10¢ PER COPY SATURDAY JAN. 18 BY THE YEAR $4.00

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

If You Believe It, It's So

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "White Tigers," "God's Messenger," etc.

GIVEN Beautiful Crystal Water Set

Yes, absolutely given. We will send this wonderful set without a cent for you to pay. Seven superb pieces. Six one-half pint tumblers and three-pint pitcher of dainty, extra thin blown glass, with sheen like finest European ware. Each piece with any initial you want in **Sterling Silver** and silver wreath. Also edged with Sterling Silver. A set that any household will be proud to show to guests. A superb ornament to any table—and a display for the sideboard between meals. This beautiful glassware yours if you accept this special offer now—only a few sets left.

Sterling Silver **Initial and Decorations**

It's So Easy

Send your name on coupon. Or just send a post card. State initial you want on set. I will send you 12 beautiful colored patriotic pictures—showing our brave soldiers and sailors in action. They are wonderful. Distribute these remarkable pictures free among your friends on our greatest of all 35c offers. Some folks do it in half an hour. You'll be surprised how everyone wants one. When you distribute the pictures, the beautiful 7-piece Set is yours to keep—Free.

H. A. SMITH, President
180 N. Wabash Ave., Dept. 30 Chicago, Ill.

I want the beautiful Silver Initialed, Silver Edged Water Set, also the 12 Patriotic Pictures free and details of special offer.

Name.....

Street or R. F. D.....

Town..... State.....

Letter wanted on Set.....

Send Coupon Don't put this off. Now is the time to get this beautiful set. Send name and address on the coupon or a post card—TODAY. Write plainly initial letter wanted on 7-Piece Set.

The Old Way

Factory
Branch House
Salesman
Agent
You

Two Ways of Selling the OLIVER Typewriter

The New Way

Factory
You

The New Way Saves You $43

THE OLD WAY: It cost $43 to sell you a typewriter. Rents of offices in many cities, salaries, commissions and other costly practices — each demanded its share.

THE NEW WAY: We ship from the factory to you, eliminating all wastes. This saves the $43, and it now goes to you. A $100 Oliver costs you but $57. Why waste $43 by buying typewriters the old way?

These Facts Will Save You Money

Note that this advertisement is signed by The Oliver Typewriter Company itself. It is not the advertisement of a concern offering second-hand or rebuilt Olivers of an earlier model. The Oliver Typewriter Company makes only new machines.

The old way, as explained above, was wasteful and wrong. So people have welcomed our new economical plan and our output has multiplied.

We offer for $57 the exact machine which formerly sold at $100. This is our Model Nine, the finest typewriter we ever built. It has the universal keyboard, so any stenographer may turn to it without the slightest hesitation and do better work more easily.

And it has dozens of superiorities not found elsewhere. For instance, it has far fewer parts. This means longer wear, and naturally few or no repairs.

This Oliver Nine is a 20-year development. If any typewriter is worth $100, it is this splendid model.

It is the same machine used by great concerns such as United States Steel Corporation, Baldwin Locomotive Works, National City Bank of New York, Pennsylvania Railroad, Otis Elevator Company and hosts of others. Such concerns demand the best. Yet they are not wasteful.

FREE TRIAL

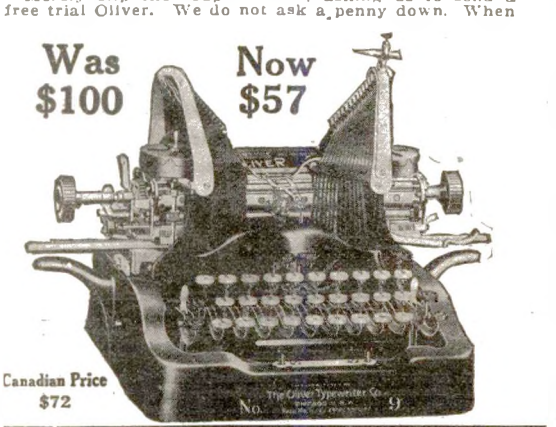
Merely clip the coupon below, asking us to send a free trial Oliver. We do not ask a penny down. When the Oliver arrives, try it out. Put it to every test. Compare its workmanship.

Then, when you are convinced that the Oliver Nine is all we claim, and you prefer it, pay us at the rate of $3 per month.

During the free trial, you are not under the slightest obligation to buy. If you wish to return it, we even refund the out-going transportation charges.

Used typewriters accepted in exchange at a fair valuation.

Or, if you would rather know more about our plans before ordering a free-trial Oliver, check the coupon for our amazing book entitled, "The High Cost of Typewriters — The Reason and the Remedy." We accompany it with our beautifully illustrated catalog describing the Oliver Nine.



Mail Today

The Oliver Typewriter Co.
1131 Oliver Typewriter Building
Chicago, Ill. (20.03)

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY
1131 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver Nine for five days free inspection. If I keep it, I will pay $57 at the rate of $3 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for.

My shipping point is.....

This does not place me under any obligation to buy. If I choose to return the Oliver, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name.....

Street Address.....

City.....State.....

Occupation or Business .....

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME XCIII — NUMBER 1

CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 18, 1919

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

FOUR SHORT STORIES

VERSE

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

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Entered as second class matter May 17, 1915, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

Learn Shorthand that Quick

No longer is it necessary to spend months studying shorthand. ***You can master all the lessons in K. I. Shorthand at home in five evenings.***

Don't doubt this amazing truth! Send for free lessons—also convincing proof that this is the simplest, most practical, lowest-cost course in stenography by *personal correspondence instruction.*

K·I· Shorthand

Simplified Stenography

Undoubtedly you have heard of this new and revolutionary shorthand system—the simplest and most practical in the world. Used in the Army and Navy and in numerous other governmental places. Used by court officials, by doctors, business men, teachers, clergymen, lawyers, reporters—and in hundreds of other occupations.

It is the *universal speed-script—the easy to-learn, never-forgetable,* lightning writing.

Not only is K. I. Shorthand acquired with wonderful speed and ease—but it is so standardized as to make for *perfect legibility* and *absolute accuracy.* Notes years old may be read as easily as when fresh.

SEND FOR FREE PROOF LESSONS

Everybody needs K. I. Shorthand—*those in business and the professions* for their personal ready use—as well as regular stenographers. It is the greatest time-saver compared to the amount of effort and *insignificant cost* necessary to acquire it. It will help you to record precious ideas instantly. It will do your remembering for you. It develops your all-round efficiency tremendously.

If you are going to be a stenographer, learn K. I. Shorthand because it will *fit you for practical work far ahead of the old systems.* Learn it because you will give greater satisfaction to your employer by enabling you to *transcribe all dictation perfectly,* no matter how complex. No guessing necessary.

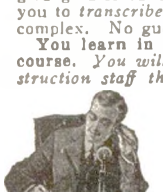
You learn in your own home by our mail tuition course. *You will have all the personal help of our instruction staff that you need.* We are not content to let you shift for yourself after you receive the lessons. When your stenographic competency is established, we award you a recognized Certificate of Proficiency.

Thousands have learned K. I. Shorthand who never could master the old, complicated system.

TESTIMONIALS

Let us send you copies of letters received from persons of all ages, in many vocations. From boys and girls, from professional and business persons, from some over 80 years of age! **You will be absolutely convinced that K. I. Shorthand** is offered on the most liberal terms right now. Send for the first two lessons free. *You may then continue the entire course on a month's approval.* We give you a **positive guarantee** that you can learn, or no cost to you. King Institute is incorporated in New York State, $100,000 authorized capital.

"Go ahead! I am getting it in K.I. Shorthand."



"Talk as fast as you like. I am taking it down in K. I. Shorthand."

Cut out and mail the coupon, or write a letter asking for free lessons, complete information, and many convincing testimonials. Mention this magazine.

Write to either address:

KING INSTITUTE, Inc.

EB-801, Station F New York, N. Y.

or

8 So. Wabash Avenue, EB-801, Chicago

KING INSTITUTE, Inc.

Please send me FREE the first lessons in K. I. Shorthand, also full information.

Name .....

Address EB-801

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50
The Argosy Comb'n	
The Argosy . . .	1.75
All-Story Weekly.	

Combination Line Rate $3.25 less 3% cash discount

Feb. 15th Argosy Combination Forms Close Jan. 23rd.

"A New Force In Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Department of the Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

SWELL SUIT FREE FOR 2 HOURS' WORK. Show it to your friends and make $5.00 an hour in your spare time. We show how. Costs nothing to try. Write quick for measure blank and our handy sample outfit. All Free. We deliver everything free. Look into this. Paragon Tailoring Co., Dept. 1501, Chicago.

INSYDE TYRES—Inner Armor For Auto Tires. Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blow outs. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

AGENTS.—PATRIOTIC PORTRAITS for soldiers' homes. Big money now. Pan American Supply Co., 448E No. Wells Street, Chicago, Ill.

THE POLICE KEY ANSWERS THE PURPOSE OF A WHOLE BUNCH OF ORDINARY KEYS; opens almost everything; every house owner should have one; sent postpaid on receipt of 20 cents. Agents wanted. Sharpe Mfg. Co., 48 Van Houten Street, Paterson, N. J.

YOUNG MAN, WOULD YOU ACCEPT A TAILOR-MADE SUIT just for showing it to your friends? Then write Banner Tailoring Co., Dept. 149, Chicago, and get beautiful samples, styles and a wonderful offer.

HISTORY OF THE WORLD WAR. MOST COMPLETE AND OFFICIAL BOOK PUBLISHED. Best terms. Credit given. Biggest outfit free. Write quick. Ziegler Co., 3W, East Harrison, Chicago, Ill.

"WRENCH OF A THOUSAND SIZES." A Pipe and Nut Wrench in one for Chauffeur, Machinist, Hardware Man, etc. Retails 75c; sample 50c postpaid. Write for full selling proposition. Colvit Laboratories, Dept. W, 565 W. Washington St., Chicago.

War Necessity: Government creates demand, you take the orders; every farmer, merchant, business and professional man a prospect; $6 to $12 daily, more if you have agents helping. Progressive League, 1561 Larrabee Street, Chicago.

AGENTS—WITH EXPERIENCE, SELL TO CONSUMERS MADE-TO-MEASURE SUITS $15.50, $20.00, and $25.00. Build independent business with big money. Outfits furnished. Midland Tailors, Dept. 5, 19 So. Wells St., Chicago.

HELP WANTED

GET A GOVERNMENT POSITION THROUGH US. POSITION OR MONEY BACK GUARANTY. Thousands of men and women, 16 to 60, needed in Washington and elsewhere for the years of "reconstruction" ahead. We'll coach you quickly by mail for Civil Service examination and appointment. Permanent; easy hours; paid vacations; higher salaries. Our free Book "RG" gives list of positions. **Write** for it. Washington Civil Service School, 2001 Marden Bldg., Washington, D. C.

LADIES TO SEW AT HOME FOR A LARGE PHILADELPHIA FIRM. Good pay; nice work; no canvassing. Send stamped envelope for prices paid. Universal Co., Dept. 26, Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

LAND PRICES ADVANCE after every war. Get yours now. 40,000 acres in Antrim and Kalkaska Counties of hardwood land. Farmers grow rich here. 10 acres up. $15 to $30 per acre. Terms to the working man. Large tracts for stockraising. Fine climate, markets, schools. Photographs and fine booklet free. Send your name in today. Swigart Land Company, Y1215 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

10 ACRE FARM—Best clay loam soil; new 3-room house; 100 chickens; overlooking two beautiful lakes; near Hart and Shelby; surrounded by splendid farms and orchards; only $575; only $6 down and $6 a month. Pentwater Beach Assn., 860 Reaper Block, Chicago.

AUTOMOBILE ACCESSORIES

FORDS START EASY IN COLD WEATHER with our new 1919 carburetors. Thirty-four miles per gallon. Use cheapest gasoline or half kerosene. Increased power. Sticks for any motor. Very slow on high. Attach it yourself. Big profits to agents. Money back guarantee; 30 days trial. Air Friction Carburetor Co., 519 Madison, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

THE FASTEST SELLING HISTORY OF THE WORLD WAR is by Francis A. March, brother of General Peyton C. March, the Highest Officer in the United States Army. Complete—800 pages illustrated—official photographs. This is your chance to make $500.00 per month. Free outfit. Victory Publishing Company, 129 S. Dearborn, Chicago, Ill.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WEAR A BEAUTIFUL NEW SUIT made to your own measure **Free**, and make $35 to $50 every week? You can be the best dressed man in your town and earn a lot of extra money if you write at once for our beautiful samples and wonderful offer. The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. 283, Chicago.

AGENTS — WATERPROOF KITCHEN APRON. Needs no laundering. Every housewife buys. Dainty, durable, economical. Big money. Sample free. Thomas Co., 2107 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS—$40 TO $100 A WEEK. FREE SAMPLES. Gold and silver Sign Letters for stores and office windows. Anyone can put them on. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 400 N. Clark, Chicago.

GREATEST HISTORY OF WORLD WAR. Complete details of great battles—600 pages; 100 striking illustrations; only $2.00. 50% commission. Send 10c postage on free outfit. H. J. Smith, Publisher, 1002 Ludington Building, Chicago.

AGENTS—$50 WEEKLY AND YOUR SPRING SUIT FREE. Sell our famous popular priced made to measure suits; big, steady income guaranteed. Complete outfit free. Act quick. Commonwealth Tailors, Suite 1921, Lees Building, Chicago.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. SELL MENDETS, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN to sell your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the 5,000,000 readers of The Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.

ADDING MACHINES

AUTOMATIC ADDING MACHINE, Subtracts, Multiplies, Divides. Does work of $300 machine. Retails $10. Five-year Guarantee. Catalog and terms free. Dept. 502, Calculator Co., Grand Rapids, Mich.

AERONAUTICS

LET ME TRAIN YOU IN AVIATION. POSITIONS AT GOOD PAY READY. I was flying for years at the front. Study at home. Send for **Free Book.** Get the inside facts. Address Capt. Campbell, Chief Instructor, Natl. Aero Institute, Suite 1121, Morton Building, Chicago, Ill.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

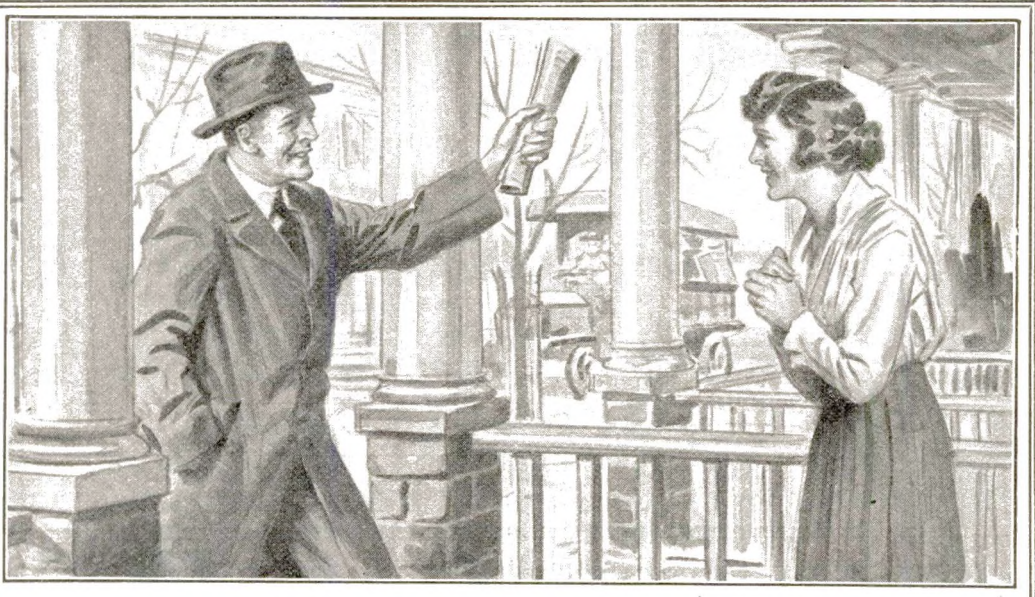
FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money-making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Writers' Service, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED FOR PUBLICATION. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss. or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our **big free catalog.** Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



"$100 a Week, Nell!

Think What That Means To Us!"

"They've made me Superintendent—and doubled my salary! Now we can have the comforts and pleasures we've dreamed of—our own home, a maid for you, Nell, and no more worrying about the cost of living!

"The president called me in today and told me. He said he picked me for promotion three months ago when he learned I was studying at home with the International Correspondence Schools. Now my chance has come—and thanks to the I. C. S., I'm ready for it!"

Thousands of men now know the joy of happy, prosperous homes because they let the International Correspondence Schools prepare them in spare hours for bigger work and better pay. You will find them in offices, shops, stores, mills, mines, factories, on railroads, in the Army and Navy—everywhere.

Why don't *you* study some one thing and get ready for a real job, at a salary that will give *your* wife and children the things you would like them to have?

You can *do* it! Pick the position you want in the work you like best and the I. C. S. will prepare you for it right in your own home, in your spare time—you need not lose a day or a dollar from your present occupation.

Yes, you *can* do it! More than two million have done it in the last twenty-seven years. More than 100,000 are doing it right now. Without cost, without obligation, find out how you can join them. Mark and mail this coupon!

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 2198, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, *before* which I mark X.

- ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Electric Lighting and Railways
- ☐ Electric Wiring
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ Ship Draftsman
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
- ☐ SALESMANSHIP
- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Window Trimmer
- ☐ Show Card Writer
- ☐ Sign Painter
- ☐ Railroad Trainman
- ☐ ILLUSTRATING
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ BOOKKEEPER
- ☐ Stenographer and Typist
- ☐ Cert. Public Accountant
- ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
- ☐ Railway Accountant
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ GOOD ENGLISH
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ AUTOMOBILE OPERATING
- ☐ Auto Repairing
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ AGRICULTURE
- ☐ Poultry Raising
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ French
- ☐ Italian

Name _____

Present Occupation _____

Street and No. _____

City _____ State _____

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; $10 TO $500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

MUSIC AND SHEET MUSIC

LOVERS OF GOOD SONGS. Send today for **My Killarney Rose**—one of the most beautiful Irish ballads ever published. You will never tire of this song. Written in an easy key for medium voice. Now being sung by famous vaudeville and minstrel artists, and by the daughter of President Wilson in the military camps abroad. Regular 60c song. Sent to any address for 20c (stamps or silver). Extra quartet Chorus sheet free, if wanted. Full orchestration 25c extra. The H. E. Smith Pub. Co., New London, Conn., publishers of songs of real merit.

