motioned the men to bring the three bodies, and led the way around the base of an ice crag on the farther side of the igloo. They deposited them in the snow, and we returned to the others.

The crag was wide and high, and lay in direct line with the broken ascent to the hills.

I smiled at Nannuit, patted her on the shoulder, and led her to the igloo,

where I made her understand that she was to prepare a great *potlatch,* then returned to the shack about which the huskies were grouped.

Wrenching the door from its walrus-hide hinges, I stood upon it and made a short speech in which I told them in glowing terms just exactly what I thought of them, their origin, and their destination, and wound up with a wide and generous sweep of the arm which conveyed the shack, its contents, and appurtenances to them and their heirs and assigns forever.

Peterssen and I paused on the edge of a high cliff a good half-mile away and through our glasses watched fifteen or twenty Kimilimuits fight fiercely over the distribution of several thousand dollars' worth of storage-batteries, selenium disks, and coherers.

Barbed Wire and Buttermilk

by George Allan England

NONCHALANT, sleek, bored, the very elegant young man leaned over the rail of the old Pilgrim as she wallowed up alongside the wharf on Peaks Island, which same lies in the harbor of Portland, Maine.

His condescending and world-wearied gaze, on a level with Cap'n Rebidee Blodgett and with me—as we sat contemplatively at ease on a couple of lobster pots—indifferently viewed the sun-baked wharf, the dusty road, the cottages, and idling summer folk. It did not, however, observe so inconsiderable a detail as a molasses-barrel upended close beside one of the mooring-piles.

Jingle-jangle!

At the stern of the aged boat a cream of swirling lather churned out. The Pilgrim creaked, swayed, and sidled clumsily toward her berth.

"All right!" rasped the mate, supremely gold-braided and with an eye on two summer girls hammocking in the little park.

Then a hawser snaked through the tepid air. Its loop embraced both the pile and the molasses-barrel, flushing up a swarm of flies.

Came a stiffening of the cable as it drew steel-taut. Something creaked stutteringly. 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 deck, and with strange, blobby noises. Behind it copious sweets trailed. The elegant and blasé youth had instantly and entirely vanished.

Cap'n Blodgett and I viewed the subsequent proceedings with a calmly silent rapture.

Why mar a perfect and blissful occasion with mere speech? Tobacco and observation sufficed.

But, after all, the doings were at an end and the Pilgrim had once more launched upon her watery course down the bay, the cap'n removed his pipe, waved it slowly in air, and spake:

"You can't most allus sometimes tell," said he contemplatively. "That was sartain sure a little bit of all right. I never seen the beat of it but once—an' *that* concerned barb-wire an' buttermilk. As a ruction, it was some smart ruction, mister, and don't ye doubt it. Chowder! This here warn't shucks beside it!"

"Well?"

"Luella Buck and her old man and Zetheriah Bartlett was all in it, up to Trap Corner, three year ago last March. Now ye see—"

The cap'n sucked his ancient cob to a glow, picked up a bit of shingle, and opened his knife. I rejoiced inwardly, for *that* meant business.

"Zeth, he lived on the old Gorman place, with his folks, adjoinin' the Buck farm. Him and Luell' had been lolly-gaggin' quite a spell, till a row come up 'twixt his pa and hern account of old Bartlett lawin' Buck for damages the fall before—somethin' to do with a line-fence, I cal'late. After that Zeth and Luell' had a fall-out and burst up."

"What?"

"Had a rookus, and broke off the engagement, I mean." The cap'n eyed a screaming gull with mild interest.

"But I reckon they wasn't cured of their hanker for one 'nother at that. Zeth was some boy, and Luell' was a trim craft, well-rigged fore and aft, no two ways about it.

"Anyhow, one March afternoon Zeth come over to Buck's considerable slicked up — fresh shaved, with his boots greased, *and* a necktie on. It looked like he meant biz.

"Old man Buck was just crossin' the side yard with a pail of buttermilk for his shoats when he ketched sight of Zeth. The old man got all riled up in a minute, and his face went black as Zip. A tough old pill he always was, mighty short on for good-nature, and the sight of Zeth was pizen to him.

"So he ups an' says, says he:

"'Hey, you, what d'you want?' About as accomodatin' as a hog on ice, you understand. He wouldn't even let Zeth get a nigh the door. 'What you want, hey?'

"Zeth, he stops and sizes up the old man. A' bastin' big feller Zeth was, too. Looked like he could have broke him in two with one hand.

"For a minute there ain't nothin' said. They just stands there glowerin' at each other. Oh, I mustn't forget to tell you 'twas a pow'ful sharp day and the yard was all a glare of ice.

"'Well,' says he again, 'what's wanted? What you doin' on my place? Thought I told you last fall to git out and keep out!'

"'That's right; you did,' says Zeth, 'but—'

"'There ain't no *but* to it! You ain't wanted fubbin' round here!'

"'But I come to—'

"'It don't make a damn's odds what you come for! What your no-nation pa done to me was plenty, and that ain't all. No man that's mean enough to shoot my shanghai roosters can set foot on *my* place!'

"'What d'ye mean?' says Zeth, brustlin' right up.

"'You know what I mean, all right. Take your back tracks now, and git!'

"'You mean to say *I* done it?'

"'Well, last week two of my best shanghais come up amongst the missin' with bullet-holes plumb through 'em, and I cal'late you know—'

"'It's a dum lie! I never!'

"'Huh! Let you tell it! But never mind; git out with you now. I don't want no truck with the likes o' you!'

"Zeth, he has to laugh.

"'You old idjit,' says he, 'do you think I come here to row with *you?* I—'

"'Be you a goin' to git out now or not?' hollers the old man, dretful sot, advancin' on him. 'If you don't hyper now, dog my cats but I'll have you took for trespass!'

"This kind of takes Zeth aback, and he don't know what to answer. But he ain't no great hand to quit cold that way, so he flings at old Buck:

"'You sap-head! 'Bout them there roosters, you're plumb off the track. What's more, it's plain to see you think a sight more of 'em than what you do of your gal's happiness or mine. But I never shot 'em, anyhow, and that's gospel. If you're so plumb anxious to know who *did*—'

"'Bugbite an' moonshine!' hollers Buck, his dander all riz. 'I don't want nothin' of you but your room! Be you a goin' or not? If you fall foul o' me, young man, you won't last as long as John Brown stayed in heaven!'

"The old man must have been madded for fair to talk that way to Zeth. I cal'late he didn't rightly reckon on how tough an' rugged the young feller really was. Anyhow, he sets down his pail of buttermilk, picks up a barrel-stave, and starts for him, powerful threatenin'.

"Zeth, he only grins.

"'Huh!' says he. 'Don't go and make a sight o' yourself, old man. *You* ain't no bigness to hout me out o' here till I elect to go!'

"'Ain't, hey? You try it on and see!'

"Zeth has to laugh right out.

"'You buffle-brain!' says he. 'A dozen o' you couldn't budge me one mite. Don't you cut no dingdoes with me, old man, or you're liable to git somethin' you don't want. I come over to see Luell',' says he, 'and what's more, I'm goin' to—and as for you, go bag your head!'

"Then he makes a move toward the house again.

"'Consarn your harslet!' rips out old Buck. 'You're prongin' me too deep! Claw along out o' here afore I do murder!'

"Zeth, he only keep on goin' toward the house. Buck can't stand it no longer. Deacon or no deacon, he lets drive the blue fire and makes a jeeroozly swipe at Zeth with the barrel-stave. Chowder! If he'd connected he'd have laid Zeth cold.

"But Zeth ain't there.

"No, when he sees that wallop comin' he ducks. The old man don't land on nothin' solider than air and he overbalances. The yard's all a sheer of ice, like I told ye. Buck, he slips, staggers round, and tries to ketch himself, but can't make out to.

"Ke-*whallow!*"

"That's him now hittin' the ice all of a scatteration. *Bing!* His bald head sends the stars a flyin'—brand-new set of uppers an' unders goes skyhootin'. Barrel-stave skids away. Conniption fits ain't in it with old Buck. He's powerful shook, mister, now *I'm* a goin' to tell you!