POULTRY BOOKS

GET OUR NEW BIG POULTRY BOOK—FREE. If you want to make big money in the poultry business, if you want to get more eggs in winter, don't fail to send for our valuable book entitled **"Feeding Secrets of Famous Poultrymen."** Tells how to start pullets laying in winter—How breeders get fertile eggs—How to make brooder chicks grow bigger and faster; and other valuable information. This book is sent to you absolutely free and postpaid by the manufacturers of **Darling's Meat Crisps**—the high grade, protein poultry feed. Write for this book today to Darling & Company, Dept. 120, U. S. Yards, Chicago.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS THAT PROTECT. HIGHEST REFERENCES. Best results. Promptness assured. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

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INVENTORS—If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How to Get Your Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., Dept. 630 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK, HOW TO OBTAIN A PATENT. Send sketch or model and description for free opinion as to its patentable nature. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS. SEND SKETCH AND DESCRIPTION OF YOUR INVENTION for Advice Regarding Patent Protection. No charge for this service. Twenty Years Experience. Prompt, personal service. Patents we secure advertised without charge in Popular Mechanics Magazine. Particulars Free. Talbert & Talbert, Patent Lawyers, 4735 Talbert Building, Washington, D. C.

TELEGRAPHY

TELEGRAPHY, Wire and Wireless, and Railway Accounting taught thoroughly. **Unprecedented Demand** for both sexes. **Big Salaries.** Oldest and Largest School—established 45 years. Catalog free. Dodge's Institute, Fourth St., Valparaiso, Ind.

FREE DIAMOND RING OFFER

Just to advertise our famous Hawaiian im. diamonds — the greatest discovery the world has ever known. We will send absolutely free this 14k gold f. ring, set with a 1-8k Hawaiian im. diamond—in beautiful ring box postage paid. Pay postmaster $1.25 C. O. D. charges to cover postage, boxing, advertising, handling, etc. If you can tell it from a real diamond return and money refunded. Only 10,000 given away. Send no money. Answer quick. Send size of finger.

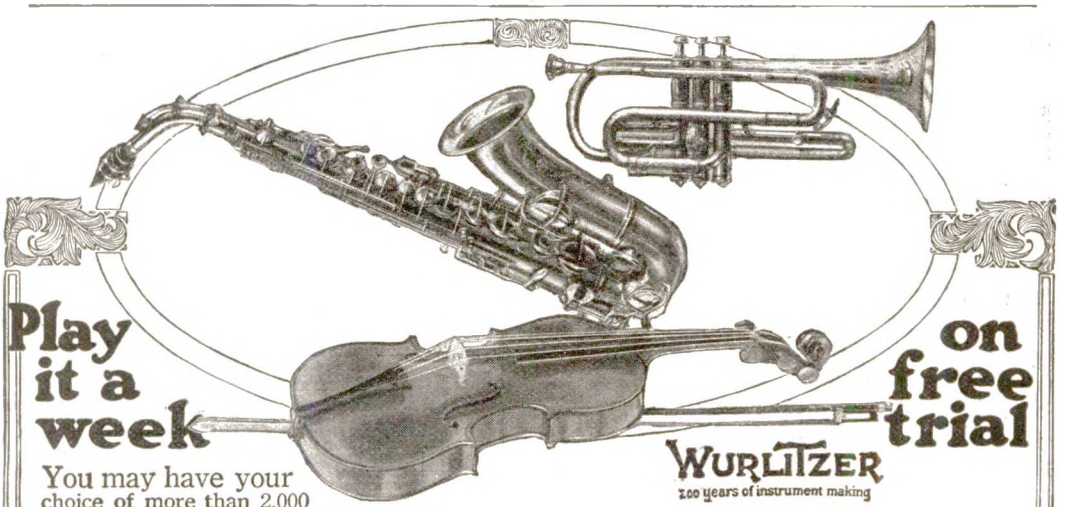
KRAUTH & REED, Dept. 902 Masonic Temple, Chicago

Gray Hair

Restored to Original Color

Gray hair positively, quickly restored to original color, no matter what color it was. KOLOR-BAK guaranteed to do this or it **costs you nothing!** KOLOR-BAK is a pleasing, pure, harmless, grand preparation. Contains no injurious ingredients. Colorless, stainless. Not a dye or stain, but a wonderful scientific preparation. Acts directly on the pigments of the hair. Also banishes dandruff and itching scalp in two applications. **Write for free book and positive proof.**

KOLOR-BAK PRODUCTS CO., 68 W. Washington St., Dept. 134 Chicago



Play it a week on free trial

WURLITZER
200 years of instrument making

You may have your choice of more than 2,000 instruments for a week's trial in your own home. Play it as if it were your own. Then, if you wish, you may send it back at our expense. Trial does not cost you a penny.

Convenient Monthly Payments

If you decide to buy you may pay the low manufacturer's price at the rate of a few cents a day. The name "*Wurlitzer*" has stood for the highest quality for nearly two centuries. Every known musical instrument sold to you at direct-from-the-manufacturer's price. We have supplied the U. S. Government with trumpets for ** years.

Send the Coupon! Just put your name and address on coupon now. Please state what instrument you are interested in. There's no obligation. We'll send you the big 160-page book free and prepaid. Write now!

The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co.— Dept. 1071 — East Fourth Street, Cincinnati, Ohio; South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

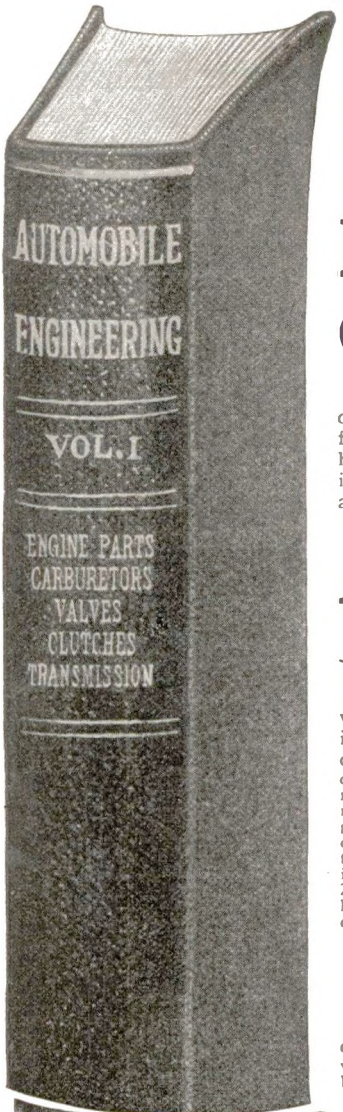
The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co. Dept. 1071
E. 4th Street, Cincinnati, Ohio
S. Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen:—Please send me your 160-page catalog, absolutely free. Also tell about your special offer direct from the manufacturer.

Name.....

Address.....

I am interested in.....
(Name of Instrument here)



NAME	POSITION	SALARY
John	AUTOMOBILE ENGINEER	$125 A WEEK
	REPAIR MAN	$50 A WEEK
	CHAUFFEUR	$30 A WEEK

Put Your Name On This Pay-Roll

Men like you are wanted for big-pay positions in the fascinating field of automobile engineering. We have made it easy for you to fit yourself for one of these positions. You don't have to go to school. You don't have to serve an apprenticeship. Fifteen automobile engineers and specialists have compiled a spare time reading course that will equip you to be an automobile expert without taking any time from your present work.

AUTO BOOKS

5 Volumes Shipped Free

Now ready for you—an up-to-the-minute five-volume library on Automobile Engineering, covering the construction, care and repair of pleasure cars, motor trucks and motorcycles. Brimming over with advanced information on Lighting Systems, Garage Design and Equipment, Welding and other repair methods. Contains everything that a mechanic or an engineer or a motorcyclist or the owner or prospective owner of a motor car ought to know. Written in simple language that anybody can understand. Tastefully bound in American Morocco, flexible covers, gold stamped, 2500 pages and 2100 illustrations, tables and explanatory diagrams. A library that cost thousands of dollars to compile but that comes to you free for 7 days' examination.

Partial List of Contents

- Explosion Motors
- Welding
- Motor Construction and Repair
- Carburetors and Settings
- Valves, Cooling
- Lubrication
- Fly-Wheels
- Clutch
- Transmission
- Final Drive
- Steering Frames
- Tires
- Vulcanizing
- Ignition
- Starting and Lighting Systems
- Wiring Diagrams
- Shop Kinks
- Commercial Garage Design and Equipment
- Electrics
- Storage Batteries
- Care and Repair
- Motorcycles
- Commercial Trucks
- Glossary

Only 7c a Day

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY
VOL. XCIII NUMBER 1
SATURDAY, JANUARY 18, 1919

If You Believe It, It's So

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "White Tigers," "The Whispering Chorus," "God's Messenger," etc.

CHAPTER I.

LOST MONEY.

LATE afternoon, and the usual ebb and flow, backwash and cross-currents of humanity in the Grand Central Station. The complication was rendered still more complex by the thousands of commuters leaving for their homes in the suburbs, by yet thousands of other suburbanites arriving for a dinner in town and an evening at the theater. A muffled hubbub filled the place, somewhat like that one hears in a concert hall when a big orchestra is settling into place—all the instruments more or less in tune, yet emitting different notes, some of them high and some of them low, some of them tiny and shrill and some of them hugely vibrant.

"*Kiss Mabel for me and tell her—*"

"*Ah'll kerry yo' beggage.*"

"*Great guns! We've missed—*"

"*There now, I'll be back.*"

And then a diversion, not very loud, not very noticeable in that vast concourse:

"*My money! It's gone! I—I've lost my money.*"

Not much louder and not much more noticeable, say, than the crushing of a Stradivarius would have been; but a disaster of equal import, to judge by the quality of the speaker's voice and the appearance of the victim himself.

He was an elderly man, still broad and powerful, yet with shoulders manifestly stooped with years of hard work. He had a rugged, kindly face, in which there were soft tints of pink and brown; clear, blue eyes, in which, even now, there was more of kindly innocence than consternation. For the rest, he was very clean, freshly shaved, and dressed in his Sunday clothes.

He had been carrying a large but not very full valise of imitation black leather. He had placed this on the polished stone floor at his feet while he used both hands to search his pockets. He stood right in the middle of one of the main drifts of mixed humanity hurrying to and from the trains.

"What will mother say? She told me to be keerful!"

Perhaps a hundred—two hundred—pedestrians passed him by, no more conscious of his existence than they would have been of any other obstacle to be automatically avoided.

Then, an undersized messenger-boy paused and looked at him with detached interest. Two Hunkies, outward-bound for a labor-camp and still with an hour or so to wait, also decided to become spectators. Three small children, with eyes like robins, lingering on their way to the drinking-fountain, forgot their thirst. This was the audience that the old man addressed.

"I wouldn't mind it so much—I suppose whoever finds it will bring it back—but it wasn't really ours."

He was panting as he said it. He had pushed back his broad-brimmed, soft felt hat, and a fine sweat was already making his white hair stick to his temples. There was no mistaking his desperation, yet he sought to cover this with a smile.

"Yuh'd better look out," said the messenger-boy, with a lurch of sly wisdom, "er they'll be swipin' yer grip."

Even this small nucleus of a crowd, however, had now been sufficient to attract others from the shuttling throngs—commuters still with a minute to spare, a porter or two, prospective diners, idlers, they that had just said good-by to friends.

In the midst of this growing crowd the old man still stood there stricken, a little dazed, taking account of his pockets. He had a big, clean handkerchief in one of his hands, and this was constantly getting into his way. He worked a large, old-fashioned snap-purse from a trouser-pocket and opened this and peered into it and then forgot to put it back.

The crowd, enthralled, began to vocalize:

"*'S matter, pop?*"

"*What's he advertisin'?*"

"*Somebuddy's gypped his roll.*"

"*You should worry. Come on 'r we'll miss the five ten.*"

A special policeman, soft-spoken, smooth as oil, came through the crowd without visible effort, and reached the old man's side.

"What appears to be the trouble?"

While the old man explained, the man in uniform made a slight signal to a regular policeman who was drawing near.

"Come on now," said the regular cop, as he began to shoo the crowd away. "Move along. They ain't nothin' happened. Come on, now. Move—al-long!"

And the crowd was drifting into motion again, its interest already on other things.

"*Did you see what the Reds done in the thoid?*"

"*Yeh, she's beginning to talk. Says: 'Dada! Dada!'*"

"*Oscar win—*"

"*But, my Gawd, Louis, she's not over seventeen!*"

The old man looked at the two policemen, the special and the regular.

"Mother—Martha—she's my wife," he recommenced, breathlessly, apologetically, with contrition and grief, "she 'lowed I'd better have it sewed in my pocket. She's generally right."

Had he received a bullet through the chest he would have looked like that—breast heaving, the color draining from his face, his mild eyes those of one who confronts the ultimate catastrophe. He made a mighty effort to pull himself together. He touched his temples with the wadded handkerchief. He was grasping for familiar realities to hold him up.

"Mr. Dale—he's the president of our bank—told me I'd—better let him send a draft."

He was speaking only with the utmost difficulty.

"Mother—she thought so, too—only—she wanted me to see New York—again. Been working pretty steady. Hadn't seen the place for thirty years."

By one of those peculiar shifts in the human whirlpool of the railroad terminus, the recent vortex where they stood was now almost completely quiet. Over there, fresh passengers and clinging friends were huddling for the departure of a great express. Nearer, an iron gate opened and at once, like the waters of a sluice, the people flowed away in yet another current.

"Maybe you got it in your hip-pocket," said the regular policeman with practical sympathy.

The old man made another examination, fumbling, hopeless, yet thorough.

"I got my purse," he said. "It ain't that—but the wallet."

The wallet, it appeared, was old; one that his daughter had given him years ago. He spoke of this daughter as "our little

girl." No, it didn't have his name on it, but he'd recognize it anywhere—about eight inches long by four wide, and the leather used to be red, but now was a sort of shiny brown. He could have told it blindfolded, he had handled it so much. He could almost recognize it by its smell—like old, blind Rex, a worn-out, ancient dog of his back home.

The special officer disappeared in the direction of the train-shed. The policeman was taking notes.

Of all those who had been lingering there—the typical New York crowd, amateurs of emotion—only two remained. One was the messenger-boy who had originally discovered the sensation. Mere profundity of thought, rather than an active interest, seemed to be holding him. It wouldn't have been so easy to guess what held the other onlooker there.

He was a strangely handsome youth, this other—a little too handsome, almost, with classic features, large, dark eyes, a general expression of alert but brooding intelligence; only, a closer look revealed a certain unwholesomeness about him, such as comes to both men and plants that lack sufficient sunshine. So it was with his clothes—almost too elegant, and yet, if scrutinized, showing a certain note of cheap luxury and underlying shabbiness.

This youth strolled away a dozen steps. He came back again. He took casual note of others who came and went. And sometimes this was with an all-but-imperceptible start, as if he recognized them, or saw something about them that pricked his interest. But, again and again, his attention reverted to the old man who had lost his money.

The special policeman returned from the train-shed, reporting the result of an inquiry: "I guess it's a larceny, all right."

"Guess we'd better go with him to the desk, Bill," the regular policeman proposed.

"I don't yet," the old man gasped miserably, "see how it happened."

"Happens every day," the special replied with Stoic philosophy. "Don't it, Jo? This way, sir. First, you'll want to make a complaint."

"Yes, and sometimes twice a day if not oftener," Jo cheerfully averred.

"Hey, youse's fergittin' yer grip," the young messenger called out.

"Well, just see!"

The old man took the grip from the boy's hand, but immediately set it down again. Once more he opened the ancient purse that had been spared him. He, trembling, opened this. He sought a coin. The messenger's lethargic face assumed an expression of astute expectancy.

"Here's a nickel for you, bub. I suppose I really should give you more."

The messenger was not adverse, but the law intervened.

"Gwan, now; beat it," Jo advised; and the messenger skipped away—not intoxicated, precisely, but mollified.

The two officers and he who had lost his money—his broad old shoulders a trifle more bent than ever—started off in the direction of the precinct police-station. The young man—he of the dark eyes—appeared to hesitate. He came to a decision.

He started in pursuit.

CHAPTER II.

AS AMONG FRIENDS.

"ELEVEN hundred dollars, Mr. Officer," the old man was saying to the chubby-faced lieutenant back of the high desk. The official bent and wrote, his face shining redly in the electric light. From the midst of his labors he rumbled.

"Name?"

"Ezra Wood."

"Address?"

"Rosebloom—this State. We've lived there, mother and me, for nigh onto sixty years."

"Was it before, or after, you got off the train—"

"After, I reckon; right after, Mr. Officer. You see, I was sort of thinking about the folks at home, and what my wife said about me being keerful. I touched the wallet in my pocket. It was there. She says to me something about New York not being like Rosebloom; but we're all born of women, have our troubles—"

"Notice any one specially who might 've taken it?"

"Done what, sir?"

"Why, took your roll—"

"You mean—I was robbed?"

He'd taken off his hat as soon as he entered the high, bare room of the police-station, and he stood there now uncovered—his silky, white hair stirring a little in the draft of the place, his benignant face graven deep with lines of pain and patience and simple goodness. The official light shone down upon him, covering him with a halo. And such a different picture did he make from those usually presented by the strangers who stood before this unholy judgment-seat, that most of the policemen who passed through the room paused there to listen.

Anyway, it was at an hour when there wasn't much to do—a new detail just gone on duty, the old platoon coming in. It was to the room at large, and those who listened there, as much as to the lieutenant back of the high desk, that the old man addressed himself when he next spoke. He had raised his face. There was a new calm and a new courage there.

"I suppose it's all for the best," he labored. He had a fleeting breath of hope. "Maybe it wasn't stolen after all. I've always been kind of absent-minded about letting things lay around. Maybe some one will find it—give it back."

"Maybe," droned the lieutenant with the flicker of an eyelid at those who were standing by. "We're going to try to find it for you, cap; but they said it, all right, all right, when they told you that this burg ain't no Rosebloom. The train and the whole platform over there at the depot has been searched, and you can bet your life, after what you've said, your roll ain't among the stuff they find. If it was, we'd have heard about it before this. The depot staff's all right. They've got to be. We got 'em trained. You've been rolled by a dip—had your pocket picked."

"You must know, Mr. Officer."

"I'll get this report down to headquarters"—and he passed the thing he had written to a sergeant—"and if your crook's to be got they'll get him."

"I'd hate to think I had something to do with sending any one to the lockup."

"That's where he'll go," the lieutenant laughed. "Say, if he's lucky, that guy 'll get only about fifteen years."

"But we don't know how he was tempted. Perhaps he was hungry, and old, was driven to it."

Some half-dozen policemen were in the room by this time. The old man's presence and the lieutenant's indulgent mood had relaxed discipline just a trifle. There was a gurgle of derision. One of the policemen turned to the dark-eyed youth who had lingered near.

"Ain't he a sketch?" the policeman inquired. "Don't want to do nothing now to the gink that nicked him."

The youth of the dark eyes smiled. He knew many policemen. But he didn't speak. He brooded. He watched. He listened.

"Fergit it," the lieutenant was advising, jovially. "It wasn't no old geezer turned this trick. This is the work of some fresh young boy. The big town keeps turnin' 'em out faster 'n we can trim 'em. Of course, sooner or later, we make the pinch."

"A young man?"

"Sure! They're the only kind that can work New York; and even they slip up—and then, good night!"

"I don't believe that I could send a boy to prison—right at the beginning of his career—to break his mother's heart."

"Well, what do they do when they catch a crook up in your part of the world?"

"There be none. No, sir! Not in Rosebloom. We raise our boys and girls to be God-fearing citizens, up there. Oh, the boys 'll take a few apples, now and then; but that ain't stealing. And I suppose the girls are about like all other girls—poor little, innocent things. But nobody locks their doors up there. Every one trusts every one else—lends a hand in case of misfortune."

"Say," the lieutenant exclaimed, with an eye on his audience, "if I ever got located in a burg like that, believe me, I'd stick! What did you leave it for, with all that money?"

"It was foolish of me," the old man answered, gently. "But that money was owing on a mortgage for nigh twoscore years. Mother and I borrowed it from old Major

Higginbotham at the time our little girl took sick. And then, when the first mortgage ran out at about the time the old major died, and we weren't in a position to clear it off, why, we renewed it with the major's son—that's Mr. Edgar Higginbotham—and he's been carrying it ever since. I wanted to see him—tell him how much mother and I appreciate his kindness. You see, hard as we'd try, we weren't always quite ready to meet the payments. Our little girl died—a beautiful and saintly creature—when she was barely thirty. But the Lord's been good to us. He has. We've done better these past six years—put by more'n a thousand dollars. This eleven hundred dollars was the last we owed."

He halted in what he was saying. He stood there with his mouth open as if he wanted to say something more.

"Now what do you know about that?" the policeman in the back of the room whispered hoarsely to the dark-eyed youth.

"Some yarn!" the youth answered from the corner of his mouth.

It was a barely audible whisper that came from Ezra Woods:

"Stand fast in the faith! Stand fast in the faith! I will, O Lord; but—will Martha be able to bear it?"

"You don't want to take it so hard," said the lieutenant with kindly intent. "Why, somebody's gettin' theirs every time the clock ticks, here in New York."

He turned a leaf of the official blotter. He read:

"'*Mamie Marcin, white, eleven, run over by brewery-truck, both legs fractured, internal injuries. Bellevue.*'

"'*Gus Pemberton—and so forth—lacerations—probably blinded.*'

"'*Max Mendelbaum, attempted suicide, arrested—*'

"'*Body unidentified girl.*'

"Get me?" the lieutenant demanded. "That sort of stuff day in and day out, every day in the year, Sundays and all."

"The Lord have pity on us all!" said Ezra Wood, bracing himself like a soldier shaking his pack into place. "In my own trouble I forgot about the trouble of others."

"That's all right," said the lieutenant. "You got your troubles, all right. So's every one else that goes up against this town. Y' understand? Unless they're tough like an elephant, which a lot of 'em are, or strong like hairy gorillas, or slick like the snakes in the zoo, they all get theirs! Either that, or you've got a brain on you like Thomas A. Edison, or a good thing, like me old friend, John D. Get me? Because, if you ain't, sooner or later, this big town's going to eat you alive."

"The Lord have pity on us all!" Ezra Wood repeated. "I suppose my loss is nothing—only—only, you see—"

"Uncle," the lieutenant said, more softly, with a burst of unprofessional sympathy, "if I was you, I'd go and get something to eat and then lay me down for a good night's sleep. They ain't nothing you can do. Leave it to us. Cheer up. Say, we'll have the commissioner himself on the job. If your roll's to be got, we'll get it. Won't we, boys?"

"Surest thing you know."

"We're wit' you, lute."

"I can't tell you how I appreciate your kindness," said Mr. Wood. "I told mother—Martha—that's my wife—we've been married nigh onto fifty years—that folks down here were no different from our folks up in Rosebloom. I wish that you gentlemen—any of you—could pay us a visit some time. We'd give you a royal welcome."

"Get that?" whispered the policeman in the back of the room. "Peeled of all he's got sooner 'n he can get out of the depot, and yet he comes back wit' an all-round invite to pay him a visit."

The youth of the dark eyes appeared to be too absorbed to answer. He was listening, one would have said, with a sort of fascination.

"You're all to the good," the lieutenant averred. And he so far forgot official dignity as to come around from the other side of the desk. "Now doncha weaken. We're on the job."

"And I appreciate your advice. I'm still a little dazed. Let's see. I've got three dollars—minus a nickel—and my return ticket home. Maybe you can recommend some modest sort of place where I could get a room."

The lieutenant meditated, but not for long.

"Tim," he said, "you got to pass the Boone House. Suppose you show cap, here, where it is. You can get a room there for a dollar," he enlightened Ezra Wood; "and sleep hearty, without fear of nobody going through your clothes." He had an afterthought. "Of course," he added, "there ain't no bath goes with the room."

"That's all right," said old Mr. Wood; "I took a bath before I come."

"And in the mean time," the lieutenant added, "if anything breaks, I'll let you know."

"The Lord bless you, Mr. Officer," said Ezra Wood, "and all you gentlemen. You know the old saying: 'No kind thing was ever done in vain.'" He turned again to the lieutenant and gripped the officer's outstretched hand. "And I hope you'll thank the commissioner for me. You tell him how sorry I am to give him this extra trouble. Only, you see, we'd worked so hard for that money, and skimped, and strove, and we'd waited so long for this time to come, and thinking we could sort of let up a little, and not have anything more to worry about—"

"I getcha," the lieutenant murmured.

"And now New York's taken it. New York! New York!" It was almost a sob, but the cry was soft. "You're right. New York lives on what it takes from the country. And its fodder ain't only the wheat and the corn and the fruit that we send to it, either; but our faith and our hopes!—our dreams and our children! Where'd you come from?" he suddenly demanded, whirling on the lieutenant.

"Galway, Ireland!"

"And you?"

"Three Rivers, Michigan."

"And you?"

"Iowa."

He flamed his questions at the various policemen standing there, and they answered him.

"And you?"

His eyes for a moment gleamed into those of the strange youth who had followed him here from the station.

"I was born here," the young man said.

"What are you doing? What are your dreams? What are your ideals? What is this town doing to you?"

The old man didn't await an answer. After a fashion the questions had been answered as soon as asked by the boy's silence and the look in the boy's face.

"That's it," Ezra Wood intoned with a soft but surprising intensity. "That's it. That's what New York does—takes a little dream, or an amibtion, or an ideal—from Galway, or Michigan, or Iowa—and breaks its legs! Lacerates and blinds— The body of an unidentified girl! Fresh young boys!—flung into the hopper of asylums and prisons! 'Tain't mere money I am grieving for. Only—only—"

"'Twas all he had!"

"Only, when it was lost—taken from me—stolen—those 'leven hundred dollars that were our sweat and our blood; but, most of all, *her* sweat and *her* blood, and she a helpin' every one that needed help, and comfortin' the afflicted—" He broke off. "I forget myself," he said with dignity. "You'll not forget to thank the commissioner."

CHAPTER III.

INTO THE NIGHT.

EVEN at this early hour there was something gruesome in the quality of the night. The day had held a promise of spring, but now the wind had shifted around to the northeast, bringing with it a dampness and a chill. The poorest of the city's workers were hurrying home—the men and women, and the girls, who work on through to six and half past six in the shops and factories.

There is a lightness and a joy about a good many of those workers who leave their tasks at five. They still have a residue of strength and gaiety. Those who quit at half past five are always duller, sadder, with still less power to react from the drudgery just ended. But those who quit their jobs still later are the utterly forlorn, the utterly fatigued.

There flowed eastward now a black and turgid current. The current gave tongue

and spoke with all the languages of the world, but through the babble there was always an undertone of weariness.

"Is it always like this?" asked Ezra Wood.

"It is at this hour," said Tim, the policeman who himself was almost as gray and old as the man from Rosebloom. "'Tis what the lieutenant said it was—a slaughter-house for body and soul."

"You've stood it, friend," said Ezra Wood.

"I have," said Tim, "by the grace of God!"

The Boone House was a little old-fashioned hotel on one of the side streets just off Third Avenue. There was a plate-glass window to either side of its sooty entrance. One of these revealed the office and sitting-room, where sad gentlemen, respectable but homeless, sometimes sat. The other window, partly curtained, was that of the once almost-famous Boone House restaurant, which still did a fairly good occasional trade. But, despite the vicissitudes that had come to the old hotel, it looked good to Ezra Wood, and his heart warmed again in gratitude to the friendly police.

"I thank you, sir," he said, shaking hands with the old officer who had shown him the way; "and I hope you'll tell the lieutenant not to worry too much if he is unable to recover the money."

Officer Tim looked at the other gravely for a dozen seconds.

"I'll tell him," he said. "And I've got a feeling that 'twill be all right with you, most likely in some way we can't forsee."

Himself like a strange fish in the home-flowing current of workers, that youth with the dark eyes who had already followed the old man of Rosebloom to the police-station had set out to follow him again. He also noticed the chill and the darkness of the night. For that matter, he noticed also—as if he were seeing it now for the first time—the heavily undulating drift of workers. Their voices reached him—Yiddish and Greek, Italian, Slovak, and Hun—but he found that he was translating all this into the things he had heard the lieutenant and the old man say:

"*Even they slip up—and then good night!*"

"*The Lord have pity on us all!*"

"*This big town's going to eat you alive.*"

He kept Ezra Wood and the policeman in sight, although he knew that there was no necessity for doing this. He knew where they were going. Only, he seemed to derive some benefit from the mere spectacle of the old man. After a manner, he was like a boy who follows a circus parade—fascinated, getting visions of a world unknown, yet conscious all the time that he's going to get home late for supper.

He turned into the splotched illumination of Third Avenue not far behind the two old men. He paused. He stared for a moment into a pawn-broker's window. Overhead, an Elevated train thundered on its way to Harlem. The surface-cars screeched. The crowds flowed by on foot. He started to follow again.

He was at the office-window of the Boone House when the policeman was recommending the citizen of Rosebloom to the clerk, and tarrying there for a few more words.

The old man had taken off his hat again, his white hair shining through the dimness.

"Good night!" the youth exclaimed under his breath, and he was off in the direction of Third Avenue, going fast, at first, then more slowly, more slowly yet, until he came to an indecisive halt. What was the matter with him? What was biting him anyway? "Good night," he murmured again—like a *sesame* against the spell that was holding him. But instead of wavering forward he wavered back.

The next time that he looked into the front windows of the Boone House he saw that the old man was eating his supper in the restaurant. It occurred to the youth that he himself was hungry. Why not eat here? He lingered at the entrance. He again walked away swiftly, but dwindled off to a standstill.

He had to eat! He was ravenous.

There was an oyster-booth on the corner of the avenue, and presently he had given his order here for a couple of sandwiches. But scarcely had he taken a bite out of the first sandwich than he found that he wasn't so hungry after all. He paused to think

and forgot to chew. He wished he hadn't ordered anything at all.

While he stood there, an old, old woman, dressed in black and very dirty, crept up with the unction of a hungry cat.

"Have a sandwich?" said the youth.

A slow smile came into her puckered face. Her breathless voice had an echo of sweetness in it.

"It's been a long time," she said, "since a young gentleman's invited me to dine."

She was still smiling as she hid the proffered sandwich under her shawl.

"Here's a buck to go with it," said the youth.

She accepted the dollar with the same smiling suavity and rewarded him with the gleam in her rheumy old eyes. And she was telling him something again—an intimate confession of sorts that called for an occasional grimace of modesty on her highly informed old mask. But he didn't hear her—for two reasons. One reason was that the Elevated trains and the screeching cars made a din that smothered her voice. The other reason was that, louder yet, came the lieutenant's words:

"*They all get theirs!*"

Like this old dame, like so many others he had known, like a projection of himself in the no-distant future.

The old lady was still mumbling autobiographical bits—with the oysterman for audience now, only, the oysterman, having heard many old ladies like this hold forth on similar themes, was not listening particularly—when the youth started off down Third Avenue.

He went as far as the next corner. He stopped there to let an auto pass — and found himself unable to go on—his impulse gone—invisible hands upon him to turn him back once more in the direction he had come.

"Suppose I telephone!"

He meditated this. He knew that there wasn't a chance in a million of the old man's going out. Yes, this was the idea. Maybe, like that, he'd raise the curse that had put the nippers on him.

There was a cheap little tobacco-shop, a few doors away, with a blue telephone sign on its window.

"But what 'll I say?"

He entered the place. He bought a package of cigarettes. He took his time about lighting one of these. With an impulsive, clinching movement, he turned to the telephone-book and opened it.

"'Boone—Boone House'—and I'm a nut!"

He squared his flat and shapely shoulders. He arched his neck, pulled in his chin. He strode on out of the place, and, at the door, almost bumped into the old lady of the oyster-booth. She peered up at him. Perhaps she didn't recognize him at all, but she smiled at him, graciously, with the echo of an ancient graciousness.

And what was that the old man had said about—"No kind act—"

He bit his cigarette in two. He hurled it to the sidewalk. This was certainly fierce. And here he was, once more, in the street that had called him.

Ezra Wood had gone up to his room in the Boone House. It was a large room, as New York hotel rooms go. It was on the third floor, with a certain air of faded splendor about it—and if he could have a room like this for a dollar, possibly he might have got a room that was good enough for fifty cents; but he didn't like to ask, now that they had taken the trouble to give him this one. And, besides, there was no telling when he would receive a visitor from headquarters—perhaps from the commissioner himself.

He would have liked to go to bed at once, but he scarcely dared. He wondered how long he ought to wait up.

The room was in the rear, with two windows in it that commanded a dim vista of neighboring yards and the backs of houses, and the glimmering lights of these, and the human noises that came from them—of speech, and laughter, and squabbling quarrels—all fretted the strings of his homesick heart with a heavy hand.

He had taken off his boots and his coat, and drawn one of the squashy old chairs up to a window he had opened. And he seated himself there—smelling the night, hearing its strange squeals and thunders, yet battling himself betimes to overcome the

mounting tumult in his breast. The thing to do, he argued, was to be brave and strong, to "stand fast in the faith."

But he moaned: "Oh, God Almighty!"

His mind came reeling back to a consciousness of present things.

Some one was knocking at the door.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

"COME in, sir! Come right in!" said Ezra Wood. "I was sort of expecting you. Although I don't look it," he added, apologetically, with reference to his undress.

He could see that the young man in the hall was not a member of the hotel-staff, although the light was dim, for the stranger wore a hat—one of those velours hats, with the brim pulled down on one side. The light in the hall was dim, and the hat further shaded the stranger's face, all of which gave him a certain air of mystery. But detectives were men of mystery. The touch of mystery was heightened by the stranger's reticence. He appeared to be in no hurry to come in. There, for a fleeting moment or so, he seemed to be on the point of betaking himself away.

"Be you waiting for some one else?" Mr. Wood inquired.

The Boone House was not one of those hotels which announce the arrival of visitors. There was no way of telling whether there was one or two.

What was that the stranger said? It was a sibilant whisper at the best, inarticulate. Anyway, he was inside; and, once inside, he lost no time. While Mr. Wood was still closing the door, with patient effort, for the lock was somewhat out of order, the stranger went swiftly to the window that was closed and drew the blind, then went with equal speed, smoothly, without noise, to the window that was open. There he paused for a pair of seconds, close to it, but a little to one side, looking out. Then he closed the window and lowered the shade.

All this in the time that it had taken the elder man to close and latch the door.

"Did you come from the commissioner, or did the lieutenant ask you to come?" Mr. Wood inquired. "In any case, I'm glad to see you. Won't you make yourself comfortable?" And he motioned to a chair.

As yet, both of them were standing; and, like that, they certainly made a very striking contrast—old Ezra Wood, his white hair uncovered and slightly ruffled, his bent old frame loosely clad in black, except for his white shirt-sleeves and his gray, home-knitted socks; and then this stranger—slender, dark, shabbily dapper from his velours hat on down to his pointed, light-tan, cloth-top shoes. He still wore his hat. From under it his dark eyes gleamed.

Mr. Wood was willing that his guest should take his own time about speaking. He was eager to put the young man at ease. He pulled a heavy old gold watch from his vest-pocket and carefully opened it—not noticing the visitor's glance of avid interest.

"What's the time?" the young man asked.

"It is now—just eight o'clock."

"I didn't know it was so late."

He spoke like a man who has but a moment to stay.

"That's the hour," said Mr. Wood with calm decision. "This watch is a marine-chronometer. My uncle sailed his ship thrice around the globe and no end of times to China and back with this to go by."

"What's it worth?"

"It's priceless to me because of him who owned it—reminds me of him, true-running, never-failing, a masterpiece of gold and steel. Let's see! The store price? Oh, maybe five hundred—maybe six hundred dollars. Like to look at it?" He undid the watch from its guard. He passed it over. "Sit down! Sit down!"

The stranger slid down to the edge of a chair. He put his hat on the floor. He had taken the watch and he studied it—while Ezra Wood benignantly studied him. The benignant gaze did not falter when the youth suddenly shifted his eyes, but not his position, and saw that he was being observed.

"You're sort of young, my boy, for police work," said Ezra Wood. "Don't it keep you out a good deal at night?"

"Sure!"

"How do you like it?"

"I can't kick."

"You certainly have some agreeable associates. How does your mother like it?"

"What?"

"Your work."

"Whose mother? My mother?"

"Yes."

"I ain't got no mother. My mother's dead."

"Ah!"

"Here, take your watch back. What you want to do—lose it—like you lose your roll?"

"Son"—it was a question that had been storming the mind and heart of old Ezra Wood ever since he heard the knock at the door—"have you brought me any word?"

The youth hesitated. He flashed a smile. He scowled a look of annoyance.

"Say," he demanded, in a husky whisper, "what do you suppose I come here for?"

Ezra Wood didn't appear to notice the irony of the question. He accepted it as a blow to his immediate hopes. He was resigned. He was calm. He took a brief interval for a mental and moral readjustment.

"I was hopin'," he said, stress of emotion causing him to be less careful of his speech than usual, "I was hopin'," he repeated. He was the homesick old farmer bewildered amid strange surroundings. From not very far away came the shaking roar of an Elevated train. A phonograph scraped shockingly at a Sousa masterpiece. Beyond the zone of back yards a man and a woman howled at each other in a frenzy of hate. There was a crash of glass, a shriek, then comparative silence. "I'm sorry you've lost your mother," he concluded.

If the youth himself felt any sorrow, he gave no sign of it. Anyway, his mind was elsewhere.

"What do you suppose I come here for?" he repeated.

"There was only one thing that could have brought you."

"You're gettin' wise."

There was another pause for reflection. The old man must have noticed the closed windows, the drawn blinds. In his mental survey of the hotel he must have perceived how easily any stranger could have gained access to his door as this one had done.

"Son," said Ezra Wood, blandly, kindly, "you seem to be unhappy about something or other. You seem to be holding something back. I don't want you to feel put out on my account. It ain't the first time that I've sort of had to fall back on the Lord for strength and consolation. He'll take care of us, mother and me. He always has. Now, maybe it's something that's happened to you. I'm an old man; but, lah! I ain't forgotten the days of my own youth—wild days—mad days—days when I let the devil get the better of my judgment. Is your father living?"