"'Ja Reoo!' says Zeth. 'You ain't killed, be ye?'

"And he jumps for to pick the old man up. But just at that minute Luella pops out the door, excited as a cat at a mouse show. Her eyes is just flingin' sparks.

"'Here, you!' she hollers. 'You leggo my pa! Coward! How dast you hit an old man?'

"It seems she's been reddin' up the back kitchen and heerd the rookus. Now out she comes a hyperin', gits there just as the old man flops, and flies madder than snakes in hayin' all in a minute. She used to like Zeth pow'ful well, like I told you, but this here is beyond human endurance.

"'Shame onto you, Zeth Bartlett!' she yells at him. 'Don't you dast to touch my pa again!'

"'I never!' says Zeth. 'Honest to God, I never! He tried to—'

"'It's a dumnation lie!' mumbles the old man between his gums, strug-

glin' to git up, and fallin' back, struck all of a heap. 'He assaulted me! Tried to kill me! Help! Help'

"Luella, she don't wait to hear no more, but grabs a kettle of b'ilin' water off the stove and hucks out with business in her eye.

"When Zeth sees *that* comin' he don't wait for no argument, but turns and stivvers, Hell-bent an' crooked, and Luell' after him. She's some high-spry of a female, Luell' is, and full of sprawl, I'll have you to know. When she's madded good and proper the fur's goin' to fly. That kettle looks all-fired hot.

"Zeth, he makes a jump for the quickest way off the farm, right down across the meadow an' through the line-fence. Luella ketches up the barrel-stave an' takes after him, stave in one hand, kettle in t'other, pell-mell fer Kittry. But the hot water sloshes some and she has to drop it. The stave's enough, anyhow.

"Zeth don't even look back about that time, but legs it as tight as he can jump fer luck. Withy, he is, and a master-hand to run; but Chowder! the gal's a close second. The way them two dusts across that there field is a caution. I think it's a doubt if any of these here Marython runners could ha' ketched 'em.

"He makes the fence just a little ahead of her and dives fer safety. But —barb-wire, you know! Dog my cats if he don't get 'tarnally hung up head first. And the harder he hauls the tighter them pesky barbs hangs to his pants. An' there he is, caught slick as a ram-cat, in a most convenient position fer Luell'.

"Afore he can break loose she's got him.

"Spat! *Spat!*

"Livin' laws! How she does warm it to him, madder 'n the mill-tail o' thunder! Raises a blister on the seat of his pants big as a saucer every wallop.

"He fights like all-git-out to clear himself, but beyond tearin' his best pants to ribbons an' bustin both galluses plumb off he don't git nowhere.

"Whack! Spang! *Crackum!*

"'Ow! O-o-o-o! By *gravy! Ow-w-w!*'

"Wouldn't think a woman could slam 'em in so hard, would you? Say! Luella certainly slatted him some regular he-uns that time—rim-racked Zeth somethin' desprit. Her wallops come thicker 'n fiddlers in hell.

"Mister! I reckon Zeth sees stars, all right. Him and the barb-wire does a tango—kind of a muscle-dance like —and Luell', plumb industrious, hangs to it like a cockle-bur to a bell-wether's tag-locks. Her hair comes tumblin' down and flies in the March wind. Cheeks burn like fire—eyes sparkles—she's sure handsome!

"About now old Buck pulls together and makes out to git up. He sees the doin's down by the line-fence, sees Zeth in that all-fired quand'y, and 'lows he'll take a hand in the mix-up.

"Up he grabs the pail of buttermilk and racks down across the meadow at his best gait—but he's tizzicky an' has the creepin' palsy; and the j'int-water, they say, has mostly leaked out of his knees, so he's slower 'n stock-still. All this endurin' time the gal keeps busy with that there stave, and Zeth's yells, they do tell, was heerd 'way up to the Farnum place on Bird Hill.

"Just as old Buck gits there *rip!* goes somethin' and Zeth's free on the nigh side o' the fence.

"Up he scrambles and backs away, with her still after him. He ups with his arms fer to defend himself.

"'Don't ye dast to hit my gal!' roars old Buck. 'You do, and I'll law ye! Don't ye dast!'

"For a minute they all mill round. Then the old man he sees what he thinks is a good chance and ups with the pail and lets fly slosh-bang!

"But his aim's bad, what with the ruction and the circlin' round—he bein' seventy-six and all fuddied up, and also shakin' with the palsy, like I told you. So I'm consarned if he don't

miss Zeth entire and let Luella have the pailful.

"Chowder! It a'most drownds her! Kersouse! She drops the stave and staggers back, gaspin' fit to kill.

"'O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!'

"She blinks and chokes and nigh strangles tryin' to git a breath. The old man, pale as dishwater and nigh faintin' falls back plumb speechless.

"When Zeth sees his Luella in that there pickle he forgets his mad and all his blisters and makes for her.

"'Angel!' he says, says he. 'Darlin'! You ain't hurt, be ye?'

"I'm dumbjiggered if he don't grab her right in his arms, all drippin' and wetter'n a drownded kitten, and kiss her, milk and all.

"'About them there roosters,' says he, 'old Hank Leatherbee done it to git square for bein' kept out of the blueberry patch last fall,' says he, 'and I can prove it!

"'And everybody knows he ain't right in his head nohow. And I never hit yer pa, Luell'! He swiped at me and missed and knocked his own self down, and that's gospel—ain't it, you?'

"'It shore is!' gulps Buck. 'That there's the livin' truth, Luell'!'

"'Booo-hooo!' sobs the gal, flyin' all to gosh and clingin' to Zeth, cryin' like her heart would break—and shiverin', too, account of bein' all wet through and it a March day.

"Zeth, he's shiverin', too, a little, his pants bein' a plumb scandal, but he keeps his nerve. 'I—I come over to ask ye—' says he.

"'Oh, Zeth!' she takes on, 'I ain't went and killed ye, have I? Oh, I'd ought to be kicked to death by cripples, booo-hoo! You ain't *killed?*'

"'Gosh a'mighty, no! It ain't nothin'! I cal'late to live through it, provided you say yes!'

"'Wha'—what d'you mean, Zeth?' she chatters, all wee-waw, her teeth clatterin' somethin' dreadful.

"'Mean? Can't you guess?'

"'But, Zeth! You can't never forgive me now! Oh, land's sakes, whatever possessed me to do it? How—'

"'There, there, Luell'! It wa'n't nothin' but a mistake all round. Never you mind now—don't you cry! Say, will you have me?'

"'*Have* you? My land o' livin'! Yes, yes! You bet I will!'

"Her face come up to his, all buttermilk an' tears.

"'My soul an' senses, Zeth,' she stammers. 'Why in time didn't you say it before?'

"'I reckon I didn't have no great chance to,' he answers, and kisses her again, this time square on the mouth. And mister! Dog my cats if the old man don't bust out a cryin' himself and grab Zeth's free hand.

"'Take her!' says he with a choke in his voice. 'Bygones is bygones all round. Take her, an' Gawd bless ye! She's wuth any ten ornery girls. I reckon she'll make you a right smart, strong woman!'

"'Strong?' says Zeth. 'I ain't got no call to doubt *that*, sartain sure! She's strong, all right, and no two ways about it. Gosh!'

"Then, as the old man picks up the barrel-stave and the empty pail and shows his gumption by startin' for the house, Zeth takes her in his arms again, and they both plumb forget every namable thing except that they're dognation happy and it's comin' spring."

AT LAST!

By Harold Susman

COMFORT for the weary heart!
In the daily news I find
Cupid is about to start
An asylum for the blind!

His House

by Harold Titus

"I'D like to seen you paperin' that house," laughed the girl.

The man, mouth full of the restaurant product, smiled in advisable silence as he mopped his plate with a piece of bread.

"I'll bet you wouldn't talk the way you did if women was around," she said merrily.

The other strained to swallow, then spoke:

"Oh, I do' know. After a fella's been bachin' for half a dozen years he gets pretty handy. Now, this here bread"—surveying dubiously the piece in his great hard hand—"if I couldn't beat that I'd hire a cook. An' I ain't got nothing against the party in the kitchen of this here establishment, neither!"