"Naw!"

"Be you all alone?"

"Sure!"

"If it ain't asking too much, what church do you go to?"

"Who—me?"

"Well, never mind. I suppose the Lord's everywhere—here in New York the same's up in Rosebloom. That's what made me think you brought me some word. Funny; ain't it? But I've noticed it time and again—when something or other had happened that seemed just a leetle more'n I could stand—I'd get a sudden feeling of relief, comforting, consoling, and I'd know that things were straightening out. Ever have that happen to you?"

"I got to beat it," said the youth. "I got a date. I didn't know it was so late. I just wanted to see if you was here."

"What did you say your name was?"

"Harris."

"What's your first name?"

"Charley."

"Charley Harris, eh? Well, Charley, I don't want to be keeping you, but I'm mighty glad you called. I'm an old man. I was feeling pretty lonely. Son, are you quite sure I can't help you in some way or other. What appears to be ailin' you?"

The youth had seized his hat and risen to his feet. The old man remained seated. He gave the boy a glance. Then, deliberately, thoughtfully, took his watch from his pocket again and slowly began to wind it.

A keen observer might have noticed a

slight, lurching movement on the part of the visitor. His dark eyes had gone to the timepiece with that same avid flicker of desire that had been there before. But all this was very fleeting, barely perceptible.

"I just wanted to see if you was here," he repeated.

"Most of the folks are in bed by this time back home," the old man mused. "Another day done—crickets chirpin', wind in the trees, night smellin' of dew and early bloom. I suppose it was thinkin' of all that, and then what the officer said over to the station-house about what's goin' on here in this great city, that made me realize our blessings."

He was still speaking like that, absorbed, as the youth silently, stealthily crossed the room in the direction of the door. The old man hadn't noticed him. The visitor's movements were as light and swift as a shadow's. He put his hand on the knob. But there he paused.

CHAPTER V.

REMISSION.

HE turned and looked back of him. He could see nothing of the old man but a crown of white hair above the shabby back of an antiquated easy chair.

The visitor drew something from the breast-pocket of his elegant but somewhat soiled coat. He thrust it back again.

He silently opened the door, as silently closed it again.

He looked around him.

Almost within reach of his hand there was a small marble-topped table of a design once fashionable. The only thing on this was a dusty little coverlet of white cotton.

With a movement so deft and lightning-quick that it would have served a sleight-of-hand performer in carrying through his most difficult illusion, the visitor had taken something once more from his breast-pocket and hidden it under the coverlet.

Even so, he was none too quick. The old man had turned, was peering over at him.

Had the old man seen anything the visitor didn't want him to see? It was hard to tell. Most likely he had not. Mr. Wood got up from his chair—bent, rugged, absorbed. He came over to the young man.

"Will I see you again?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"I'd like to see you again. I sort of feel as if you and I were neighbors."

"When 'r' you pullin' out?"

"I suppose it will be to-morrow. It hurts me, but I'll have to see Mr. Higginbotham. Did they tell about it? He's—"

"Yeh! I got all that."

The visitor gave a quick glance, unobserved, at the marble-topped table.

"It hurts me, but I'll have to tell him what's happened."

"Was the money for him?"

"Yes."

"Ain't he one of those rich guys?"

"I believe his father left him quite a bit of money."

"Well, what did he need this for?"

"He may not have needed it, but it was his."

"You wouldn't have got no benefit from it?" And the visitor shifted his position somewhat away from the door.

The old man let one of his hard and twisted hands rest on the marble-topped table. His fingers toyed with the dusty coverlet.

"Only the benefit of a debt paid," he answered sweetly.

"And now I suppose you think that the gun who copped your leather owes you something."

"Do you?"

The youth who had given his name as Charley Harris turned abruptly to the door. His sudden movement had disarranged the table-cover.

"I'm not thinkin'," he flung back savagely. "To hell with thinkin'. It costs too much."

He was putting something back into his pocket—into the inside pocket of his somewhat shabby but stylish coat. And, in spite of all his manifest embarrassment and indecision, his movements had remained as swift and baffling as those of a wild animal at bay. He would have been out of the door right then—and that the end of the episode—but the crazy old latch refused to function properly.

The delay was sufficient to permit the old man to react from his surprise.

"Charley!"

The word was an appeal. At the same time it was something of a command, full of quiet dignity, also with a friendly but perfect authority. It seemed to penetrate the back of the boy at the door and fasten him as surely as a harpoon would have done. The youth turned. He did this slowly. He slued around and stood there panting slightly, like one utterly exhausted.

"What?" he gasped.

The old man merely contemplated him.

"What do you want?" the youth repeated.

"To help you."

"I don't—know what you mean."

"You're young," said Ezra Wood, softly. "You're strugglin', boy. You're strugglin' 'twixt right and wrong."

"Where do you get that?"

"I can see it in your eyes. Boy and man, I've seen God's critters struggle like that. I've struggled like that myself—wrestled through the night. If ye look for it, the Almighty's 'most always there ready to lend a hand."

The words were gently, calmly spoken, yet with a certain thrill of exaltation in them.

The dark eyes of the youth glowed steadily as if they were unable to leave the other's face. The boy was breathing deeply. He slowly returned his right hand to the inside pocket of his coat. He let it rest on the contents of the pocket.

As one who watches for the manifestations of some terrible and tragic phenomenon, he drew from the pocket that thing he had recently hidden under the table-cover. The thing was an old wallet, shiny and brown.

There was a moment of silence. More than a moment. There, for almost a minute, silence was dripping about the two of them like something palpable—like rain.

"Mine!" breathed Ezra Wood, with an intake of his breath.

The visitor held it out to him—did this weakly, as if all his, so to speak, feline strength and speed had deserted him. His own face was going as white as the old man's face had been over there in the railway-station. His life was concentrated in his eyes. Without haste, without other apparent excitement than that shown by his visibly shaking hand, Ezra Wood received the thing he had lost.

"Count it!"

The old man slowly opened the wallet. There were eleven bank-notes in it, each for one hundred dollars.

"So you were from headquarters, after all," the old man said softly.

"Sure!"

There was nothing to indicate that the symbolism of this occurred to either of them.

"And you were tempted."

"What do you think! It was easy money."

"Even our Lord Jesus was tempted."

"I got to beat it. If I don't—say, what d'yuh mean—shakin' a wad like that in a fellah's face if yuh don't want him to nick yuh—handin' him a ticker 'at's good for another five hundred?"

"Are you in such need?"

"Sure!"

"Will you take what you need? Charley, I had a son, but he was born in the country, he had his parents—unworthy—but he had our love. I know now—I had forgotten—that the country is a protection—that it's sweet, and tender, and pure. There are some, I suppose, that can live without it. Our boy couldn't. If he'd stayed in the country we might have saved him. But here, not even our love, nor his early training, were enough. He wasn't strong, and if you're not strong—"

"Yuh got it right—'strong like a hairy gorilla'—"

"The city's not the place for you. Just think! Spring is here—the apple-orchards all drifted with white, and the birds—bluebirds and redbirds, robins and finches—swelling their little breasts with song—and the meadows getting deeper and deeper with grass—and, by and by, the grass will be just filled with wild strawberries. All this under a sky that would make you understand why men call it heaven—blue and friendly—only a few fleecy clouds to serve as ships for your dreams.

"And after spring, the summer's there; with every day 'most a hundred years long, each year a happy lifetime—sunshine, and a smell of mint, of hay and apples, and the big woods there to give you coolth and shade, a spring to drink from, a brook making music, and at last a sunset proclaiming the glory of God, and the stars His long-suffering mercy.

"Son, were you ever in the country in the autumn?

"That's the time of the harvest—crops coming in, pumpkins in the corn, stock all fat and slick for the county fair, plenty for every one, folks laying in their supplies for the winter. And I've always loved the winters — burning hickory, parching corn, smoke-house perfuming the valley with a smell of new bacon. But, no—it wa'n't this that has always made me love the winter so. I loved it for the big, clean winds and the miles of untrodden snow, for the sparkly nights when every star might be the star of Bethlehem; and I loved it for the kitchen stove, where Martha and I have always sat on winter nights and sort of had our little children back.

"But it's spring in the country now. Can't you sort of hear it calling? I can:

"'Come to me, all ye that are heavy laden!'"

CHAPTER VI.

NEAR CHATHAM SQUARE.

IN the mean time, New York's change of weather had culminated in a sleety rain, and the city had become, more than ever, a place of disconcerting contrast—of mortuary black and garish color; of dripping trees in haunted parks and juggernaut traffic in howling streets; of shivering poor in places that were damp and dark, and of blatant luxury in places that were warm and brilliant.

Moreover, it was Wednesday—with here and there, in somber neighborhoods, an oasis of yellow light where a church presented its mild invitation to prayer-meeting.

But, unless all signs failed, the devil also was keeping open house—dirty and discreet, sinister and cordial—there where the rear doors of saloons were open, and where the scarlet lobbies of obscure hotels insinuated secrecy and welcome, and Oriental restaurants, stealthy clubs, throbbing dance-halls, and noisy but secretive flats, all offered forgetfulness and mystery.

Night, for much of the world; but the day was just beginning for a certain saloon, especially in the back room thereof.

"Where's Chick?"

"Ain't seen him. What 'll you have?"

"Hello, there, Solly!"

"'Lo, Phil! Have a drink."

"Watchures?"

"Me? I'm takin' a little old-fashioned mixed."

"That's good enough for me."

"Two mixed ales, Eddie. Seen Chick?"

Outside and overhead, an Elevated train squealed through its thunder as it rounded the curve in Chatham Square.

"Came here to see him myself," said Phil, glancing about the back room of the Commodore. He was a well-favored youth, engaging, vicious. Both he and Solly were better dressed than the other male customers present. Phil shot the next question at Solly from the corner of his mouth: "Goin' to join the mob?"

"Whose—Chick's?"

Solly was a cherub, pink, two hundred pounds. The other gave him a glance of cynical amusement. Solly was so used to playing the part of dull innocence that he couldn't drop it even among friends. But a glint of hard wisdom flickered for an instant in Solly's baby-blue eyes. It was answer enough.

"Here's luck," said Phil, picking up one of the glasses that Eddie placed on their table.

"Drink hearty!"

Over the receding thunder of the Elevated train and the maudlin racket of the room, they could hear a thump of tambourines and then a crescendo chorus:

> "At the cross, at the cross,
> Where I fir-rest saw the light."

At the door to the dark hallway leading to the street appeared a slim young girl with brilliant eyes and other indications of con-

sumption about her delicate and pretty face. She was dressed in black. Her brown hair was waved plainly down over her ears in that style once made famous by Cléo de Mérode. And her hat might have, almost, belonged to one of those singers out there in the army of salvation.

She advanced to the table where Solly and Phil were seated.

"My God!" she said. "What a night!"

"Hello, Belle!" said Solly. "Hello, Irene!" said Phil.

But there was no disagreement when they asked her to sit down, state her wishes in the matter of refreshment. The girl herself seemed to attach no importance at first to the fact that they had called her by different names. The barkeep came forward, swinging his shoulders like a boxer feinting for a lead.

"Hello, Eddie!" she greeted him.

"Hello, Blanche!"

"Say, you boys call me Myrtle after this, will you?" The girl reflected. "Rock-and-rye, Eddie!" And she added: "I want to change my luck. Where's Chick?"

"Maybe he's been pinched," Phil suggested with a grin.

"Him?" cried Myrtle. "The bull ain't been born that 'll get anything on Chick."

"Many a good man's got his," mused Solly, paternal.

"I wonder where he is," said the girl.

"Out enjoyin' a stroll," said Phil, he being a humorist.

"He's planning some new riot," Solly averred.

Solly was right.

The youth of the dark eyes had torn himself away rather abruptly from the old gentleman in the Boone House. He had done this with the instinctive panic of a man who finds himself at grips with a power that he cannot comprehend. He had never read the story of Jacob and the Strange Man, and the wrestling-match that lasted till dawn, but he was feeling a good deal as Jacob must have felt.

Why should he have lost his nerve in this old man's presence?

No, it wasn't a matter of nerve. He had kept his nerve, all right, or he couldn't have followed the old man to the police-station, stuck around during all that followed.

Why hadn't he been able to make his getaway when there was nothing to stop him? Why did he come over here to the Boone House right at the time when a flick from headquarters was due to show up? Since he had shown up, how came it that he hadn't palmed the old geezer's watch?

That was the way his thoughts ran.

But back of these superficial riddles there remained an instinctive, unshaken knowledge to the effect that some great change had occurred in his life, that he would never hereafter be the same. Again like Jacob—only this boy didn't know it—his thigh was out of joint, but he was blessed.

Beyond the door at which he still lingered, he could still see—with the eye of his mind—the old man he had just left, could see him in his shirt-sleeves and his stocking feet, an innocent, bewildered old hick, absolutely helpless, a child in need of a guardian.

"A poor old rube!"

That was what he was trying to tell himself.

But all the time that he was trying to tell himself this there was another voice that shamed him, that presented to him this man in there in the semblance of no man he had ever seen before—bigger than most men, white and shining, with power to do with other men as he willed.

The same voice was telling him that he would never see this white and shining giant in there again, but that this would make no difference.

He had been thrown, and thrown hard. There would be a limp in his make-up forever more.

But he had been blessed!

He never did quite know how he got out into the street again. He was so absorbed in wondering what had happened to him that it was only some time later that he noticed the sleety rain, the mortuary black and the garish color of the New York he had always known—remembered that he had a date with friends.

Far down-town, where Park Row and the Bowery meet—like a rowdy old beau

and beldame with a past—the young man of the dark eyes left the Elevated train that had brought him south. He was shaken. He was muttering to himself.

"Comin' down fer a card of hop," was the comment of a gateman who saw him pass.

But he felt as if he had been drugged already, if the truth were known. So much to think about! Yet thought almost impossible!

Still he was thinking, thinking, with such intensity that he passed them by and noticed them not—the slippered Chinamen, the coal-stained men of the sea, the befuddled women, the lurking gangsters. The sleet smote him. He merely lowered his head.

He entered the "family-entrance" of the Commodore. He also paused at that door where the girl in black had stood a while ago.

"And there's Chick now!" said Myrtle.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BIG IDEA.

CHICK came over to the table where his friends were seated, slid the vacant chair into position, dropped into it. Since that first glance from the other side of the room he hadn't looked at his friends. During most of the conversation that followed, his eyes were elsewhere. There was no special occasion for it, perhaps, but hardly at any time would his voice have carried beyond the table.

As for his friends, neither Solly nor Phil had given him more than a shifty glance. But Myrtle looked at him, frankly, openly, except when he happened to look at her. Neither did they speak loudly.

"Hello!" said Chick.

"How's the boy?" Solly wanted to know.

"Watcha been pullin'?" Phil demanded. "Been here an hour."

Eddie, the bartender, came up, rolling his shoulders. He had a smile for Chick, a scowl for a noisy customer at another table.

"Ask 'em what they want," said Chick. "Bring me a schooner-glass of milk with a couple of eggs in it." He slanted a look at Myrtle. "Coughin' again, ain'tcha, kid? Bring a glass of milk for her, Eddie, but make it hot."

"Gotcha," said Eddie, and sidled away.

"'Smatter with the boy?" asked Solly.

"Needs some booze to cheer him up," Phil volunteered.

"Wait till he's had his breakfast," Myrtle recommended, without reference to the hour. "Can't you see that he hasn't had anything to eat? You'd be that way, too, if you'd just got up."

"You got me wrong," said Chick. "All of you."

"What's the answer?"

"Nothin's the matter with me. I don't need no booze. I didn't just get up. I've just been doin' a little thinkin', that's all. I got a big idea."

"If it's like that last big idea of yours when we worked the wine-agents' ball," said Solly, "come across."

"Nothin' doin' along that line."

"Another mill in Madison Square?" guessed Phil.

"Wait 'll he's had his breakfast."

"I'm goin' to hand it straight to you three," said Chick. "You've treated me straight. You're about the only ones that ever did. You're the only pals I have."

He paused. An aged drunk was squabbling with himself in a corner. Strained through the windows of the place, between the intermittent rumble and roar of Elevated trains, there came the discordant, nasal whine of a Chinese flageolet.

"Honest and on the level, how long do you think it's goin' to be before you all get yours?"

It was as if all sounds stopped. The effect of Chick's question was silence. The silence was absolute, so far as the four at the table were concerned. Solly took out a cigar, bit the end from it, spat out the end, struck a match, then looked at Chick through the bobbing flame as he lighted up. Phil gave Chick a lingering look from the corner of his eyes; his thin mouth went cruel. Myrtle stared wide-eyed, startled, a little frightened.

Solly was the first to recover himself.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "Maybe I'll retire, or something; start a saloon; go

over and live in England or France. I will, when I get the big stake."

"What's bitin' yuh?" asked Phil.

Chick stuck to his line of thought.

"Where's Silver Smith? Joliet! Roscoe Flynn, who stalled for him? Up the river! Where's Curly, and Clivvers, and Big Jones; Mary Mack, and Boston Sue? Ask the island or the morgue."

"My God, Chick, don't!" said Myrtle.

"You get it, kid," said Chick.

"They was thrown by their crooked pals," said Phil. "Either that, or the old stuff got 'em, or the snow."

"You ain't comparing yourself, Chick, with that bunch of rummies, are you? Not to mention ourselves."

"They were all as good as any, in their day."

"But not like you!"

"Not in one respect. They stayed too long."

"And they didn't have the chances you got," said Solly. "Why, boy—"

"You make me sick," Chick broke in. "Chances! Chances! What chances did I ever have? Brought up by a wood-merchant—learned how to swipe everything I could get my hands on before I was ten years old; taken on by Blodgett, the Dutch House man, and almost got beaten to death; and would have been if Muscowsky hadn't taken me to help him work the lofts; and after Muscowsky, the Hessian, for stores; and after the Hessian, young Billy Gin, for store-windows; and after Billy Gin, Old Doc, the cleverest dip of 'em all.

"Chances!

"I've had my luck—in not getting mine—when the bull dropped Blodgett from the roof, or when Muscowsky was shot. Where's the Hessian? Twenty stretches. Billy Gin? Makin' faces in a straight-jacket! Old Doc? Dead at thirty-three!

"I've never had no chances. Has any one worked harder than me? Has any one tried to play straighter with his pals? Haven't I left the booze alone?" He gave Myrtle a look that made her drop her eyes. "Haven't I been straight and fair in other ways? Have I ever broke trainin'—always been able to do my turn in the ring as a stall at havin' a profession? And what's the result of it all? I'm broke. This old town's broke me. You got to have a thinker on you like Thomas A. Edison or a good thing like Rockefeller—get me? Or tough like an elephant, or strong like a monk, or slick like a snake, and then some—get me? Or this old town 'll eat you alive!"

Solly dropped a slow wink at Phil, and Phil grinned cruelly.

"Eat your breakfast, Chick," Myrtle urged.

"Drink hearty!" said Solly, lifting his glass.

"Lookin' atcha," said Phil.

There was another comparative lull in the noises of the night. The aged bacchanal in the corner was mumbling now. As the youth of the dark eyes looked at him, perhaps there was a dissolving away of the coarser colors and the coarser lines until, under the same sort of white hair that he had seen once before, this night, there appeared a milder, kindlier face. He flashed his eyes at Solly.

Solly grinned. He hadn't liked Chick's talk, but he was getting his cherubic humor back.

"If it was any one but the boy," he said, "I'd back me guess that he'd got a green pill. It's the weather that's got to you, my boy. Let Eddie put a finger of rum in the slop."

"Leave him alone," said Myrtle.

"I've talked to you fair and on the level," said Chick. "There's the big auto meet down at the bay next week. I suppose you boys 'll be there."

"With bells on," said Phil.

"And what's the big idea?" asked Sol.

"Oh, nothin' very much," said Chick, but his voice quivered. "I'm quitting. That's all! I'm blowin' the game!"

CHAPTER VIII.

TESTIMENTAL.

IF there had been an effect of silence following Chick's words a little while before, his words now were in the nature of a sputtering fuse preliminary to an explosion. Nothing deadly. Something in the way of fireworks.

Solly let out a guffaw.

Phil stiffly turned his head for another sidelong glance, derisive, his thin mouth expanded in a snakelike grin.

Myrtle rested her elbows on the table, her chin on her hands, her wide eyes staring, the fine vapor of the drink in front of her slowly exhausting itself like some tenuous, disappearing hope.

That was all for a while. The Chinese musician played. There was the sound of a brief but vigorous encounter between two belligerent thugs in the street. Through the odorous air of the room there crept an added aroma of chop-suey and incense.

" I'm blowin' the game," Chick repeated in a whisper, and his fashion of saying it indicated that he said what he did for his own enlightenment as much as that of the others. Also there was an implication that he was surprised by the declaration as much as any one; yet, that he understood it perfectly, that it was the result of all his hard thinking—groping; thought which at the time had seemed to be blind.

" Yuh talk about me having chances," he said with soft but passionate intensity. " No guy's ever had a chance unless he got started right. There's only one place where yuh can get started right—there's only one place where most of us can keep right—get me? And that's out in the country."

" He's wisin' up," said Phil, " to what I tells him about Saratoga and French Lick."

Chick did not reply. He hadn't even heard. To one who could have understood, his dark eyes would have told the tale—eyes that saw a vision. The sordid walls of the back room had disappeared—blue paint, dirty plaster, fly-blown lithographs of prize-fighters, burlesque queens, and once-famous horses; these had disappeared, and in their place was a melting prospect of apple-orchards white with bloom, then a sunset, then a wide sky, silent, fiery and nebulous with the billion stars. Perhaps, even, the mingled reek of beer and tobacco, chop-suey and incense, yielded to a cleaner breath. Most of the visions that men have are atavistic, have nothing to do with present experience.

" What do you know about the country?" Solly asked.

" Nothin'."

" What do yuh think it is—just a sort of zoo full of hicks waitin' to be trimmed?"

" I never been outside of New York City in my life," said Chick, absorbed. He faced them, a little sullen, ready to fight. " But I know I'm goin'. That's all. We're the rubes and the hicks—if yuh come down to it—us guys that stick around here in the slums waitin' for the cell-block, or the island, or the morgue. Get me? I gives you the dope. This big town eats yuh alive."

" Chick's lost his noive," Phil grinned. " He's made a bad play. It's trun a scare into him."

" Guess again," Chick countered, with a subdued but deadly menace that was to put Philly out of the argument for a while. " I put one over to-day at the Grand Central 'at 'd made you swell out your chest for the rest of your natural. I'm out in the train-shed—see?—with a local comin' in. I pipes one of these rubes comin' down the steps. Bulls and specials all around—smoke-porters swarmin'—not a chance in a million to make the getaway. And I touches the rube—for—one—thousand—bones!"

" For the love of Mike!"

" My Gawd!"

" Me lost my nerve? Fergit it! I listens in when the hick makes his squeal—I tails him to the house— I gets my hunch—I hands him back his roll—I'm through!"

" Do you mean to say, my boy," Solly inquired, " that you nicked the jay for a thousand?"

" One thousand one hundred."

" And you make your getaway?"

" Clean."

" An' 'en you hand it to him back?"

" You heard me."

Solly looked at Phil. " You get your other guess, all right. Chick ain't lost his nerve nor nothin'. Say, it 'd take the nerve of a dentist to pull a thing like that—then tell it!"

" Yuh fat gonef—"

Myrtle interposed.

" Say, ain't Solly the limit? Neither him nor Phil's got a brain for anything higher'n a ham sandwich. I'll go to the country with you, Chick, if you want me to. The doctor says I ought to go."

Chick looked at the girl. She tried to

brazen him out, but there was a shade of wistfulness about her. She wavered. She shrank.

"You're all right, Myrtle," he said to her, almost as if there was no one else there to hear. "Yuh got your faults, but yuh got a heart, and y' ain't dead from the neck up. And, so far's I know, you're still as straight as they make 'em. Keep that way, kid. Do you know what I'm goin' to do for you? I'm goin' to take you up to the Penn Depot and give yuh a shove 'at 'll put yuh in Denver. Ain't that the place the doctor said?"

"Yes, but—"

"I'm goin' to stake yuh. That's all fer you. If yuh ever think about me again, just sort of pull for me, kid, because I'll be needin' it, maybe, more'n you."

The little speech, and the simple, mortal directness of Chick's mood, impressed the other two men. Solly was moved to further speech, but he was subdued.

"The boy ain't sore at his old pal!"

For a moment, however, Chick ignored him. Chick was still addressing Myrtle, ostensibly, although Myrtle was apparently letting her interest waver. Myrtle, it seemed, had got something in her eye and was having trouble to extract it.

"You're going to do what I tell yuh, kid. Go out West where the cowboys are. A year from now, and yuh can put it over on this here Daughter of the Gods. Get me? And some nice young feller's going to pick you out and find he's got a winner. Cut out the guys like me and Solly and Phil. You know—the wise ones!—so damn wise they can't see what's comin' to 'em even when they get the straight tip."

Solly was sober, but he was cynical.

"So it's the old reform!" he droned, tongueing his cigar and taking Chick in with narrowed eyes.

"What yuh got against it?"

"Nothing! Nothing!" Solly's voice registered weary patience. "Only, what's the use of your takin' to the bushes? Get a political job here in New York like a lot o' others."

"Yeh—and keep on bein' a crook—like them!" But Chick could see that his friend was sincere. "I want to get away from the crooks and the crooked stuff before it gets me," he explained with desperate persistence. "I want to get out where the apples grow, and the little birds are red and blue and know how to sing. Get me? And where the people are so honest that they don't have to lock their doors at night. Why, say! Here in New York a guy can't get into his own house without a bunch of pass-keys, and every other guy you meet in the street is a bull or a gun, or somethin'. How do yuh expect a feller to keep straight when he's up against nothin' but bull-con and flimflam, rough-house and fakes, sniffs and smokes, creepers and—ah, what's the use! Yuh know what I mean!"

"If yuh mean," said Solly, "that your rubes are a bunch of plaster angels with wings on their backs, somebody's been handin' yuh the wrong line o' dope. I know. I was born in the country myself. And for all your dirty, low-down crooks, Chicky, gimme your hick crook—skinnin' each other out of peanuts; hookin' pennies from old women; sousin' on the sly; takin' dirty money with both mitts on week-days and wearin' white neckties on Sunday."

"That ain't the kind I'm goin' up against," said Chick in his slightly stifled voice.

"Where are you goin to, then?" Solly inquired. "The moon?"

"No, I ain't goin' to the moon," Chick replied with a dogged grip on his vision on his hunch. "But I'm goin' back—get me? 'Way back!"

"And who is this," came a paternal voice, "who speaks of going back—'way back?"

CHAPTER IX.

"SKY-BLUE."

"GRANDPA!" Solly almost sobbed.

To judge by Solly's accent, and the expression in Solly's cherubic face, the newcomer really was some cherished relative—ancient and beloved—one whose presence was a gift from Heaven almost too good to be true.

"'Way back! 'Way back!" And he solemnly wagged his head.

He would have been a remarkable per-

sonage in any place of assembly, but most of all in the back room of the Commodore.

Phil was the next to recognize him. Into Phil's cynical but well-favored countenance there came a touch of amazement, also of respect flavored with awe.

"Sky-Blue!" breathed Phil.

At the pronouncement of that fabulous name Chick turned.

His first impression was of a cascade of white whiskers, then of black broadcloth and a gold chain. It was only an instant later that he met the friendly twinkle of a pair of the brightest and keenest eyes his own eyes had ever met. They belonged to a man who couldn't have been much less than seventy. His ministerial and hoary benevolence was rather emphasized by the fact that he wore a peculiar hat—shaped like a plug hat, but of stiff, black felt—and that his necktie, when it could be seen, which wasn't often on account of his whiskers, was a particularly flat, black Ascot. The tie was, however, ornamented with a jet-and-gold scarfpin big enough to serve a lady for a brooch.

"Sit down," begged Solly, getting to his feet.

But Eddie, the bar-boy, had his eye on the new arrival. In Eddie's face also there was a look of happy surprise. At the slightest gesture from the old gentleman, indicating that he was willing to join the party, Eddie, had stepped forward swiftly with a chair, held this in place while the patriarch seated himself.

Eddie breathed his willingness to be of further use:

"What kin I bring yuh, bishop?"

The bishop reflected, with an alert appliance of thought.

"Bring me"—he paused, then pronounced the rest of it like a scientist stating a complex theorem—"a cocktail containing two parts Bacardi rum. Hold on, now! You tell him who it's for, and tell him that I don't want lemon but lime, and that he's to put the lime and the sugar in before the rum. Hold on!"

He reflected, benevolently. He thrust a finger and thumb into the pocket of his well-filled vest. He thoughtfully extracted a fifty-cent piece.

"Well, go on," he said. "I'll see how you get me that order filled before—no, here! You give me forty cents. Quick!"

He didn't have to speak twice. He picked up the four wet dimes Eddie had left in exchange for the larger coin which Eddie had seized in his rush for the bar. Then the bishop looked around at his table companions. He smiled. He blandly winked.

"I bet," he said, complacently, "that's the first phony coin Eddie's took in for quite a spell. Solly, my child, I haven't seen you since you was a little shaver selling lemonade at the Muzée." He cast an indulgent glance toward Phil and Myrtle. But it was to Chick that he addressed himself with kindly interest: "Was you thinking of leaving New York?"

Chick was momentarily embarrassed, but Solly answered for him.

"You ought to 'a' been here, grandpa. The boy here's a little sour on the game—hands us a line of dope about how everybody gets it in the neck if they stick around too long. Say, it was in my mind to ask him how about you. Nobody ever got nothing on you; did they, grandpa? You ain't got any kick at how the world's been treatin' you; have you, grandpa?"

The bishop was placid, but before he could formulate his answer Phil contributed to the conversation.

"The old reform-bug's bit him."

Myrtle turned on him.

"You should worry," she flared.

"Yeh," Solly mocked, as the humor of the situation got the better of him; "says he ain't never had a chance because he wasn't raised up a rube. He ought to know somethin' about rubes like you do; oughtn't he, grandpa?"

"Was you aiming to go out in the country, son?"

"Yes."

Chick answered softly, still embarrassed somewhat. It was all right for Solly to play the familiar with this old man, but there was something about him, as there is apt to be about any celebrity that one sees for the first time, to cause the mind to recoil for a better look. "Sky-Blue!" "The Bishop!" There were a dozen other war names that belonged to this patriarch. His fame ex-

tended from coast to coast. This, Chick knew, but only in a general way. Now, here was the great man himself—looking at him, taking a sympathetic interest in his plans.

Solly also diverted his interest to Chick.

"Say," he whispered from the side of his mouth, "they ain't a bull in the world that 'd dream o' hangin' anything on grandpa!"

Before the interesting colloquy could develop further, Eddie came back with the bishop's beverage on a sloppy tray. In Eddie's face was a look of consternation carefully held in check. Eddie set the drink on the table and tentatively drew out the half-dollar the elder had given him. But Eddie's opportunity to put in a claim was deferred.

The bishop lifted the glass. He smelled it. He took a copious swallow. He appeared to masticate the liquid before it got down. He turned to Eddie with a glint of rage so subdued and deadly and cold that even Eddie winced.

"Git me the bottle!" the bishop commanded.

Eddie disappeared. He was almost instantly back, bringing the bottle with him. Sky-Blue took this and studied it patiently.

"It's Bacardi," he pronounced with mild surprise.

He pulled the cork. He decanted enough of the liquor into his glass to make up for the swallow he had taken. He turned to Eddie.

"Leave it here," he said. "I'll settle with you later."

Eddie withdrew, but only as far as the next table, which happened to be empty. There he paused long enough to bounce his coin a couple of times on the table-top.

The bishop refreshed himself with another swallow. He was mellow. He was suave. He slowly wagged his head. He watched, with a glint of kindly but detached interest, while Eddie, responsive to an inspiration, slipped the bad coin into the return change of a tipsy customer on the other side of the room. Then, once again he addressed the group:

"The country's good. I've always found it pleasant." He went reminiscent. "My first wife was a country girl—wooed her and won her out in Missouri."

"Was she—" Solly began. He hesitated, possibly for fear of committing an indelicacy.

But Sky-Blue, abstracted, nodded his head.

"Yes, that was her who later posed as the Princess Clementine or something up in Duluth."

"Whatever became of her?"

"I don't know," the bishop drawled.

"Ain't she—"

"No; she divorced me, or I divorced her—I don't remember which. The lawyers could tell you. *There's* a bunch of rascals for you. I never could get the straight of it. But, speaking about the country. I was addressing a grange out in North Dakota not more than two weeks ago. And—blooie, but it was cold!" He drained his glass and, absent-mindedly, filled it up again, this time with the Bacardi straight. "And I spoke of the blessings of the country. One of the most successful sermons I've got!"

"One of the what?" gasped Solly.

The bishop eyed him musingly.

"Solly, my child," he said, "you always was a materialist."

Myrtle dared speak. "I was tellin' him the same thing. I'm leaving for the country myself."

"A good idea," Sky-Blue averred, taking her in with his bright and kindly eyes. "Oh, the great country! It's so rich in sympathy! Just let a bank president out there, or somebody, know that you are a young widder, genteel, and in reduced circumstances, and not knowing which way to turn next! Oh, this great and generous land!" He turned once more to Chick. "But you go alone, my son," he said gently. "What line of reform was you aiming to manipulate?"

CHAPTER X.

SNIFFING THE ASPHODEL.

POSSIBLY for the first time in his life, Chick was letting his embarrassment get the better of him. He was on strange ground. That was the trouble. But his courage came to his rescue. He dared tell the truth even to Sky-Blue.

"It ain't no line," he said. "I'm goin' straight. That's all. I got a hunch that I can do it, too, but only out in the country."

Neither Chick nor the bishop paid any attention to Solly's snort of laughter nor Phil's reptilian smile. Chick was looking at the bishop, and the bishop was looking at his glass. He meditatively filled this from the bottle again. He was about to raise the glass when he halted his movement with a look of consternation.

"Where are my manners?" he exclaimed, apologetically.

He summoned Eddie with a finger.

"Why don't you take the orders of this lady and these gentlemen?" he demanded reprovingly. "Bring them—bring them—let's see—a bottle of your best Catawba wine." He dismissed Eddie and momentarily gave his attention to Myrtle. "I'm going to ask them to make you a package of an extra bottle of that for you to take away with you, and I want you to listen to what I say. You take your bottle of Catawba wine and open it and put in about a dozen tenpenny nails—wrought nails—don't let them give you cut nails—wrought nails!—and then cork your bottle and let it stand for about a fortnight—a month would be better. Got that? Catawba wine and then your wrought nails!"

"Yes," said Myrtle at a loss.

"Then, what's she to do with it, grandpa?" Solly inquired. "Poison the banker?"

The bishop ignored him.

"A dear old soul out in Juniata, Pennsylvania, gave me that prescription," he said. "She had a daughter that looked something like you, only she wasn't so good looking, and I asked her, says I: 'How comes it that Angelica,' says I, 'who used to be so slim and white now looks like one of those corn-fed girls,' says I, 'like they raise 'em where I come from,' I says, 'out Cincinnati way?'"

"Do you come from Cincinnati?" asked Myrtle.

"Sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't," said the bishop. "It all depends. Well, as I was telling you, the dear old soul, she says, says she: 'I'm giving Angelica a tonic,' and she tells me about that. So you needn't be afraid of it doing you any harm, my child. I've given the prescription to five thousand people if I've given it to one; and all I ever got out of it was a case of whisky from a liquor-house; but it did them all good. Wine and iron! Nature's gift to suffering man!"

"You must do a lot of good," said Myrtle, to show her gratitude.

The bishop emptied his glass. He made an atrocious face, as the stuff went down, but he filled his glass again.

"Solly," he said, "it's nothing to me, but suppose you proposed the smokes. You're looking fairly prosperous."

"Gotcha," said Solly, and he playfully displayed a small roll of bils. "Here, Eddie, take their orders for the smokes."

The bishop was in a reverie as he saw Solly's money.

"You was sayin'—" Solly suggested when Eddie had gone.

"Oh, yes," said the bishop. But any one could have seen that it was still several seconds before he fully recovered his line of thought. "As I was saying, that's the advice I'd give to any young man. Why stay around where all the sinners flee to, when you can go to a sweeter, purer clime, where the lambs ain't all grew horns and whiskers yet nor learned how to eat tin cans?"

"There's as many suckers here in New York, grandpa, as there are billy-goats," laughed Sol; "or nanny-goats either."

"Tell it to Sweeney," countered the bishop, promptly.

He drained his glass, gathering philosophical force.

"You'll make a success of this reform business, my son," he said, smiling at Chick. "You believe in goodness. That's the secret of success." He laughed in his beard. "Oh, this sweet, sweet appeal to benign flapdoodle and mellifluous balderdash! But you must be sincere. You must believe it yourself. Be good and you'll be happy. Oh, how I suffered before I learned the truth. Let us spread the truth to others not so fortunate as us. Let us carry the sweetness of this broad land to the besotted unfortunates of the wicked Babylon, to the end that they also, brothers and sisters, may be blessed like us and sniff the asphodel!"

"He's gettin' a little stewed," breathed Solly.

To Chick it seemed that there was a gleam of alert intelligence in Sky-Blue's eye notwithstanding the ground for Solly's judgment. And the bishop himself followed with the wise suggestion that they all be going their several ways. Myrtle had her package of wine. There was nothing more especially pressing either to do or to talk about.

"Solly, my child," said the bishop, with a trembling note in his voice that hadn't been there before, "I'm getting too old to trust myself, but I can trust you. Eddie, here, is waiting to get back at me on account of that little joke I played on him. We'll fool him again. You settle and let me know how much it is. You wouldn't lie to me about it. Would you, Solly?"