The girl laughed again.

"I don't blame you for kickin'," she confided. "It's fierce, an' I know it. I get awful tired shootin' it out to customers, say nothin' of eatin' myself."

The man scanned her at length across the damp, rumpled linen as she leaned her shining elbows on the table.

She never could face that sort of a look from him, and dropped her eyes in embarrassment. The occasion demanded words. He was incapable, being occupied. So, going back to the subject that always held a world of interest for her, she asked:

"Like it better now that you have four rooms, don't you?"

"Uh-huh!"

"I'll bet it seems nice after livin' those first two years in one room! Gosh, I don't see how you stood it! 'Course I live in one room, but—I guess it's different. That's your home, and a girl never thinks of a boardin'-house room as a home."

He nodded grave assent as he plied his knife.

"When you told me that time you was goin' back to build on another room I thought about it a lot—wonderin' how 'twould seem to live in a one-room house. Then you got three, and now it's four! Believe me, it must be quite a place!"

He pushed back the chair.

"You bet it's a house!" he replied proudly, reaching for the toothpicks she offered him. "It's the best house on Douglas Creek. None of 'em are as warm or's handy. Now I got it all papered, you bet it's snug!"

"Kitchen, dinin'-room, settin'-room, an' bedroom, I s'pose."

"Oh, no! Us Douglas Creekers ain't that swell. We eat in th' kitchen. I have my room and two beds in another for stoppers. Use one for grub. Some day mebby I'll use it for somethin' else."

"It must be swell!" she breathed, rising and reaching for the soiled dishes.

He watched her as she walked from him, bearing the tin tray; saw her kick the battered swing-door and disappear into the mysterious precincts of the little restaurant.

The man shifted his position and looked about. It was mid-afternoon. He was alone in the place. The cashier and other waitresses had gone.

It had taken him long to eat because Annie, across the table, busily plied him with questions; besides, he had eaten nothing since the night before and had ordered recklessly, the roll of bills and crisp draft in his vest-pocket arousing fine and varied tastes to go with his lusty appetite.

For beef was high; his steers had been smooth and fat and attractive to the buyers. He felt lucky.

It was the one relaxation of his life, these three or four days in Kansas City each fall, after he had "gone out" with his beef and before he returned to plod through the winter, waiting for spring and its high activity. Six times he had watched his steers run through the chutes. Five times he had spent dollars extravagantly on theaters and suppers with Annie.

Their meeting had not been exactly accidental.

That first day he took money from the commission-house for his own beef Hudson set out to have a time. He stumbled into this restaurant because, taking the wrong car to the city, he lost his way, and hunger urged him to take what was at hand. Annie presided over his table.

He talked to her with a purpose and looked on the slim girl with covetous eyes. Her replies were the inane banter of such places, and she stood in awe of his roll of yellow-backs. So Annie and Hudson started out to have the time.

It was not the sort of a time on which the man had planned. Instead of a noisy debauch, he found himself in a theater where decorum characterized both actors and audience. Afterward he sat across the table from the girl in a big café, whither she led him with dancing eyes.

He paid no attention to the open looks that were directed at him while he ate vociferously. He was busy talking, uttering words that were muffled by mouthfuls of fancy food; telling the girl about his outfit, about the time he had building the one-room house, about the calf crop, range conditions, the prospects for an open winter, and another year of prosperity.

He awoke the next morning realizing that he had been sober.

He put in the day aimlessly, waiting for night. When he left Annie that time she knew all about the mortgage, all but his bachelorhood, all about *him*. It interested the girl; not the business, but his way of living.

She laughed merrily when he boasted of his puddings, and interrupted him many times to ask questions, for he stumbled on in the vernacular of his country as though taking for granted she had spent her life there, when in reality Colorado was but a name to her.

On his way back to the ranch he sent her a highly decorated post-card, spelling laboriously a brief, meaningless message. It was an event.

The next autumn he came again. They repeated their excursions into those parts of the city which she so seldom saw. And so the next year and the next. She nodded gravely and vaguely when he talked of the stock. Her eyes shone and she became animatedly inquisitive when he told of the growing house and the cottonwoods he had planted along the ditch to "dress it up."

The exchange of post-cards became frequent, as many as four or five a year. She had from the first been Annie, and he had been Tom. Their intimacy ripened.

This was the sixth time, and he nerved himself as he saw her coming back through the swing-door, patting a stringy lock in place.

She brushed the table slowly with a crumpled napkin, flicking the crumbs to the worn linoleum. Hudson picked his hat from beneath the chair and placed it with unconscious swagger on

his big blond head. He looked at her from frank eyes and settled his feet to the floor; placed both hands, palms down, on his knees, and commenced to talk.

"I've never had to do with women much," he said. "I do' know much about 'em. Comin' down from the yards I didn't know whether I would or whether I wouldn't. I kinda lost my nerve; mebby it would come back and mebby not. Anyhow, I took out a dollar and shook it in my hand.

"Heads I will, an' tails I won't," I says.

"Heads come, so it won't do me no good to lose my nerve, will it?"

She stood looking down at him, puzzled by this rather cryptic beginning.

He took off his hat and commenced turning it around and around by the wide brim.

"You know pretty much about me," he went on. "Guess you know more about me than anybody else, even the fellas I been ridin' with ever since I was a kid.

"I been bachin' long enough. I'm tired. I've got a good house, best on th' creek. The steers averaged seventy-three-sixty, and this here draft 'll clean up th' mortgage." He patted his breast. "I've come clean. I'm ready to settle down.

"How'd you like to marry me?"

Annie dropped her eyes to the napkin and plucked with trembling fingers at a frayed corner.

When he had waited what seemed an intolerable length of time for her to speak he continued:

"I'm thirty-two; you're twenty-five. You ain't got nobody; neither have I. You've been workin' here six years, right in th' same spot. What you got for it? Nothin'! You get grub — such as 'tis — an' enough for your room and clothes. It stops right there. Out on Douglas you can have better chuck; you can have a whole house."

She looked at him with flushed cheeks, and a frightened smile fluttered across her plain little features. "'Course we ain't much on style, but we're comfortable. We've got real pleasant neighbors—two families.

"This city life ain't goin' to get you nothin'." He warmed to his subject now and traces of embarrassment melted. "You'll go on and on just like this. Mebby some day if you're real lucky you'll marry a teamster or a street-car conductor an' go to live in one of these here flats where th' babies 'll be under your feet an' sickly. That's no way to live. Why, out there on th' creek it's all fine! Never too hot; never very cold, an', anyhow, you've always got a nice, snug, warm house."

Another girl, tired and pale, came from the kitchen and passed through to the street.

"What d' you say?"

Perhaps the tone carried just the slightest suggestion of pleading. But the girl did not notice. Her mind had been made up; made up for a long time. It was that of which she had dreamed: to forget the restaurant smells, to get away from the room, to have a house all her own.

Often had she sworn tearfully when she was all alone because things were as they were.

But now—to tell *him* that she wanted to go out there to that house—that was the rub! She experienced her first real happiness as she stood there, breathing quickly, cheeks scorching. She wanted to tell him about it.

She ached to say the words that would change the stuffy, colorless existence she had led so long; but somehow she could not speak. A dozen times she tried to open her throat, but she could only hang her head and stay silent.

"Well, won't you even say *no?*" he asked, hitching forward in his chair.

She shook her head and smiled. Then words came.

"No, I won't say no," she muttered.

Hudson rose to his big height with a smile wrinkling the bronzed cheeks.

"Get your hat," he said.

They were married at dusk. At seven they settled in their reclining-chairs and began the long ride back through Kansas and rugged Colorado. They talked far into the night, while those about them slept in uncouth attitudes and the dim air grew thick with varied smells of humans.

The talk was of the house and the steers; how some day if they needed to they could build still another room. Of the two women that were their neighbors; of a hundred things. Yet, and it was not strange—not for them—no word that came close to the personal was spoken.