"What do you think?"

They went out on to the sidewalk, leaving Solly to follow.

The rain had stopped, but the night had continued to be damp and unseasonably cool. Crowded up into a dismal but more or less sheltered corner of the barroom entrance they saw a little slum girl with an armful of untidy flowers which she had evidently been trying to sell. It was the bishop who saw her first.

"Well, well, well!" he exclaimed. "What have we here?"

The little girl looked up at him. She had a smile in her hollow eyes. She tried to repeat the formula of her salesmanship. Her lips moved, but her voice was inaudible.

The bishop thrust his fingers into various pockets. He turned to Phil.

"She says her flowers are worth two dollars," he announced, with cheerful sympathy, all trace of weakness now having disappeared. "Slip the little lady two dollars—until I settle with Sol."

Phil was obedient to the higher law.

"There's your two dollars," said the bishop playfully to the child. "Now you're free to go home. Where'd you say it was?" He bowed his patriarchal head until his ear was on a level with the little girl's lips. "Ah, Cherry Street! I shall have the honor of sending you there in a cab."

And Chick remembered vaguely some tradition as to why this old man had been called Sky-Blue. It was because he was always doing things like this.

He saw the bishop summon the night-hawk cabby, put the little maid into the vehicle—no, he wouldn't take her flowers; they had been rained on enough to freshen them up, and the weather was cool, so that she could sell them all to-morrow—and saw him give the cabman a bill with a request that the cabman keep the change.

The bishop was in a softer mood than ever when he returned from the little adventure. He was smiling, but his eye was a little moist. He ignored Phil with a slight hint of asperity. He seemed to be drawn to Chick.

"See how little it costs to be kind—to spread a little sweetness on our pathway through the world, as the poet says."

"It looks to me like it sets *you* back quite a bit," said Chick.

Sky-Blue dropped his voice to a confidential tone.

"I'm going to let Phil keep that two dollars to his credit," he said; "and the child will get home in safety—in safety and happiness—poor little sparrow, even if that was a punk dollar bill I handed over to the jehu."

Solly came out and joined his friends.

"It was eight fifty, grandpa," he announced.

"What was?" the bishop inquired with polite interest.

"The drinks; and I had to let out a roar to keep it that low."

"Well, you were always good at that, Solly, when it came to paying for anything. But I don't quite understand. I'm getting a little old. What's it all about? You'll have to make yourself clear."

"You owes me eight fifty," said Solly. "Is that clear?"

"Solly, my child," said Sky-Blue, with sincere regret, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you've been a little fresh all evening, calling me 'grandpa' and everything. Now, let us have an end of this nonsense."

He turned to Chick.

"And that's the way of the world," he

said, linking his arm into that of the younger man. "There is a scheme in things. Come on, Solly, and you, Phil. I'm taking you all to supper. Don't be afraid. I have a friend who will pay for it, and maybe show you how to get a little stake. I knew you'd smile at that. Good money! Bad money! We all get our share of each, and what we get we pass along. You're right. Go where the good money is—'way back!"

"'Way back! 'Way back!"

For a long time after he was alone that night, Chick's mind was in confusion, a jumble of the words and the phrases he had heard this day—from the lieutenant of police, from the old man who had been his victim and his master, from his friends, from Sky-Blue; a jumble of fragmentary pictures also—of the back room of the Commodore, of a hill white with bloom, of Solly's fat face, mocking but not unkind; Phil's face, friendly but cruel; Myrtle's face, oddly transfigured, as he had seen her last at the Pennsylvania Station when he bade her good-by; the face of Ezra Wood; the bishop's!

But through all this double confusion, like the sound of a bell through the noises of a street came the echo:

"'*Way back!* '*Way back!*"

He didn't know where he was going. It didn't matter very much. The whole of America lay to the north and west and south of him. He had given Myrtle about all the money that he had, and he had a vague idea that this was going to bring him luck. The pawn-shops would open at 7 A.M.—an hour fixed by the police. Then he would pawn all he had. It wouldn't yield him much, but it would be sufficient to carry him far from New York, far from the only life he had ever known, far from all the people he had ever known.

There, for a time, he regretted it a little that he hadn't talked this thing over with old Ezra Wood. Or, suppose that he himself went to Rosebloom.

No, everything that had thus far entered into his life he would put behind him. New York had mauled him, shaken him down, begun to eat him alive. He could see it now.

He would begin all over again—like an innocent babe among other innocents—'*way back!*

CHAPTER XI.

SPRING.

THE whole country was busy about something. It was an activity which paralleled and confirmed an activity within himself. The idea kept coming back to him wherever he went, and the further he went the stronger the idea grew.

He went to the westward, slowly, by easy stages, without any particular design. The big towns made no appeal to him whatsoever. It was the open country and the villages that ensnared his interest, set up a vibration in his own heart that was in perfect accord with the vast but muted tremolo of the cosmic orchestra. The opening note of a new composition—a new symphonic poem.

Not all of a man's feelings are reduced to speech. And for much of the time Chick's moods were wordless. But all this was what he felt.

There was an underlying strain of philosophy and poetry in his nature which he had always known existed there. The wizard touch of old Ezra Wood had identified it for him. That was all. What Chick saw with his eyes translated itself largely in the words that the old man had used in speaking of the country. There was that wider sense, however, that had nothing to do with merely physical sensation.

"God's own country!"

The familiar phrase of a sometimes cheap and tawdry patriotism took on a wider meaning and expressed somewhat this feeling of harmony. And he drew on other sources of expression—songs and sentiments that had been planted in his heart 'way back in school-days. He was not without education. No child of the New York streets is.

> My native country, thee,
> Land of the noble free.

It was as if the seeds of a new growth had been planted there—in some seer October, or in the dark of some winter now past—and that these were now springing up,

covering everything with green, delivering a promise of blossom and future harvest.

Chance, as much as anything, carried him a little to the south as well as west—right toward the heart of the country; or, if not its heart, at least its lungs—a corpuscle going back in the veins of the body politic to be revivified, although he didn't think of it that way. Only that feeling that he was a part of some great scheme persisted and made itself clear.

His course led him down through the Delaware Water Gap, which is a region of wooded hills, carpeted valleys, glimmering rivers and misty cascades. He had told the truth when he said that he had never been out of New York. Even New York he had never seen as some people see it. New York was that screaming monster where it was mostly night, where the sky is frontiered by high roofs and smoke-stacks, or shut out altogether by the "L."

There were times when Chick was telling himself that he had never seen the sky before—not since some dimly remembered past. You can't see the sky when your business keeps your eyes on the things of the street. Nor had he ever seen the earth before. The sidewalks, the granite pavements, the asphalt, the slippery mosaics and soiled carpets that his feet had hitherto trod—these were not the earth.

He had been gone from New York for almost a month. This particular night he had slept in the open. He hadn't slept very much, but this was not due to any lack of comfort. Discomfort could never keep him awake. He had slept in all sorts of places, and this place was better than any of them—under the low boughs of a purple beech, where the grass none the less grew fine and long, springy and thick, on the rim of a wide valley that stretched away into hazy nothingness, as if this were the end of the world.

He had found this place at sunset, when he was traveling on foot, decided, this time, to test the new world of his discovery to the utmost. He had passed many a night in New York City "out in the open"—"flying the banner," as they called it, back there; and what would it be like to "fly the banner" here in the country? Now he had tried it, and he felt, as he had never felt before, that he finally belonged to the open places. He had been initiated. No longer was the country holding out on him. He knew the days. He knew the nights.

At sunset, though, the whole valley had been so flooded with red and golden light, especially straight ahead of him, that many of the details of it had escaped him. After that, it was the purpling twilight, getting so thick that it floated the eyes of his head and the eyes of his mind right up to where the stars were coming out.

It was not until the dawn that he saw that there was a town in the valley. It looked almost like his mental picture of Rosebloom, the place old Ezra Wood came from. He would have to see this town.

He took his time about his toilet.

It may have been the result of his night in the open air, but there was a picnic-feeling in his heart—a feeling that engulfed him and permeated all things that this was a holiday. There was a hint of happy adventure about it, as well. The birds were singing about him as he washed himself in the rock wash-bowl of a tiny brook. The birds were celebrating something which was about to come to pass. He changed his linen. He scrupulously brushed his clothes. He polished his shoes with strands of grass.

"Be you a stranger in these parts?"

He turned and saw an old, old man at the top of a tussocky slope. And, for all any one could have judged from the appearance of him, the old man had been there all the time, just like an old stump, or one of those shy, wild creatures which know how to emerge from a hiding-place and then rest silent and motionless for hours.

"I sure be," the New Yorker replied. "And where do you come from?"

"Well now," said the ancient, "since you've asked me, I ain't a goin' to tell you no lie. I just come from the medder back there that Uncle Newt Parker stoled from Henry Smith in 1882. Hold on, now. I don't want to tell no lie. It wa'n't in 1882, neither. It was in 1883. Yes, sir. It were in the fall of the year, 1883."

All the time that the ancient was saying this, he kept his eyes gimleting the distance, as an aid to abstruse thought.

"Live there?"

The native swung his small eyes on Chick with a start.

"Where—the medder?"

"Yeh."

The ancient once more let his sight go into the far places.

"Now, if you'd asked me in the first place where I lived and not where I come from, I'd 'a' told you right out. A fair answer fer a fair question. That's my motto. That's what I was tellin' one of these here Indian doctors who went through here last fall and wanted to know if I ever suffered from chilblains. A fair answer fer a fair question. Stranger, do you see that town over there?"

"Yes. Is that where you live?"

"Hold your horses. Hold your horses. I ain't goin' to lie to you. I lived there once."

"What's the name of it?"

"Well, if they ain't changed it since I been there, the name of that town over there, since you been asking me, stranger, is St. Clair."

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.

Giving It Away

by E. K. Means

"ONE ten cents dime is a mighty little money, Figger," Pap Curtain remarked in his snarly tones as he placed an insignificant coin upon the table between them.

"Why don't you git dat dime changed into two nickels an' clink 'em togedder?" Figger snickered.

"I mought change 'em into ten copper cents; but whut kin a nigger buy wid a copper cent?"

"De post-office will sell you a postige stamp," Figger suggested.

"Whut kin a nigger buy wid a nickel?"

"I'll sell you one small beer," Figger volunteered.

"Whut kin a nigger buy fer a dime?" Pap persisted.

"Dimes is onhandy," Figger admitted. "Whut uster be bought wid a dime now costs 'leven cents."

"I wus busted dis mawnin', Figger," Pap said gloomily. "I felt powerful happy an' nachel when I didn't had nothin'. But I found dis here onforchnit dime in between de blades of my pocket-knife."

Mustard Prophet, who had been a silent auditor, suddenly sprang to his feet, jerked out his own pocket-knife and opened all the blades, then turned all his pockets inside out, finally examining the sweat-band of his hat.

"I knowed I didn't hab no money," he grinned. "But I thought I better take a secont look."

The door opened, and a strange negro walked toward them across the sanded floor of the Hen-Scratch saloon, carrying his derby hat before him. The derby was inverted, and the stranger carried it carefully as if it contained something very precious. He placed the hat in the center of the table,

keeping his hand upon the brim to prevent the receptacle from rocking on its curved crown and spilling its contents.

"Take a look, niggers!" he said with a queer laugh. "My name am Buss Bargain."

The three men stretched their necks and looked into the derby.

"My Gawd!" Pap Curtain howled. "Whut is dat mess in yo' hat?"

"Oystyers!" Buss Bargain chuckled. "Two dozen raw oystyers! Dey's been salted an' peppered an' a leetle vinegar has been poured on an' some grated horse-reddish is sprinkled on de top."

"Dat's a dern good derby," Figger chuckled. "She ain't leaked a drap of dat mess."

"He'p yo'selfs, niggers!" Buss exclaimed in a generous tone. "I knows you-alls is awful hongry."

"I just et!" Pap exclaimed, making a grimace at the hat.

"I wouldn't choose none," Mustard Prophet remarked feelingly.

"I jes' dee-spise raw oystyers," Figger Bush proclaimed earnestly.

"Less take 'em over to some nigger cabin an' git 'em fried," Buss suggested.

"Take 'em out an' feed 'em to a dawg!" Figger howled. "Who wants to eat a passel of oystyers outen a nigger's hat?"

"I done tried to feed 'em to a dawg," the stranger answered easily. "De dang dawg turned up his nose an' his tail at 'em an' wouldn't even lick 'em. So I fotch 'em in here to you-alls."

The stranger released his grip upon the hat-brim and made a generous gesture, and the hat dipped and spilled half the oysters out upon the top of the table.

Three negroes pushed back hastily to escape the overflow.

"Good gosh!" Figger Bush squalled. "Whut you mean by messin' up my saloon dis-a-way? Git outen here!"

The stranger reached out and calmly emptied the remainder of the bivalves on the top of the table.

"Hol' on dar," Pap Curtain snarled, clawing in the raw oysters with his horny, yellow fingers. "I had a ten cents dime layin' on de top of dat table—de last cash money I owned—an' now you done lost it in his here oystyer soup."

"Here it am," Buss Bargain chuckled, picking it up. "Is dis de last dime you is got?"

"Suttinly."

Thereupon Buss placed it upon his thumb and flicked it out of the window into the darkness.

"Now you is dead broke!" he said dramatically. "Don't deny dat fack fer I kin see it in yo' face!"

"Looky here, nigger!" Pap snarled, pushing back his chair with a belligerent gesture. "You is actin' powerful biggity fer a stranger in Tickfall. I'll rub yo' nose in dese here oystyers in a minute!"

"'Twouldn't do no good," the stranger sighed lugubriously. "I'd be onhappy still."

"You'd shore hab somepin to be onhappy about," Pap snapped. "You ain't got no right to pitch away my dime."

"Is you really plum' broke?" Buss asked sympathetically.

"Busted!" Pap assured him.

"Is you busted, too?" the stranger asked Mustard.

"Worser dan Pap," Mustard sighed. "I didn't even hab no dime to lose."

"How 'bout you, barkeep'?"

"Busted is my nachel condition," Figger grinned. "'Thout nothin' I come into dis worl', I's trabbelin' through 'thout nothin', an' I's gwine out 'thout nothin'."

The stranger surveyed them with the utmost solemnity for about a minute. Then he walked to a near-by table and sat down.

"Come over dis way, brudders!" he exclaimed. "I wants to show you somepin by de 'lectric light."

As the three came up he laid a cheap photograph upon the top of the table, and beside the picture he placed a large roll of money.

"Look at 'em bofe, brudders!" he exclaimed.

Pap Curtain snatched at the roll of money, examining it first to see if there was a corn-cob wrapped in the middle to make the roll look like a large amount. It was good money clear through.

Then they picked up the photograph of

a negro woman and passed it around for inspection. There was nothing attractive about it, merely the picture of a kinky-haired, thick-lipped, stupid girl.

"Which does you choose, brudders?" Buss Bargain asked. "De woman or de money?"

"De money," the trio answered promptly.

"He'p yo'selfs, brudders," the stranger answered. "I chooses de woman."

He placed the photograph back into his pocket, walked to the other table and picked up his messy derby hat, slapped it upon his head and started out.

"Hol' on, brudder, you's fergittin' yo' money!" Figger Bush quacked.

"I done gib dat money to you-alls!" the stranger grinned.

"Us don't want it!" Pap Curtain howled with sudden suspicion. "Somepin muss ail dis money!"

"I never heerd tell of nobody givin' money away!" Mustard exclaimed. "I don't need none in mine!"

He snatched the roll of currency from the table and threw it at the feet of the stranger.

Buss Bargain picked it up, placed it in the crown of his derby hat where the oysters had been, and walked out.

II.

WHEN the green-baize doors slapped together behind that most interesting negro, the three men gazed at each other with astonishment. In all their experience with luck and providence nothing like that had ever happened before.

"Dat nigger man ain't right in his head," Pap Curtain proclaimed, gazing at the table covered with raw oysters.

"Ef I thought dat wus all dat ailed him, I'd 'a' kep' his money," Figger snickered. "I don't mind takin' money from a loon'-tick."

"I needed dat money, but I didn't choose it," Mustard sighed. "When a black man hands me a wad like dat fer a free gift, I jes' nachelly figger dat dat money is got snake-ile on it."

"You cullud pussons he'p me clean up dis oystyer stew," Figger pleaded, pointing to the table. "Gosh! Whoever heerd tell of doin's like dis!"

"We kin tote de table out de door an' scrape de gorm off," Pap suggested. "Ketch holt!"

Outside of the saloon they stopped under the electric light on the corner, inverted the table, scraped off the top, and scooped up handfuls of sand and scoured it clean. While they were at work a white man passed on a saddle-horse, then reined up and turned back.

"Howdy, Marse John!" Figger greeted him. "Who is you sheriffin' atter dis time of de night?"

"I'm lookin' for Vinegar Atts," Sheriff Flournoy replied. "Know where he is?"

"He's up at de Shoofly chu'ch," Pap Curtain told him. "Dis here is Vinegar's preachin' night. Us oughter be at de meetin' right now, but we got to scour dis table."

"What is that mess on the ground?" Flournoy asked, stooping from the saddle. "Somebody get his brains knocked out with that table?"

"Dem's oystyers, Marse John," Figger snickered. "Us jes' now met up wid de craziest nigger in de worl'. He wanted to feed us oystyers outen his derby hat, an' when us loss our appetite fer hat-feed, he wanted to gib us all his money."

"Did you take his money?" Flournoy asked.

"Naw, suh."

"Then you are crazier than he is," Flournoy laughed.

Then, in answer to Flournoy's questions, they told him the whole story.

"He wus a tall, black nigger, Marse John," they concluded. "He's gittin' ole an' white-head. He's got a derby hat smeared up wid oystyer juice, an' wored black clothes wid white stripes up 'n' down, an' had on a yaller vest. You'll know him right away ef he tries to gib you any money. He's shore a outstandin' nigger."

Flournoy sat his horse for a minute, chuckling over what he had heard. Then the negroes began to ask questions:

"Whut ailed him, Marse John?" Pap asked.

"Maybe he loves the woman of the photograph more than anything else in the world. It might even have affected his mind."

"Tain't reasomable, boss," Pap chuckled. "Too many nigger women in de worl' fer a cullud man to git crippled in his head about ary pertickler one. I been married fo' times, an' I knows."

"He may have been drunk," Flournoy proposed next.

"Naw, suh," Figger, the barkeeper, protested. "Even a drunk nigger would hab mo' sense dan to put oystyer stew in his derby hat an' try to gib all his dollars away. I been barkeep' of de Hen-Scratch fer a long time, an' I ain't never been able even to shawt-change a drunk nigger. He kin count his money better when he drunk dan he kin when he's sober."

"Whut I cain't ketch on to is how come he wanted to gib his money away," Mustard muttered in a wondering voice. "Lawd, dat shore is a secret myst'ry."

"Sometimes a man gives money away because he stole it, and is afraid he will be caught with it in his possession," Flournoy suggested.

"He acted too public fer a nigger dat swiped it," Pap protested.

"Sometimes a man gives money away which does not belong to him—money he's holding in trust for another party," Flournoy said.

"Not niggers!" Mustard Prophet asserted. "A nigger keeps his own dollars—he don't trust nobody."

"Maybe he wanted to give it away because it was bad money," the sheriff surmised.

"I examinated dat money myse'f," Pap declared. "Dey wus all real dollars."

"Maybe the money is infected—poisoned by disease," Flournoy smiled.

"Dat's onpossible, Marse John," Figger assured him. "Dat coon put dat money in his derby hat, and put dat hat on his head. No black man ain't gwine rub no p'isoned money in his wool."

"I give it up," Flournoy laughed, gathering his bridle-reins in his hand.

"How we gwine find out dis privut myst'ry, Marse John," Pap asked.

"Ask the man!"

"We never thought of dat," Figger giggled. "Us 'll hunt him up right now an' 'terrogate him."

"When you see Vinegar Atts, tell him I want him to come to my house right after church," Flournoy told them as he started down the street.

They carried their table back into the saloon, making many guesses about where Buss Bargain might be found. Figger turned out the light, and his two companions stepped outside, waiting until he had locked the door.

"Us 'll go up an' listen to Vinegar Atts explavicate," Pap suggested. "We'll gib him de message Marse John sont, an' mebbe de revun kin gib us some religium advices on dis strange nigger."

They sauntered down the street through the settlement called Dirty-Six. Before them, half a block away, a bright light shined through the open door of the Shin-Bone eating-house. In that light they saw a man pause, glance around him for a moment, then enter the restaurant.

"Dar's dat nigger!" Pap exclaimed, breaking into a trot. "Less go see whut he is up to now."

A moment later the panting trio entered the restaurant and sat down at a table. Buss Bargain glanced at them without a sign of recognition. At the quick-lunch counter a slovenly waitress asked Buss what he would have.

"Sister, I wants two fried eggs an' a couple slices of apple pie," said Buss.

"Ten cents per each," the waitress replied, and waited.

Buss placed four dimes upon the counter and sat down on a stool and waited.

The three negroes whispered to each other from the corners of their mouths and waited. What they finally saw was worth waiting for.

The negro girl appeared with one plate containing two fried eggs, and another plate holding two slices of apple pie.

Buss Bargain picked up one egg, laid it on top of a slice of apple pie, and solemnly slipped it in the side pocket of his coat! Then he placed the other fried egg on the other slice of pie and slipped that in the

other side pocket of his coat. Then he held the flaps of his pockets open while he sprinkled salt and pepper inside on his eggs. Then he asked for some powdered sugar, and sprinkled that inside his pockets on his pie!

"My Gawd!" the waitress exclaimed.

"I's gwine up to de Shoofly chu'ch to hear de Revun Doctor Vinegar Atts preach, sister," Buss Bargain explained in an apologetic tone. "I figger I better take a little lunch wid me, because I might git hungry."

The girl looked at him with frightened eyes, giggled uneasily, and took refuge behind the partition in the rear of the restaurant.

Buss walked out, going toward the church.

The three Tickfall negroes followed, at intervals uttering profane expletives expressive of their complete mystification.

"Somepin is gwine happen at de Shoofly, niggers," Pap Curtain said at last. "Dis am de very fust time I ever wus glad I wus gwine to church!"

III.

WHEN the three Tickfall negroes arrived at the church, they found all the exercises ended except the important one of taking up a collection.

Vinegar Atts always gave an interesting stage setting to this part of public worship. To-night he had placed a table within the altar railing, seating at each end of the table the two oldest members of the Shoofly church, Isaiah Gaitskill and Popsy Spout. Each person contributing to the church funds walked forward and laid the amount upon the table in the presence of the congregation. Thereupon the two old men would announce the amount of the contribution, and one or the other would add an invitation to others to come up and give a larger amount.

"De congregation will now stand up an' sing!" Vinegar announced in his ministerial tones. "Sing out loud!"

"I's livin' on de mountain underneath a cloudless sky,
I's drinkin' at de fountain whut never shall run dry;
Oh yes! I's feastin' on de manna of a bountiful supply—
Praise de Lawd! I's dwellin' in Beulah Land!"

On the tremendous volume of this song, Buss Bargain rode in, followed by the three interested men who had trailed him from the Shin-Bone restaurant. He moved to a front seat and stood listening to the conclusion of the song with reverent attention.

"Fotch yo' dollars up now an' lay 'em on de table!" Vinegar bellowed. "Dese two ole men is gittin' sleepy, an' oughter be in bed. Don't keep 'em up late by comin' slow!"

A procession of negroes flowed slowly to the table at the altar, a small stream of nickels and dimes trickled down upon the table. Vinegar was not pleased at the financial prospect. The words of a hymn came into his mind: "Lawd, whut a wretched land am dis, whut yields us no supply."

He looked around to find something which might stir the enthusiasm of the congregation and make them loosen up. There was a chance that a strange negro sitting upon the front bench, who had come in late, might help him. He eyed this stranger for a minute, then decided to call upon him for service.

"Us is got a strange brudder wushuppin' wid us to-night," he announced. "Come up, brudder, an' bow down befo' de cong'egation! Whut mought yo' name be?"

"Dey calls me Buss Bargain," the man announced, as he stepped forward and shook hands with the preacher.

"Does you know any religium stunts, brudder?" Vinegar asked cordially. "Kin you sing us a tune?"

"Suttinly," Buss grinned. "I wus fotch up on religium, an' has always knowed a tune 'r two!"

He turned and spoke to the audience:

"Brudders an' sisters, I come to dis chu'ch to-night to cornfess up a strange fack. I has always had mo' money dan I wanted, an' a heap mo' dan I could spend. I has always loved money. But now a great change is come over me; I loves one woman more dan all de dollars in de worl'. Money ain't got no wuth to me no more;

cash spondulix don't appeal to my heart. So, a little at a time, I's givin' my money away. I am come to dis chu'ch to bestow all my wad of dollars on de cause of religium.

"'Tis a great change fer me, a great change fer me;
Oh, now I'm so happy from money set free!
From out of de darkness I'm stepped into light,
An' oh, 'tis a great change fer me!"

"Bless Gawd!" Vinegar Atts bellowed feelingly at the conclusion of this song.

Buss stepped over to the table where the two aged members of the Shoofly church sat. He thrust both hands into the side-pockets of his coat, hesitated a moment while a look of great surprise passed over his face.

Then he brought forth his hands and displayed a fried egg and a slice of apple pie in each black paw!

The eggs had been good to eat once, but they were not palatable now. The apple pie had had some shape once, now it was a sticky mess. There he stood, holding that ruinous-looking mess in his hands, the stuff oozing from his fingers and dripping upon the floor. He was silent a long time, looking at his hands as solemn as a mule.

"Dat money am done turned to scrambled eggs an' pie," he muttered at last, with an air of great bewilderment. "I wonder whut else I'm got down in dem pockets of my coat?"

"Don't look, brudder!" Vinegar Atts bellowed. "Mebbe you got a couple ole hens in yo' pockets, an' dey might peck you!"

"I remembers now," Buss grinned. "I put de eggs in my coat-pockets an' de raw oystyers in my hat—but whar did dis here pie come from?"

"Mebbe de Lawd sont it down unbeknownst to you!" Vinegar bawled.

"But whar is my cash spondulix at?" Buss wanted to know.

"De Lawd gave—mebbe de Lawd is done tuck away!" Vinegar howled.

Buss turned around and held out both gormy hands to Vinegar Atts.

"Brudder Atts, you hol' my pie an' eggs a minute while I feels in de yuther pockets of my clothes fer my money!"

"Naw!" Vinegar whooped. "Git away from me wid dat mess! You looks like a garbage bucket! I ain't no slop pail!"

Thereupon Buss laid his pie and eggs upon the edge of the table, wiped his hands upon his handkerchief, and thrust them into the various pockets of his coat.

"Dar now!" he bellowed, as he thrust his hand into his trousers. "I put my dollars in my hip-pocket next to my heart!"

He brought forth the wad he had exhibited earlier in the evening in the Hen-Scratch saloon and laid it upon the table.

"'Tis a great change fer me, a great change fer me;
Oh, now I'm so happy from money set free!
From out of de darkness I'm stepped into light,
An' oh, 'tis a great change fer me!"

While Buss was repeating this song, a hasty consultation was held at the table between the two old men and Vinegar Atts.

Popsy held up one finger and twirled it with a circular motion around his ear to indicate that he thought Buss Bargain had wheels in his head. When Buss had finished singing, Vinegar picked up the wad of currency and extended it to Buss.

"Brudder Bargain, nothin' hurts my feelin's wuss dan to gib money back, especially money whut has been bestowed to de Shoofly chu'ch, whut needs it so powerful bad. But I feels dat you is a stranger in dese here parts, an' you ain't no member of dis cong'egation, an' you won't git no money's wuth outen dem dollars you bestow, so fer conscience scruples' sake, I's obleeged to hand yo' money back to you."

For a moment Buss stood looking at him as if he could not understand. Then he stretched out his hand with a stupid gesture and took the roll of currency. He thrust it back into his hip-pocket.

"I reckin I won't never git to gib dis money away, brudders," he said in a sad tone. "I ain't hankered to spend it like de prodigal calf in riotous livin', but I knows now dat I got to buy somepin wid dis money an' git rid of dis cash dat way."

"I hopes you won't spend it foolish, brudder," Vinegar exhorted.

"At de fust off-startin' I plans to buy me a box of seegaws an' set around whar

de lady-folks kin see me smoke 'em," Buss chuckled, and picked up his hat and left.

A few minutes later the congregation in the Shoofly church was dismissed, and Vinegar received his message from Sheriff Flournoy.

"I knows 'bout dat," Vinegar answered. "Me an' Marse John is got to go he'p a sick man."

"I's gwine hurry back to de Hen-Scratch an' open up, Pap," Figger said in a businesslike tone. "Dat Buss nigger is gittin' ready to spend dat money, an' I wants to he'p him along. I'll sell him anything 'slong as he's got de dough to pay fer it."

"Dat's de right notion," Pap and Mustard agreed. "We'll go down an' set aroun'. Mebbe he'll set us all up."

When the three arrived at the Hen-Scratch saloon they found Little Bit seated on the steps.

"I been waitin' fer you-alls, Figger," that diminutive darky exclaimed. "A cullud gen'leman called Buss Bargain is down at Ginny Babe Chew's house, an' he sont me here to git him a box of seegaws."

"Whut kind?" Figger asked cheerfully.

"He specify de best you's got."

"Dat sounds good," Figger remarked.

"He say fer you to send him de change fer a hundred-dollar bill," Little Bit announced.

"Dat sounds gooder," Figger exulted. "He's bustin' his big money fust. Dat means he's fixin' to spend it all."

Figger opened a little iron safe and exhausted its contents to find the change for a hundred-dollar bill. He wrapped the money very carefully in some heavy paper, handed that and the box of cigars to Little Bit, and told him to hurry back.

"Gib our love to Brudder Buss Bargain, an' tell him to buy a hat full of oystyer-stew an' come down an' sot in dis nice saloom," Pap said with his snarly laugh.

"I'll tell him," Little Bit cackled. "He done promised me five dollars to git dese here seegaws fer him!"

IV.

Buss Bargain was a wise old spider, spinning a psychological web.

None of the people in Ginny Babe Chew's boarding-house had yet come home from the Shoofly church when Little Bit came racing up the stairs with a box of cigars in one hand and the change for a hundred-dollar bill in the other.

"Dese seegaws costes fi' dollars," Little Bit panted. "Here's de ninety-fi' dollars change. Gimme de hunderd."

"Dem figgers is c'reck, Little Bit," Buss said cordially, as he removed his roll of money from his hip-pocket. "You shore is got a fancy figgerin' mind. I b'lieve I'll hire you to trot along wid me an' count de dollars I gives away an' spends in Tickfall."

"Thank' 'e for de job, Brudder Buss. I'd shore be proud to go."

"'Twon't be hard wuck," Buss explained. "It 'll be easy to count de money I gives away. Now I 'speck you better hustle back wid dat change befo' Figger Bush gits skeart you's run away."

"Whut 'bout dat five dollars you owes me?" Little Bit inquired. "You say you'd gimme five to git dese here seegaws."

"Dat's a fack," Buss replied. "I ain't fergot dat off my mind. But ain't you jes' now hired yo'se'f to me?"

"Yes, suh."

"All right. I pays all my hired he'p on Saddy night," Buss announced. "Now you hump to de Hen-Scratch. Ef I wusn't in a hurry I'd keep you here an' talk to you some. But I got to walk fast an' fur, an' start soon."

"You ain't leavin' town, is you?" Little Bit asked suspiciously.

"Naw, suh, I's gwine to meet a lady pusson."

The two separated, and Buss sauntered toward the depot. The train from New Orleans was due to arrive in about ten minutes.

As Buss stood in the shadow of a freight shed, a tall white man passed, accompanied by a fat, squatty negro. Sheriff John Flournoy and Vinegar Atts had come to the depot to assist a sick man into his automobile and convey him to his home.

"Dar's dat crazy nigger I wus tellin' you about, Marse John," Vinegar chuckled as he pointed through the darkness. "He's hidin' under dat shed."

"Stay here while I go talk to him," Flournoy commanded.

He walked across the intervening space and stopped beside the negro.

"They tell me you're the man who is giving money away," Flournoy said with a laugh.

"Yes, suh. I offered to gib some away, but nobody wouldn't take none." Buss said easily.

"Have you offered any money to a white man?" Flournoy inquired.

"Naw, suh," Buss answered, peering at the sheriff through the darkness. "White folks don't onderstan' nigger bizzness."

The sheriff moved slightly so that the light from the depot across the way could shine upon him; touching the pocket of his coat with his hand, he caused the lapel of his coat to draw away from his vest and reveal his sheriff's badge. He expected to see Buss Bargain's jaw drop, the whites of his eyes show, and his derby hat lift slowly up on his head from the hair standing on end.

"Bless de Lawd, Mister Sheriff," Buss exclaimed cordially. "I's proud to meet up wid you so soon. I been figgerin' dat I might need a sheriff or somepin like dat befo' I leaves dis town, an' I's glad to know one dat kin pertection me."

"A negro giving money away is in no danger, unless he gets stepped on when they rush him to get his dough," Flournoy laughed.

"Dat's jes' it, boss," Buss laughed. "I's kinder expectin' a rush."

Vinegar Atts, eager to hear the conversation, sneaked across the dark space and stood in the shadow. Buss's sharp eyes detected the movement, and his last words to Flournoy were spoken in a loud tone for Vinegar's benefit.

"When de niggers finds out I really means whut I says, I's expectin' a pretty rough scramble amongst 'em to git some. I reckin dey'll come to ax fer donations fer pretty many causes, but I ain't gwine gib my money away excusin' to three kinds of poor folks."

"Just three kinds of poor?" Flournoy laughed. "What are they?"

Buss took off his derby and scratched his head, while he enumerated:

"Fust, dar is de good Lawd's poor—dey deserves a little cash money to he'p 'em on deir way to de holy land."

"That's right," Flournoy agreed.

"Secont, dar is de devil's poor—dey needs he'p because dey don't git nothin' in de worl' to come."

"Ain't it so!" Flournoy chuckled.

"An' thirdly, dar is de poor devils—dey needs de mostest he'p of all."

"Amen," Flournoy chuckled as the train pulled into the station, and Flournoy turned away to help an invalid into his automobile.

Two minutes later the train pulled out, gliding into the darkness, shining like a long serpent with jeweled sides.

Flournoy, sitting in his automobile, heard a chorus of wailing cries up the street. In a moment his machine was surrounded by a crowd of excited negroes, led by Mustard, Figger, Pap, and Little Bit.

"O my Lawd, Marse John, whar is Buss Bargain gone to? Is he done went on de train?"

"I don't know who you niggers are talking about! Shut up!" Flournoy exclaimed.

"De man whut is givin' away his money, Marse John," Figger howled. "We done let him arrive away on de train!"

A chorus of wailing voices from the other negroes expressed to the sheriff the extent of the calamity.

"He's de only man whut ever promised to give us somepin," Pap wailed. "An' us niggers didn't hab sense enough to take it!"

"You oughtn't to be allowed another chance!" Flournoy laughed. "Get out of the way or I'll run over all three classes of you—the Lord's poor, the devil's poor, and the poor devils!"

The crowd parted, the automobile went through, and the mob surged together again. Suddenly the crowd descried a man and woman standing under an electric light beside the depot, and the mob went howling toward them like a wolf-pack.

"Dar he is! We done foun' dat noble man agin!"

They crowded up close to the pair, and everybody took a good look at the woman. Pap, Mustard, and Figger recognized her at once—the woman of the photograph.

The three drew aside for a brief consultation.

"Dar ain't no money in dis fer us, brudders," Figger mourned. "Dat female is fixin' to git it all."

"'Tain't so," Pap snarled. "He's done notified us dat he's givin' his money away fer dat woman's sake. She wants him to shake loose from it."

Mustard Prophet put both hands up to his head.

"I's hearin' a whole heap of queer things to-night," he sighed. "I hopes my head ain't gwine wrong."

"Mebbe dat gal is put him up to dis foolishness," Pap suggested hopefully. "Less go git in close an' see!"

"Dis is de little gal I loves, brudders," Buss said happily. "She says I got to gib my money away if I gits her. She's wuth mo' dan money to me. Her name am Georgine Nolly."

"Shore!" Pap Curtain exclaimed with great enthusiasm. "A blind nigger kin see dat a dollar ain't nothin' to you by de side of dat gal. De only thing am to gib all you' money away."

"Buss tole me dat he's been tryin' to gib his money away all day, an' nobody wouldn't take it," Georgine remarked.

"Dat's right," they all answered in a chorus. Then some added the remark: "We lost all our good sense."

"Mebbe you'll git yo' good sense, ef any, back by to-morrer," the colored woman laughed. "Good night! We's gwine up to Ginny Babe's boardin'-house!"

"I's 'll see you-alls in de mawnin'!" a dozen voices told her.

V.

THE remaining hours of that night were hours of deep planning upon the part of the leaders of three Tickfall institutions.

The Rev. Vinegar Atts, preacher in charge of the Shoofly church, called into consultation old Popsy Spout and Isaiah Gaitskill, and the three heard the cocks crow for the morning while they considered the ways and means of inducing Buss Bargain to bestow his money upon the impecunious Shoofly church.

Figger Bush, barkeeper of the Hen-Scratch saloon, consulted until the dawning of the day with Pap Curtain and Little Bit, planning to impress Buss Bargain with the fact that the Hen-Scratch was the very institution which would most appreciate a donation, and which could use it to greatest advantage for the public good.

Hitch Diamond, first high exalted commander of the Nights of Darkness lodge, talked until daybreak with Mustard Prophet and Shin Bone, setting forth at length the many arguments which he hoped would convince Buss Bargain that money invested as a free gift into the Nights of Darkness lodge would do, as Hitch expressed it, "a large amount of great good."