The nights were long, and you cannot sleep well in those widely advertised reclining-chair cars. They were fagged when the wheezy, narrow-gage train squeaked to a stop at Dragon and the rolling of the spring-wagon seemed restful, violent though it was.

At dark they stopped at a ranch-house. A spare, tall man met them. His greeting was as genuine as his surprise; and his banter, though crude, struck a warm response in the girl's heart.

"We can sleep you all right," he said, "but we'll have to switch around to do it. Mrs. Tom Hudson here can sleep with maw, an' us men folks'll go out to th' bunk-house. Sorry, but it's th' best we can do."

"Gosh!" Annie said as they drove away in the morning. "I'd hate to live in a place like that! Old log house an' worse'n no floor!"

"Well, 'tain't a mansion, you're right," her husband said, and drove in silence for a long time.

They kept on until mid-afternoon up the trail, through the sage-brush that follows Douglas Creek. Now and then Annie clung to the seat desperately as they labored up some narrow dugway or plunged with brakes set down into the stream itself. Tom laughed at her with indulgent delight. She seemed to possess an added interest.

"Whose barn is that?"

The girl pointed and cried with such a burst of surprise that it startled Hudson. Her finger was leveled at a building of logs squatting beside an immense hay-stack.

He laughed deep-chestedly. "That ain't a barn. That's a house! My house! That's a good one; thought it was th' barn!"

Annie said nothing for a moment. She shoved herself backward in the seat.

"But it's a *log* house. I thought you said—"

"Why, they're all log out here," he explained. "Would cost a million to haul sawed stuff. They're all log."

"What's that stuff growin' on the roof?"

"Weeds," he answered. "We put dirt on th' roofs to keep out the rain, an' it makes a flower garden."

She was unresponsive to his attempt at jest. They drove through the gate and he pulled to a stop.

"Here we are!" he cried, and turned to her.

Annie did not return his look. She busily inventoried the cluttered corral and stared at the house with its chinked-in logs and bits of windows.

An uneasy something stole over the man as he commenced to unharness. This woman, his wife, was disappointed! And his was the best house on the creek!

A slow resentment made his veins hot. He had taken her from a life she hated and raised her to the best in his country. And she was not satisfied! He jerked impatiently at a refractory neck-yoke strap.

"Where are th' neighbors' houses?" Annie asked, standing up in the wagon and straining to look about.

"Oh, you can't see 'em!" he said just a bit coldly. "One family twenty miles up west fork, an' the other up Cathedral—'bout same distance."

The girl sat down limply and did not see Tom's quick glance thrown at her.

The look of Annie made it a difficult matter for him to unbuckle the hame-straps. His resentment had ebbed quickly. He did not understand the emotion which replaced it, but he led his wife to the house with a feeling closely akin to dread.

Hudson shoved the kitchen door open and entered. "Fire all laid," he said. The match flared, the pitch wood caught the flame, and he watched until it commenced to crackle.

"Better, ain't it?" he asked, and, although the girl did not answer, he felt a warming relief.

They had left the door open, and the chill November afternoon light struggled with the shadows of the little room—and the rusty stove, dingy muslin ceiling, out-of-date calendars, rough chairs, and table.

Tom drew off his mackinaw and busied himself with the homely duties of housekeeper, going about impelled by the force of habit.

While he worked he talked continually; of the milk cow running loose with her calf, of the horses in the upper pasture, of wood and water, of the deer he would kill. It was hypnotic, his own talk—about *them*. The uneasiness slipped away. He talked on.

Still Annie said no word. She stood in the middle of the room, looking slowly about her, taking in every detail.

"When you said paper," she murmured, as though to herself rather than to the man, "I thought you meant *wall* paper; not old newspapers!"

Tom glanced at the stained sheets which covered the logs and put down the bucket. The uneasiness came back; the dread with it; something more acute, too, which weighed about his heart.

"Ain't it good enough?" he asked, pushing his hat back.

No resentment in his voice that time. The girl's tone had been bitter. Five minutes before it would have struck a quick spark in him. But now his question was a plea; nothing more.

"Mebby—for some folks," his wife said after a long wait.

She walked to the door and gazed out across the flat to where huge heaps of welded rock reared themselves toward the chilling sky. The breeze that blew up the creek was raw, forbidding. The peaks she saw away over there were miles off—like her neighbors.

She thought suddenly that it was a grim joke. Neighbors! And a day's trip away!

"Is the rest like this?"

Her question broke a long silence; a silence in which Tom Hudson had suffered, stoiclike and helpless. He walked slowly toward her, his face very grave and eyes troubled. He flecked unthinkingly at a grease-spot on his hat.

"The other houses, you mean?"

"The other rooms."

"No," he said after a moment, as though confessing a shameful thing. "No; this is th' best; we use it most. We can fix th' others up, though—when we sell the steers."

The girl moved back into the room and walked an unsteady step or two. She sat down abruptly on a stiff-backed chair.

"When you told me about your house," she said in a choking voice, "I thought it was a *real* house, not just a log cabin. It ain't what—"

She commenced to cry openly, hiding her face in her hands.

The man dropped his hat to the floor and looked at her, utter helplessness screaming from every angle and curve of his big frame. The fire was roaring; the stovepipe red hot to a dangerous height. He gave no heed.

"Why, Annie," he said, stepping close to her, his voice trembling, "I've gone an' done somethin' to you—somethin' I wouldn't 'a' done for the world! I can't—I don't—"

Her sobbing became louder.

"Every one of these logs I got out was for you. I thought about it ever

since I begun buildin' onto this here room, which was th' first. I took a long chance. I didn't like to have you back there, waitin' on table.

"I thought you'd like a house—a good, snug house. I planted th' cottonwoods so's it would look a little more like a place for a woman, an' you wouldn't get lonesome. It's th' best I could do for you. I—I'm sorry."

She burst into violent outcry, wordless but eloquent. Springing up, she started for the door. He stepped close and grasped her arm.

"What's th' matter, Annie?" he asked, and his voice cracked with fright.

She stopped, with a hand against the papered logs and the other wrist pressed against her lips.

"What's th' matter, Annie?" he cried again, stepping toward her.

"I—I don't know—I don't—"

She looked about wildly, as though dazed and struggling to bring comprehension.

He took her fiercely by both arms and made her face him.

"What is it, Annie?" he demanded, growing rougher with the rising of concern for her. "Ain't it what you thought it was? Ain't it as fine as I'd made you think?

"Maybe it ain't much of a house, but I built it for you, Annie — for *you*. Mostly with my own hands. An' I'd never want to do nothin' again for nobody if you wasn't happy in this house."

He did not realize that she had ceased her wild staring and was gazing at him in wonder, for his great body was grief-racked.

"It's all I thought about," he went on, voice growing choked. "Just to get a place for you—so's you wouldn't have to stay back there waitin' table an' livin' God knows how! Just to have a house for you—*your* house. That was all I thought."

And she asked, quaveringly: "Mine?"

"Yes, yours," he answered. "An' I wanted to call it mine, too—at th' same time, because—'cause I—I love you—I—

"You've *got* to be happy here and let me love you — and love me!" he ended, voice mounting to a shout.

They stood there, the man straining the girl to him, gazing at one another with the sort of amazement which means quick breath and dilated nostrils.

"*Mine!*" she whispered. "And you—you love me for myself—for my own self?"—dragging the words. "It wasn't because you was sorry for me; it wasn't because you wanted somebody to cook for you? You love me—for—my—own—self—that way?"

The tears came, but words struggled through the swelling of her throat. "Why, when I saw it, I thought I had just come out here to get away from the restaurant—an' to live in—your house!"

He swallowed hard as her face fell against his chest. He did not know, could not know, the emotions that surged through her. He felt her breathing swiftly against him; he could know that much and no more. He never could understand what it meant to her: life, and a place for life—and love. When she had feared mere escape!

And just as the teakettle gave the first gurgle she shook off his grasp, raised her arms, and clasped her hands about the back of his thick neck.

"I tried to tell you," he said weakly, "that first time we was together; but I couldn't make it. I tried every time I seen you, but it wasn't no use. I loved you, Annie, but I guess th' words had to be scared out of me! I loved you—I loved you—"

She lifted her head then and looked at him soberly with wet eyes.

"That makes up for—logs, an' no wall-paper an' neighbors, an' things," she whispered.

A sucking wind drew the door shut with a slam, and in the warm gloom behind them the teakettle boiled over riotously.

The Strangler

By Jack Harrower

IT was one of those cold, raw, blustery March nights.

A young woman—Miss Wilkes—stood anxiously peering from the window of her room on the top floor of a house on West End Avenue. It was after midnight, and she was growing somewhat nervous over the delayed return of her old father from a meeting of a G. A. R. Post, of which he was a member.

At last she breathed a sigh of relief. The stooped, gray-haired figure of the old soldier turned the corner of the side street and proceeded slowly up the avenue toward his home in the center of the block. The high wind swept full in his face, and buffeted the aged veteran about so that he fairly staggered as he made his way with enfeebled steps, gray head bent low.

The girl at the window noted another figure coming in the opposite direction — a great hulking form of a man, lumbering along.

It was plain to see that he was slightly under the influence of liquor. The two forms collided under a lamppost. Miss Wilkes saw her father glance up and smilingly proffer apologies.

She could not see the other's features, but only a great fist which was shaken angrily in the old veteran's face.

Suddenly the girl saw the fist open, and the long, sinewy fingers leap forward and encircle her father's throat; the other hand of the stranger then clutched the back of his victim's neck. Horrified, she saw them tighten like the coils of a snake; the old gentleman's gray face went purple under the grip of the strangler; his eyes bulged from their sockets, while his tongue protruded from wide-open jaws.

The hulking form of the big brute shook the other like a rat; the old man's form went limp, and as his assailant's fingers released their grip at last his victim sank to the sidewalk in a huddled heap.

With a piercing cry Miss Wilkes fell forward, swooning upon the floor of her room.

The brutal murder caused great indignation throughout the city. But although a squad of detectives were as-

signed to hunt down the strangler, no trace of him could be found.

Miss Wilkes's meager description was of little assistance.

Three nights later the body of a little boy of twelve was found in a deserted section of East New York. About his neck were the same purple imprints of long, thin fingers as marked old Mr. Wilkes's throat.

The police saw at once that this was a maniac with whom they had to deal, for robbery was not the motive in either case.

Forty-eight hours after this tragedy a printer who worked on the night force of a newspaper returned to his Bronx home at 4 A.M. His body was found in the vestibule of the house in which he lived, and the purple marks of the formidable strangler were also upon his throat.

But he, being a powerful man, had evidently struggled desperately for his life; his clothes were torn, and he clutched a lock of long coarse black hair in his fingers.

The very next night a policeman patrolling his beat through West Seventy-First Street came upon the body of a young and beautiful girl lying at the foot of the steps leading to the home of her father, Mr. Claring, the prominent Wall Street broker.

When the news of this final brutality of the strangler became public in the papers the next morning a great wave of tremendous indignation and fear swept over the entire population of New York.

Yet the police were helpless; no slightest clue to the murderer could be found anywhere — only those telltale purple marks of the long, thin fingers about the throats of his victims.

People were now afraid to travel about after dark even in the vicinity of their own homes if the neighborhood chanced to be deserted. Strong, courageous men who had to be about at night and in the early morning hurried along in trepidation, glancing furtively about as they walked, and jumping sharply around if they heard a footfall in back of them.

The whole great city was obsessed with the fear of the strangler; a reign of terror gripped everybody, for rich and poor, young children and women were all alike to this mysterious, murderous maniac.

The efforts of the police were redoubled with promises of promotion from headquarters, and a reward of ten thousand dollars, offered by Mr. Claring, the father of the murdered girl, for the apprehension of the dreaded strangler.

In a squalid two-room apartment of a tenement house on the East Side two brothers, Willie and Joe Grinley, fifteen and sixteen years of age respectively, sat reading a newspaper spread out on a bare table, containing the accounts of the latest atrocity of the strangler. They were miserably clad, their thin sallow faces and puny bodies speaking eloquently of lack of sufficient nourishment.

They looked up from the paper, stared in wide-eyed terror at each other, and then stole a furtive glance at the hulking form of a drunken man sprawled upon a tattered couch in the front room. His hands were folded across his great chest—unusual hands they were, with remarkably long, white and sinewy fingers.

"It's *him* all right," whispered Willie Grinley in a terror born of a lifetime of fear and brutality at the hands of the brute sleeping on the couch.

"Yes, Willie," whispered Joe in the same tones. "I always was afraid of his long, white fingers. They ain't natural. Even when I was about ten year old I kin remember bein' scared of 'em."

They never alluded to their father otherwise than as *him* or *he*.

Willie clutched Joe's arm.

"D'yer remember last week when he told me to get the whisky bottle frum the shelf an' dropped it?"

Joe nodded.

"An' he give yer that black eye. I'd like to fix him fer that!"

He glowered upon the form of his sleeping father. The only friend Joe had in the world was his brother; they clung to each other loyally in their mutual suffering and misery at the hands of their unnatural parent.

Ever since they could remember they had toiled like slaves at any odd jobs they could get, bringing home their hard-earned little money to the brute, who beat and maltreated and swore at them by way of reward. So great was their fear of him that never for an instant did they entertain thoughts of rebellion from the insufferable tyranny.

When such thoughts did enter their terrified minds they dismissed them instantly with a shudder. They would never dare oppose him!

"I never told yer what else he did beside givin' me the black eye," whispered Willie, placing a thin hand to the still swollen and discolored member. "I've known ever since then that he wuz the—the strangler."

"How?" asked Joe hoarsely.

"W'y, when I smashed the bottle he jumped over an' grabbed me round the throat with those—those long fingers. Gee! I t'ought it wuz all over, Joe.

"I could feel myself goin' fast. Then he let up an' sez: 'No, I won't kill me bread an' butter an' whisky. Take that, yer brat!' An' he sent me spinnin' with his fist in me eye. That's how I learned what them white fingers wuz for."

"Why didn't yer tell me before, Willie?"

"Aw, I wuz scared stiff—you know."

Joe nodded understandingly.

"Gee! Ten thousan' dollars, Joe. We c'u'd get that reward if—"

The terrified look in the other's eyes halted him.

"Oh, I know we can't! He'd kill us before they got him. But then"—added Willie in an access of fear—"he's li'ble to kill us, anyway. He's gettin' worse every day. The whisky's sure got him goin' now. He's not right—his eyes looks queer to me the last few days."

Again the elder brother nodded, and stole a glance at those long, white talons resting on the great chest of the slumbering man. He shivered and rose from his chair.

"Well, Willie, I gotter be goin' to night school. Don't think about it any more."

He leaned over and patted his brother on the shoulder, who was now staring in a fascinated terror at the brute on the lounge—a new terror born of the thought his own words had conjured up.

"He ain't goin' to strangle us. Don't yer remember what he said? We're his bread an' butter an' whisky."

With a reassuring smile, which was not only intended to comfort Willie, but also to bolster up his own courage, Joe turned and walked through to the other room. As he closed the door on the way out he glanced at the man on the couch.

And he distinctly caught the glint of his black piercing eyes looking out at him through almost closed lashes!

With a distinct shock Joe closed the door and stood outside meditating for a full minute. His father was not asleep; he had been lying there watching them read the paper.

But the boy knew he had not heard their conversation, for they had talked in low whispers, as they always did when in his presence.

Yet he knew they were discussing him, for he had seen them reading the accounts, and had no doubt noted their furtive glances in his direction. Joe at last consoled himself with the reflection that he would not do away with the sources of his "bread and butter and whisky," and so betook himself in the direction of the night school.

Meanwhile the man on the couch

surveyed through half-shut eyes his other son who now sat perusing the paper.

"Talking about me," he mused to himself. "The dirty little beggars have guessed. Saw 'em lookin' at me hands. I shouldn't have grabbed the kid aroun' the throat that time.

"It wuz a dead give 'way. They've put two an' two together. I know they ain't wasting any love on me—an' there is that ten thousan' reward. That'll put nerve in 'em to give me away to the police. It'll take a couple uv days fer 'em to screw up their courage to squeal. Well, I guess it's up to me."

He moved, yawned, threw his hands above his head as if just waking, and sat up, rubbing his eyes. Slowly he arose and came toward the boy sitting eying him apprehensively in the other room.

He smiled upon him by way of encouragement — an expression little Willie had never seen on that forbidding dark face in all his recollection. It only served to heighten his fears.

"Lookin' at the sportin' news, eh, Willie?"

"Ye-es," gulped the boy, hastily turning the page.

Still smiling, the white lean fingers jumped out and clutched the youth about the throat so he could not cry out. He lifted him up thus and set him on his feet. Holding him at arm's length he snarled:

"So, you brat! You an' y'r brother know the secret, do yer? Plannin' to give me up an' cop that ten thousan', weren't yer?"

He laughed cruelly — it was more like a snarl of a beast than human laughter.

Slowly the snaky fingers pressed tighter, ever tighter, about the slim neck of his son. His other hand hung carelessly at his side; one hand only was necessary for this job.

That peculiar look Willie had mentioned to his brother was now leaping forth from the black, glittering eyes. It was not the light of insanity—merely the expression of a brute who gloats in taking a human life and witnessing the torture.

He prolonged it as much as he could, then with an oath threw the limp, still form upon a dirty cot alongside the table. He stood gloating over it, talking aloud in the fiendish glee of this his latest crime:

"That makes five—five in two weeks! An' I never knew till I strangled old man Wilkes what these long fingers o' mine were made for. As soon as I clutched that old beggar I knew—I knew!"

He swore a terrible oath, and holding his hand before his face moved and twitched his long, white fingers deliciously, as a child might gloat over a new-found plaything; then he resumed his soliloquy:

"What a feelin' it were! I may strangle a hundred more, but it will never feel as good as that first time. Never! Now fer the other brat. He'll be back frum night school in an hour. I'll go out an' fill up this flask again, an' come back an' wait fer him. That'll be six—two in one night! Grinley, y're doin' well."

He turned the miserable oil lamp on the table low and shambled out.

He did not know that Joe had returned, having retraced his footsteps after reaching the school, filled with a vague terror of something dreadful happening in the two rooms.

He had opened the door in the front room in time to see his father clutch at his brother's throat. Transfixed with horror he stood looking in through the partly opened door, too terrified to move or cry aloud.

When the brute had said, "Now fer the other brat," it brought him to his senses. Softly he had closed the doors, and stumbled out into the street.

He stood a few doors below, leaning against a railing for support. His head was swimming; his thin legs sagged under him; everything was blurred before his staring eyes.

All he knew was that he had lost his brother—the only friend he had in the world. He saw his father's hulking form shuffle out, turn and walk in the opposite direction and enter the saloon on the corner.

The staring, purple face of his brother leaped before him, a great wave of fury swept his slight frame; he forgot his terror of that menacing form in the mad cry of vengeance which sang in his brain, bringing with it a reckless courage he had never before known. A plan took shape clearly in his mind.

Instantly he sped back to the house, opened the door of the front room and entered.

He picked up a small hammer which lay on a shelf. Placing a chair behind the door, so that it would meet the latter as it half opened, he took his place upon it.

For an interminable time it seemed he stood there waiting, but the fury in his little heart and brain never abated, seeming to grow more overmastering each second as he stared with stony eyes at the still form on the cot in the other room.

At last the shuffling steps sounded in the hall outside; the knob turned, and the door swung slowly open. As the head of the brute appeared the boy brought the hammer down with all the weight of his body in back of it.

The man grunted, clutched at the air with his long fingers, and sank in a heap upon a chair beside the wall.

Joe had fallen from his chair from the sheer impetus of the blow. He picked up some stout cords he had handy and straightening the hulking form in the chair strapped him securely, body, arms and legs.

With an effort he dragged the chair to the front of the room, opposite a long cracked mirror. Then he gagged him securely with a handkerchief.

He placed his head to the great chest; the heart was beating; his pulse was beating slowly. With an odd smile the boy left him thus.

When the brute recovered consciousness a half hour later, he stared dully about him. Recollection returned; through the cracked mirror he could see plainly the room in back of him, and that other room with the cot upon which lay the still form of the boy.

The oil lamp gave just sufficient light to reveal everything dimly.

"The other brat got me," he thought. "He's not here. Gone f'r the police. The jig's up. What a fool I were not to get him before he left the first time!"

He sat staring through the cracked mirror at the reflection of the couch with its still burden. Somehow it fascinated him; he could not draw his eyes away from it. A nameless fear clutched at his heart as he gazed; it kept growing upon him.

Thus a half hour passed—yet not for one instant could he draw his eyes away from that still form.

He wondered vaguely why Joe had not returned with the police. It would be a relief to have them come and unbind him, and take him away from this disquieting spectacle.

He straightened suddenly with a shiver. The left hand of the boy on the cot had moved!

In mortal terror he stared with wild eyes at the mirror. He tried to smile assuringly then, for the hand was still again.

"Seein' things," he thought. "Wish the cops—"

Again the hand moved—and kept moving. Slowly the head raised, and he saw the staring eyes. The form sat up, slowly, very slowly, arose on its feet, and came still more slowly toward him.

The brute in the chair was shaking with mortal terror; great drops of perspiration stood out on his ugly features. The form at last approached to the back of his chair.

Then through the mirror he saw that it was not Willie but Joe.

The boy paced slowly in front of

the chair, and stood shaking his finger at him, his thin face now livid with pent-up fury.

"Y'r killed the only friend I had—y'r own son. Now, y'r snake, I'm goin' to finish you—the same way. Y'd get the electric chair, anyway, but that's too good f'r yer. An' besides, I've got ter settle with yer f'r poor little Willie."

The boy took a stout cord from his pocket, formed into a noose.

He threw it over the brute's great head, and fitted it in place about the heavy bull neck. The man struggled desperately to release himself, a great horror in his black, glittering eyes; but it was useless—Joe had bound him too securely.

Placing himself behind the chair again the boy braced himself with one foot on the rung of the chair and his left hand on the brute's shoulder.

"This is fer Willie," he snarled into the man's ear, and straightening himself commenced a steady, slow pull upon the cord—just as slowly as he had seen the long white fingers twist about his brother's throat.

He seemed possessed of the strength of a dozen men; he kept on pulling upon the cord long after the hulking form had ceased to twist and writhe.

He released his grip at last, bent over and felt the wrist and placed his ear to the great chest. Heart and pulse was stilled.

Slowly he turned and walked to the door and opened it. The janitor of the tenement was passing in the hall.

"Hello, Joe, what's the matter? Y'r look queer."

"Did y'r ever hear tell uv the strangler?" queried Joe quietly.

"Do I read the papers?" grinned the man.

"Well, the strangler is my father. He's inside here—dead. Go get a cop."

The man stared at Joe incredulously. The boy beckoned him to the open door. He stared in, gave a cry of terror, and rushed outside.

When an officer entered two minutes later Joe was on his knees, sobbing his heart out over the still form of his brother which he had dragged out from beneath the cot.

Adding Insult

By Frank Condon

THE head of the service—newly appointed and considerably cocksure—was making his first official statement, and the reporters were standing before him, some of them concealing their smiles.

"I want you fellows to understand that I'm the chief," the new official said. "What I say goes. Nobody is going to tell me what to do. I'll take orders from nobody. I'm the boss of the police department of this city, and I'm a real boss—not a rubber-stamp chief," he went on. "I want you to

tell the public that the department is in vile condition. The man who preceded me was misguided, to put it charitably. I'm going to clean things up. When I get through this town will be fit to live in. And now if you'll write it down carefully I'll give you a little idea of what I propose to do."

Whereupon the reporters gravely wrote it down, and on the following morning, with the grapefruit and bacon, the population of New York City learned exactly what the new head of the service thought about the police department as he found it and what he intended to do to make life more worth while. New Yorkers are old hands at listening to promises.

" And among other things," said the new chief, " you can tell New Yorkers that the wire-tapping business is ended. There will be no more swindles perpetrated by the various gangs of wire-tappers that have made the police department look like a joke. I'm going to make this town so hot for those thieves that their skin will begin peeling off when they get as near town as Newark, New Jersey. No wire-tapper, rich or poor, influential or no-account, can do business in New York. Put that in the paper and make it strong."

The head of the service added further details in emphatic language, all of which made the future look exceedingly dark and bleak for the hard-working gentry of the wireless wires.

Also, it made good reading, and it had no more appreciative readers than the five prosperous, well-dressed, well-fed men that one might have noticed at five o'clock in the afternoon, lounging amid the chairs of the bronze-room in the Planters' Hotel, Palm Beach, Florida.

Looking them over with the casual eye of a disinterested observer, one would have concluded that these were the idle rich of whom so much is heard, and one would thereby make a serious mistake. Rich, yes; idle, no.

In the hotel book their names were written down.

The big, bronzed-faced man at the end of the table was Jim Martin. The others were Cockburn, Galbraith, Mooney, and Schwartz, and the five of them represented the highest form that the art of wireless wire-tapping has attained. Big Jim Martin led them.

If you happen to be familiar with the police affairs of the country, you will have heard of Big Jim Martin, and this little group was prominent in Chief Perry's mind when he stated to the reporters that there would be no more wire-tapping swindles.

After a period of considerable stress and profit the Martin guerrillas were resting. Palm Beach is a long distance from New York. It is an excellent place to seek after the metropolitan police have served notice.

Following the little deal in which the Haverford bank president had invested the fortunes of his depositors in the chances of White Peggie, a three-year-old, running at Lexington, Big Jim had gathered his flock about him and explained that a temporary absence from New York would be the best thing.

The Haverford man had shrieked to high heaven, contrary to the rule in such cases made and provided.

There were at the time seven first-grade groups of wire-tappers in town, but Jim Martin's bunch was the class. That was largely because of Jim Martin himself. Mr. Martin had more persuasive conversation in his person than a pretty girl at a charity bazaar.

He could talk the gold filling out of a Scotch tooth without any effort whatever, and this quality fitted him for the leadership of Cockburn, Galbraith, *et al.*

And now, Mr. Martin, with a Carolina perfecto drooping from his lips, was engaged in the perusal of the New York paper that had arrived in the morning.

The Northern mails had been dropped at the Planters' Hotel a half-hour before, and the five New Yorkers were reading their favorite journals with deep interest.

"It says in this one," Cockburn grinned, "that the best we get is hanging the minute we get off the train."

"No," Galbraith corrected gravely, "my paper states very plainly that the police are now under orders to bust us over the head on sight. No arguments, no arrests, no evidence—just a plain, hickory club on top of the skull. I would judge, in an offhand way, that this new Perry man is a bloodthirsty creature."

Martin read the notice of banishment without comment. He tossed the paper upon the table and smiled.

"Boys," he said slowly, "how long have we been away from town?"

"Three months," Galbraith replied.

"I didn't intend to return for at least another month," Martin mused. "But inactivity always makes me restless — inactivity and fool interviews with the reporters. Suppose we pay up here. I think there's a morning train with through Pullmans. This boy Perry needs personal attention. I think this must be the same Perry that ran the private detective agency on Forty-Fourth Street, and if it is—"

Mr. Martin flicked the ashes from his cigar and rose to his feet. Galbraith paid the check and the crowd sauntered toward the lobby.

II.

AMONG the prominent New Yorkers one might meet each afternoon in the concert hall at the Plaza or killing an idle hour in the lounge of the big hotel was Dr. Horace McCutcheon, the celebrated surgeon and philanthropist.

Dr. McCutcheon founded one hospital for poor children and endowed the city with a dozen small parks so that suffering mothers and children might breathe comparatively fresh air.

Therefore, he is a man of note in the metropolis, and the newspapers speak of him with respect and admiration, and interview him upon civic questions as frequently as he will permit them to do so.

One of the eminent surgeon's casual acquaintances at the hotel was Mr. John Carlisle, of Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. Carlisle was a dentist, and had been in New York but a short time when he formed the acquaintance of Dr. McCutcheon.

Shortly thereafter it became apparent to the surgeon that the Atlanta tooth specialist was largely in need of a guardian.

"Yes, sir," the Southerner had said to his famous friend, with the warm enthusiasm that sometimes comes out of Georgia; "I have stumbled upon a remarkable opportunity to make money — a most remarkable opportunity. The annoying thing about it is that I must return to Atlanta and obtain money for investment."

"What is it?" Dr. McCutcheon inquired.

"Horse-racing, sir," Mr. Carlisle smiled. "A chance to drive the harpoon deep into the swindling flanks of those unhung thieves—the keepers of pool-rooms."

Whereupon, Mr. Carlisle from Atlanta explained the golden chance.

He had made the acquaintance of three charming and wealthy sporting men while coming from Atlanta to the national convention of the Allied Dentists, and in the necessarily brief time on board train he had struck up a most unusual friendship with the three—and with one of them in particular he had become most astoundingly well acquainted. The name of the gentleman was Mr. Joseph Keller.

Mr. Keller had taken an immediate and decided interest in the Atlanta gentleman, and to prove the depths of his liking he had offered to admit Mr. Carlisle into a most promising little enterprise connected with the business of horse racing.

Already Mr. Carlisle had journeyed about town in company with Mr. Keller and his friends, and had met a number of bright, pleasant persons. He had dropped into an office of the telegraph company and had spoken briefly

to a tall, active man who appeared from an inner office in his shirt-sleeves.

This was Mr. Mosher, the district racing manager. He was in a great hurry, and there was time only for a brief hand-clasp and the hope that they might all get together another time under more favorable circumstances.

Dr. McCutcheon listened to the eager recital in mild-eyed amazement. In the newspapers he had often read of New Yorkers and residents of other cities who had stumbled into such palpable traps, and had been thoroughly fleeced, but never had he personally met one of the strange, guileless breed.

"Why, Mr. Carlisle," he said slowly and kindly when the story of the scheme was over and the Southerner had generously offered to share the good luck, "that's nothing in the world but the old, time-worn, wire-tapping swindle. Surely you're sophisticated enough to know that these men whom you have met accidentally are swindlers. I thought that in this age of newspapers every one over the age of twenty-one knew that game."

"You'll pardon me, doctor," Mr. Carlisle retorted stiffly, "but Mr. Keller is not a swindler. He is a friend of mine and the enemy of swindlers. I will admit that the ethics of this case may not stand close examination, but Mr. Keller is simply beating these pool-room men to it. We get the results of the race before they can get to the pool-room man.

"We bet our money on the horse that has already won. We cash. Our friend at the telegraph office holds up the results until we have completed our transaction."

"I am trying to tell you," Dr. McCutcheon continued patiently, "that you are being made the victim of a swindle. I don't know your friends. Neither do you. But the game is old —very old and familiar, and you will save your money by—"

"I can't believe you, doctor," Carlisle interrupted. "I tell you I was down-town with Mr. Keller and others. We dropped into the office of the telegraph company quite unannounced, and there met this Mr.—Mr. —well, whatever his name was. He is an employee of the company, can't you understand? He is the man who will hold up the wire report—"

"All part of the game; been in the papers a dozen times within six months. Now look here." The surgeon pounded his clenched hand upon the table. "I don't care whether you get angry or not. I hate to see a man make a fool of himself. I know more about New York than you do. I live here. I read about such people as you every day. I am simply trying to warn you away from a brace game that is slightly older than Jerusalem. And I'll go further than mere conversation, because I am interested. We'll go down to police headquarters, where I am known, and turn this whole business over to the officers. This bunch of thieves needs a turn up in Sing Sing, and if you'll do your part we'll put them there."

It required the better part of an evening for Dr. McCutcheon to convince the Atlanta man that Keller and his pals needed police attention, but in the end Carlisle agreed.

Within the next thirty-six hours he, Carlisle, should be in Atlanta; should visit his bank and withdraw fifteen thousand dollars and return at once to New York. This he could not do if he followed Dr. McCutcheon's advice.

In the McCutcheon motor the two men skimmed down to police headquarters the following morning and were received by Chief Perry.

The surgeon quickly and briefly outlined to the chief the business that had brought them, and in a few moments half a dozen plain-clothes men drifted into the private office and listened to the conversation.

"Now tell us," the chief said, turning to Carlisle.

When the Atlantan had finished the chief glanced at his men.

"That," said one of the detectives,

"is Big Jim Martin. The other two, according to the description, are Cockburn and Mooney. He hasn't mentioned any one who might be Galbraith or Schwartz."

"What were you to do next?" the chief asked of Carlisle.

"I was to go home to Atlanta and return with fifteen thousand dollars. Mr. Keller said that we would probably be able to get into action by Friday or Saturday afternoon."

"And you've been in the poolroom?"

"Twice."

"Where is it?"

"No. 6430 West Thirty-Seventh Street."

"And you were going to put your money into this?" the chief continued, regarding Carlisle with a pitying glance. "Don't you ever read the papers? Didn't you ever hear of wire-tappers?"

"I regarded Mr. Keller—"

"Keller!" roared the chief. "His name is Big Jim Martin. He's known to the police in every big town in America. It's the suckers like you from half-baked towns that make all the trouble for us. If Dr. McCutcheon hadn't steered you in here you'd be trimmed down to the bone before the end of the week, and the papers would be guying the department once again.

"Not long ago I told the people of New York, through the papers, that the days of wire-tapping in this town were ended. And now comes this gang, with a live one, all ready to serve."

The chief glanced scathingly toward Carlisle and then turned to one of his men.

"Inspector," he said, "I want you to take complete charge of this affair and get that gang with the goods. Dr. McCutcheon, you have been the means of saving this man a lot of money, and of preventing the department from being ridiculed at the outset of my administration.

"I promised to give the town a better deal than it had been getting, and I'm going to do it. Get a bunch of men and surround that house on Thirty-Seventh Street, inspector. Keep your eye on whoever goes in and out, and when the time comes for this race to be run I want you to get in there and nab the whole crowd. Do you understand?"

The inspector nodded.

"Where was this friend of yours to get the tip?" the chief asked of Carlisle.

"In the saloon on the corner."

"You've got to have fifteen thousand?"

"That's what I thought I could raise on such short notice."

"Ten thousand is enough," continued the head of the service. "You'll go right ahead the same as though you had gone down to Atlanta. You'll play them with ten thousand dollars the day after to-morrow. That will give you time enough to have gone down to Atlanta and returned."

"You mean—" Carlisle faltered.

"I mean that you'll play your race with police money," the chief snapped. "We'll supply you with ten one thousand dollar bills—*and they'll be marked!*"

The inspector who was to have charge nodded comprehendingly. Dr. McCutcheon smiled, and Carlisle looked uncomfortable and unhappy, like a man who has worked his way into a thoroughly disagreeable situation and doesn't exactly see the way out.

On their way up-town the surgeon sought to cheer the Southerner.

"Didn't I tell you that this was an old game," he remarked. "You never had a chance. Now you've a chance to get even with a crowd of scoundrels. I don't mind saying that this new chief is a bit inclined to be loud in his methods, but he apparently knows something; and if you do your part intelligently, this man Martin will travel up the river. You've got to play your part, now."

"It looks like it," Carlisle answered ruefully.

III.

No. 6430 West Thirty-Seventh Street is a staid, elderly looking, and apparently respectable residence, three stories in height, and guarded from street urchins by the spiked iron fence that is slowly disappearing from New York.

A flight of broad stone steps leads up to a double doorway and two large windows, behind which are serious-looking white lace curtains, blinking down upon the street in such an eminently respectable manner that you would never associate gambling, horse-racing, and similar evils with the structure.

But if you were to be admitted—through an iron door, with a little peep-hole in it for the concealed lookout—and if you were to hurry up the long flights to the third floor, you would find there indisputable evidences of gambling.

A partition with a cashier's "office" was at one side of the long room, and a huge blackboard filled one end, and there were charts, telegraph instruments, and wires everywhere.

And if further doubt assailed you on a Thursday afternoon, you might have noticed five recently returned New Yorkers in the pool-room. They were Big Jim Martin, Cockburn, Galbraith, Mooney, and Schwartz.

Mr. Mooney was the "employee of the telegraph company" whom the simple-souled Carlisle had met in his shirt-sleeves.

"When does this thing come off?" inquired Cockburn cheerfully. "I mean, at what precise hour to-morrow?"

"The stage is set for three or a little after," Big Jim grinned. "Did or did not you fellows notice anything funny when you came in from the street?"

The crowd laughed.

They had noticed, being sharp of eye and given to close observation. They had seen detectives planted in the café back room, in the flower-shop on the opposite side of the street, in the second-story windows of the house adjoining.

There were men from Perry's office all over the block, and not a movement was made by the Martin crowd that was not known immediately at police headquarters.

Thursday went by without incident. Big Jim went to dinner alone, and afterward attended a theater, while three plain-clothes men lounged in the lobby. Cockburn, in an entirely different part of the city, was accompanied by a silent and mysterious body-guard. Galbraith was followed by four expert shadowers.

The net was closing.

The trap was to be sprung in mid-afternoon. The head of the service smiled and rubbed his hands with the satisfaction of a man who is doing something excellent.

And then came strange doings.

Mr. Carlisle received from Chief Perry's hand ten one-thousand-dollar bills, each one skilfully marked for later identification by the police. The district racing manager down-town had arranged to hold back the pool-room's report until the bets were recorded.

At three o'clock one of Keller's men would take his station in the saloon telephone-booth. In company with Keller, Carlisle would hurry across the street, dash up the steps, and place about twenty-five thousand dollars of Carlisle's and Keller's money on the horse which had already won.

As the hour of three approached the neighborhood of Thirty-Seventh Street became infested with minions of the police. Every areaway held its plain-clothes officer, and the yards at the rear of No. 6430 were alive with men.

Only by aeroplane could human beings escape from that respectable residence, and then to the accompaniment of revolver-shots.

The head of the service waited in his

office for precise news. The hour for acting had come—had passed. Uneasiness seized upon the new chief, just as it attacked the massed police uptown.

At three-fifteen Mr. Carlisle, accompanied by Keller, was to have walked hastily up the watched steps. A few instants later Inspector Murdock, in charge, was to have followed, and the raid was to have begun.

Something had gone amiss!

Inspector Murdock waited impatiently. At three-fifty o'clock he broke bounds and attacked No. 6430 West Thirty-Seventh—and found an empty, totally empty house, absolutely deserted, and echoing hollowly to the tramp of police feet.

Pinned to a door on the top of the first landing was a long newspaper clipping, in which Chief Perry, newly appointed, had, some time before, assured the reporters and the public that New York town was rid of wire-tappers!

And at five o'clock that afternoon, in the smoke-room of the Badger Express, north-bound and ninety miles from New York, six men sipped various pleasant drinks and conversed in an animated way. Five of them were Big Jim Martin, Cockburn, Galbraith, Mooney, and Schwartz.

The other one — the sixth — was Omaha Joe, the newest addition to the Martin outfit, valuable because of his easy manner in society and his excellent appearance. Any name suited Omaha Joe—Mr. John Carlisle, of Atlanta, as well as another.

At the moment he was slowly, and to the huge admiration of his companions, counting out and arranging in a neat row about the edge of the polished table ten one-thousand-dollar bills which, a few hours previous, had belonged to the metropolitan police!

MEETING BY MOONLIGHT

By Glenn Ward Dresbach

THE night is sweet with flowers,
And the flowers are in the dew;
And sweet with the warmth of love
Are the lips of you.

The wings of the wind are folded
In still, untroubled rest,
And my soul folds its wings
Close to your breast.

You came to me from the moonlight,
Over the wet, cool grass,
And turned the sands to gold
In my hour-glass.

You came to me from the moonlight,
And into the moonlight you go,
Leaving the whispered words,
"I love you so."