About nine o'clock the next day the Big Four of Tickfall met according to an old custom, at the Hen-Scratch saloon: Vinegar Atts, Pap Curtain, Figger Bush, and Hitch Diamond. Discussing the events of the day before, and setting forth their plans for the day before them, it transpired that the three Tickfall institutions were all planning an attack upon Buss's finances.

"Hol' on, niggers!" Vinegar Atts exclaimed in consternation. "Less medjertate about dis a minute! Mebbe one of us will git dar fust wid his committee an' git all of Buss's money befo' de rest of us kin have our say-so!"

"'Tain't fair!" Hitch Diamond rumbled.

"Mebbe ef all of us would make our speechify, he'd 'vide up de money amongst us!" Figger Bush suggested.

"Dat's de notion I'm got," Vinegar bawled. "I motions dat we git our committees togedder here in de Hen-Scratch an' goes to wait on dis Buss Bargain in a solid body."

"I favors dat!" Hitch rumbled.

"It's did!" Figger Bush squeaked. "I'll telerphome all de yuthers, an' we'll stay here togedder till dey comes. I ain't trustin' nobody to go out to hunt his committee up an' go sneakin' aroun' to see Buss!"

"You shore has got a heap of trust an' confidunce in yo' friends," Vinegar said disgustedly.

"All right," Figger said complacently. "You-all stay here an' lemme go out an' git all de committees togedder!"

"Naw!" they roared. "You stay here wid us!"

"I thanks you-all fer yo' faith an' confidunce!" Figger giggled as he crossed the room and took the telephone receiver from the hook.

One hour later, three committees, representing the three great colored institutions of Tickfall, marched in solemn procession down the street to Ginny Babe Chew's boarding-house.

As a flowing stream sweeps from its bank and carries with it all sorts of débris, so this moving body of men swept into its wake a procession of all sorts: women left their cabins with children in their arms and children squalling at their skirts; men left their farm wagons and dropped in behind to see what manner of entertainment was to be furnished a country negro; every color and size and breed of dogs crawled out from under the cabins or frisked from around the corner of the houses to furnish escort and protection to the growing throng.

"All you niggers git back!" Vinegar Atts bawled, flourishing his hand to indicate a departure. "Dis ain't no nigger fun'ral!"

"It will be one ef you tries to drive us back," a negro growled as he pushed ahead. "Dis is a free country."

"You start somepin an' dar'll be a fun'ral you ain't lookin' fer," Hitch Diamond growled belligerently. "You better ax yo' friends good-by befo' you git too free wid dis country!"

They marched into Ginny Babe Chew's yard in front of her house. They spread out in formal array. The three committees took their places near the front steps. From around all the corners in sight there came men and women, running to see the show, for the grapevine telephone had been busy. Cooks left their kitchens, men dropped their tools, yard-boys left the lawn-mowers under the rose-bushes, and all the blacks in Tickfall assembled of one accord in one place like buzzards coming to a mule's funeral.

Buss Bargain and his sweetheart sat upon the porch, wondering what all the parade was about. In a little while they were informed.

"Brudder Bargain," Vinegar began, "you is been kind enough to inform dis town dat you wus givin' yo' money away. You recomember dat I admonished you las' night at de chu'ch not to spend yo' money foolish. Therefo' us is three cormittees waitin' on you to represent our causes so you kin spend yo' dollars wid discretion—yes, suh, dat's de word, discretion!"

"Dat's de word!" Buss Bargain agreed.

"Therefo', wid yo' permission, Figger Bush will speak fust."

Figger Bush stepped forward, removed his hat, fiddled with his little shoe-brush mustache, and began:

"I axes you to gib all yo' money to de Hen-Scratch saloom, Brudder Bargain. Dar ain't no yuther place in dis town whar a real poor man is welcome. We has free chairs an' free tables to set by; de ice-water an' de 'lectric lights is free. In de winter-time us don't charge nothin' fer warmin' up a cold nigger by our fire. An' a poor man kin stay dar as long as he wants to, up to closin' time. We feels dat you couldn't put yo' dollars nowhar better dan in he'pin' me fix up de Hen-Scratch so dat it 'll be mo' comfortabler fer poor cullud mens whut ain't got no money to buy booze."

"I thanks you, suh," Buss Bargain answered. "Is dar any more remarks?"

"I feels like a word or two," Hitch Diamond rumbled. "I speaks fer de Nights of Darkness lodge. I's de fust high exalted commander of dat lodge, but I now resigns in yo' favor. Ef you will gib us yo' money, I promises right now dat you will be promptly 'lected a member of de lodge in good standin', an' 'lected de fust high commander in my place. We needs some dollars to fix up our meetin'-place, an' to buy some new machines to nisheate candidates wid."

"I considers yo' remarks, also," Buss said pompously. "Is dar any more remarks?"

"Yes, suh," Vinegar Atts remarked, removing his high hat, and mopping his bald head with a red handkerchief. "I considers dat de chu'ch comes fust all de time, an' deserves de most dollars. I's de pasture of de Shoofly, an' I now invites you

to become de most leadin' member of dat chu'ch by donatin' yo' dollars to a good cause. Us members of de Shoofly is de Lawd's poor, an' de Lawd is shore left us powerful poor—an' de Good Book says: 'Blessed am he dat cornsidereth the poor!' When you bestows yo' money, fer de Lawd's sake, don't fergit de Shoofly!"

When Vinegar ceased speaking, the crowd that thronged the yard broke into an excited whispering. A moment later the mob had formed into three circles, some advocating the Hen-Scratch, some pleading for the Nights of Darkness lodge, and others earnestly declaring that the money should go to the Shoofly church. In one corner of the lawn a fist-fight occurred, and was quickly suppressed. The three speakers were surrounded by their friends and sympathizers, and all were shouting advice and admonitions to their leaders.

The woman, sitting on the porch beside Buss Bargain, leaned over and whispered:

"Be keerful how you spend yo' money, Buss. Ef you gib dem dollars to ary one of dem causes, you make two other crowds mad wid you."

"I knows dat," Buss replied. "I ain't aimin' to gib it to none of dem speakers."

"Ef you don't, you make all three crowds mad wid you," the woman warned him.

"I kin fix it," Buss said easily. "You watch me pufform!"

Buss rose to his feet and stepped to the edge of the porch. The crowd stood hushed and expectant.

"Figger Bush," he began, "I done listened to you' argumint, an' I feels compelled to bestow my money on de Hen-Scratch saloom!"

"Whoop-ee-e!" Figger howled. "Listen to dat noble nigger man!"

"But I wants to give you my money on three conditions," Buss resumed. "You got to make me three promises. Fust, de Hen-Scratch saloom mustn't never be nothin' but a saloom from dis time on ferever!"

"Whoop-ee-e!" Figger howled.

"Secont, you muss always be de barkeep' of de Hen-Scratch ferever more!"

"Whoop-ee-e!" Figger shrieked in ecstasy.

"An' thirdly, no kinds of drinkables muss ever be sold or give away in de Hen-Scratch saloom from hencefo'th on ferever!"

"Aw, gosh!" Figger spat out in disgust. "Now you done gone an' spoilt it all!"

A howl of derisive joy swept over two groups in that crowd, and the protest of Figger Bush was drowned in their noise.

"Dat Buss Bargain is a good moral nigger!" Vinegar Atts bellowed like a bull of Bashan. "I knowed he didn't really favor a sinful saloom!"

Buss Bargain raised his hand, and the crowd became silent. Buss looked into the stolid face of Hitch Diamond.

"Brudder Diamond, I is supprised dat Figger don't favor my donation to de Hen-Scratch, so I done decided to gib my money to de Nights of Darkness lodge. You is done offered to make me de head boss leader of dat lodge when I gives you dat money. Dat ain't no more dan I deserves, an' I takes dis chance to announce my program as soon as I git to be leader: I favors admittin' all de lady folks free of charge as full members, an' instructin' 'em in all de secret wuck an' inner meanin's of de teachin's of de Nights of Darkness lodge!"

"It cain't be did, brudder!" Hitch Diamond bawled in despair. "It's ag'in' de cornstitution an' by-laws!"

A loud howl arose from the delighted adherents of the Hen-Scratch saloon and the Shoofly church. Hitch continued to voice his protest, but none but the recording angel heard his remarks, and the angel had a busy moment keeping tab on some of Hitch's expletives. Two-thirds of the crowd were delighted that the thing Buss proposed to do was against the constitution and the by-laws of the lodge.

Again Buss raised his hand for silence, and the crowd hushed and listened.

"Revun Vinegar Atts, I's got to turn to you because you is de onliest one left whut bids fer my money. I offered dis money to de Hen-Scratch yistiddy evenin' an' Figger wouldn't take it, an' to-day he refused it de secont an' las' time. I offered my dollars to you las' night at de chu'ch, an' you refused 'em all. I now makes you dis secont offer!"

"I'll take de money dis time, brudder!" Vinegar whooped.

"Befo' I gibs my dollars away fer de last time, I wants you to promise me three things," Buss remarked.

"Speak 'em, brudder, speak 'em!" Vinegar howled. "I's willin' to promise anything!"

"Fust, when you gits my money fer de Shoofly chu'ch, dat house cain't never be used fer nothin' but a chu'ch!"

"Dat's easy!" Vinegar whooped. "I promises dat."

"Secont, de onliest mode of baptism ever used in dat chu'ch muss be immersion!"

"Dat's de only way we does baptise 'em!" Vinegar howled in glee. "I ducks 'em all under de water. I knows how to bapsouse better'n any nigger in Loozanny!"

"An' thirdly, all de members of dat chu'ch is to be bapsoused over agin an' de water used in de immersion is to be boilin' hot!"

Such a howl of unholy glee split the throats of the two groups that had seen their own hopes shattered that Vinegar Atts was completely overwhelmed for the first time in his life. He had often boasted that he could speak against a cyclone and make himself heard; given two lemons to suck and he could holler louder than any negro in Louisiana; imitating Demosthenes, he could put pebbles in his mouth, and whoop louder than the roar of a storm at sea; but to-day, this son of thunder was silenced. Even his own adherents joined in the howl of derision, and felt that they were getting the greatest free show of their lives.

At last, Buss Bargain turned to the woman at his side.

"Honey," he said sweetly, "you tole me you would not love me onless I loved you more than money or anything else. I promised to gib all my dollars away to show dat I loved you best of all, an' den I promised to marrify you an' start out wid nothin' but you."

"Dat's right," the woman answered.

"But you see, nobody won't take dis money. I wonder—" he paused and looked at her pleadingly—"I wonder ef I could gib it to you?"

"Suttinly," she smiled, her little piglike eyes twinkling. "Dat is, ef you'll give it 'thout no conditions!"

Buss thrust his hand into his hip pocket and eagerly produced the roll and dropped it into her lap.

"Here am fo' hundred dollars, honey!" he exclaimed. "Dis am a free gift. I rejoices dat I am able to gib dis money away an' yit keep it in de fambly!"

"You gib me dese here dollars widout no conditions?" Georgine repeated.

"'Thout no conditions!" Buss reiterated solemnly.

"I don't make you no promises?" Georgine asked.

"I ain't axin' no promises!" Buss answered earnestly.

"Thank 'e, suh!" the woman smiled, thrusting the money in her bosom.

"I invites you all to our weddin' to-night!" Buss Bargain exclaimed dramatically. "Eve'ybody is welcome. Good-by, I'll see you-alls later!"

VI.

LATE that afternoon the Big Four of Tickfall assembled in the Hen-Scratch saloon.

"Is you gwine marry dat Buss Bargain, revun?" Figger Bush asked in a bitter tone.

"Suttinly," Vinegar said disgustedly. "I reckin he'll gib me 'bout two dollars of his stingy money fer de job."

"I figger dat nigger made a jackace out of all of us," Pap Curtain snarled. "He wus jes' tryin' to show off in front of dat ugly nigger gal he's gittin'."

"Dat's how come he acted so crazy when he fust blowed into dis town," Mustard remarked. "He wus skeart we would really take his money when he offered to give us some, so he put pie in his pockets an' oystyers in his hat so us would take pity on him an' leave his dollars be."

There was a long silence while each man smoked and meditated. All felt disgusted, and all had to listen to the gibes of the other negroes since the fiasco of the morning. Each man was meditating revenge, but it remained for Pap to suggest it:

"Boys, less beef dat nigger—less blood-beef him!"

"I favors it," Vinegar Atts bawled delightedly. "I'll go right now an' pussaude Buss Bargain to hab his weddin' at de ole tabernacle, so all de beefs kin see it."

There was a chorus of yells which indicated their approval of the suggestion, and the Big Four separated, each with his task to perform before the wedding could be properly conducted.

First, Vinegar went to Buss Bargain, and after a lengthy conversation with him and his sweetheart, secured their consent to have the wedding at the old tabernacle. Vinegar explained that the whole population of Tickfall, blacks and maybe whites, would be present, and that the old camp-meeting shed was the only place large enough to accommodate the crowd.

Pap Curtain drove Vinegar's little red automobile out to the slaughter-house and secured a large cotton-sack full of sanguineous refuse which he brought back to town.

Figger Bush and Mustard Prophet were waiting for Pap at the old tabernacle. When he arrived, they tied a rope to the sack of refuse and dragged that bloody sack seven times around the tabernacle. Then they dragged it through the woods and over the underbrush around the tabernacle; after that, they opened the sack and scattered the contents in the weeds over the grounds.

Hitch Diamond started for the woods and did not show himself until the time for the wedding.

At nine o'clock that night, Vinegar Atts and Buss Bargain sat in the tabernacle, waiting for the arrival of the bride and the crowd of invited guests.

The southbound train whistled for the Tickfall station. Buss Bargain, hearing it, smiled.

"Dat's my little gal's signal to go, rev-un," he grinned. "She's leaving de boardin'-house about now. She's done arranged to hab a lot of lady-folks come up wid her to de tabernacle. Dey's gwine march in a peerade."

"Dat's right," Vinegar grinned. "When cullud ladies gits married, dey shore puts on style. How would it do fer me to go down at de forks of de road an' lead de peerade?"

"Dat would be fine," Buss giggled. "I'll wait fer you-alls!"

Vinegar was glad to get away. He went in a hurry.

He had just time enough to get over in the woods when a long, loud bellow sounded on the shores of the little lake beside the tabernacle. It was answered by the loud bawling of countless cattle, that hysterical bellowing which starts with every herd of cattle when they begin to smell blood!

Suddenly the herd began to run, threshing like a cyclone through the underbrush about the old camp-grounds, and they swept under the old tabernacle shed with horns clashing, tails erect, feet pawing the ground, their eyes wild and as big as saucers, shining in the dim electric lights which illuminated the big shed.

Buss Bargain screamed with fright and sprang to his feet with the hope of escaping to the woods, but the four revengeful negroes from Tickfall had driven the cattle so that they emerged from the woods and surrounded Buss at once. Buss seized a supporting column and climbed toward the roof like a monkey, exhausting the treasuries of his throat in efforts to vocalize his terror.

The cattle began to mill around the old shed, horning each other, bawling like all the world had come to an end, climbing clumsily over the rude seats with clattering feet and smashing the benches with their weight, and all the time roaring forth their blood-lust like the thunder of a storm upon a rock-bound coast.

Above it all could be heard, like the shrieking of a siren whistle, the wailing cries of Buss Bargain, bridegroom-to-be.

Numbers of negroes came within hearing distance of the tabernacle, expecting to witness a wedding. But when they heard those enraged cattle, they departed with expedition and carried the news all over Tickfall that the devil had got loose and was holding a convention of horns and tails and split-hoofs on the old camp-meeting grounds.

It was a wild night for Buss Bargain,

and a joyful time for the Tickfail quartet. Finally the four negroes wearied of the bellowing and milling and trampling of hoofs and clashing of horns, the smell of blood, and the scent of sweating cattle, and decided that the time had come to call the fun off.

Hitch Diamond wet his finger by placing it in his mouth, and held it up in the air to ascertain which way the wind was blowing. Having received the latest weather report, Hitch and his three companions moved to one side of the tabernacle and separated, standing about forty feet apart.

At a given signal, they each emptied a large bag of sulfur on the ground, emptied a small vial of gasoline on top of the sulfur, and lighted the gasoline with a match.

Four sulfur fires blazed up simultaneously, the wind carried the rank fumes and smoke toward the tabernacle, the bellowing cattle ceased their mighty chorus, sniffed the brimstone for a moment, lowered their heads and fled far out into the woods.

Then four happy negroes wended their way to the Hen-Scratch saloon to talk over their escapade, and one terrified darky climbed down a pole under the roof of the tabernacle and scorched a trail toward the boarding-house of Ginny Babe Chew.

Two hours later, as the four delighted men sat around the table in the saloon, there came a timid knock upon the door.

Figger Bush opened, and Buss Bargain entered the room. His manner and appearance was that of a personified calamity.

"Is any of you saw Georgine Nolly tonight, brudders?" he asked with pitiable timidity.

"Naw," Vinegar Atts said disgustedly. "She didn't come to no weddin', an' I done loss my weddin'-fee."

"I done loss more dan dat, brudders," Buss sighed. "Dat nigger woman took all my money an' escaped away to N'Awleens on dat nine o'clock train."

"Lemme shake yo' hand, my beloved brudder," Vinegar howled with a mighty laugh, as he extended a giant, black paw. "You shore had a awful hard time to gib yo' money away, an' us hopes you'll never git it back!"

U U U

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

BY GEORGE TAGGART

WHEN Mabel makes her mind, I may
As well withhold my weakling will,
Whatever she sees fit to say,
I shall assent—though diff'ring still:
Which policy is, as it were,
To our true happiness the key—
I have complete respect for her,
She entertains the same for me.

No mere assertion of my rights
Could profit me e'en in the least—
I'd simply spoil my days and nights
And she would class me as a beast;
Thus we two get on famously,
Devotedly, the livelong day—
We never seem to disagree—
I let her think she has her way.

Cursed

by George Allan England

Author of "The Shyster at Law," "The Brass Check," "Hypnotized," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

CAPTAIN ALPHEUS BRIGGS, of the clipper-ship Silver Fleece, of New Bedford, a huge, black-bearded bucko of the worst type, even for the strenuous days of the old windjammers, having stolen a Malay girl, Kuala Pahang, at Batu Kawan, refused pointblank to give her up, even though he knew the natives might rise and slaughter every white man on the ship.

Even when the girl's mother, Dengan Jouga, a *neneck kabayan* (witch woman), came on board and cursed him, he refused and drove her off the ship, and when his mate protested, the skipper, in drunken rage, beat him. The mate, Scurlock, accompanied by a cabin-boy he had rescued from the bucko skipper's rage, went ashore; and the skipper, who had been somewhat held in check by the diplomacy of the ship's surgeon, Dr. Filhiol, finally fell into a drunken sleep. While he slept, the second mate, Wansley, took the ship out of Batu Kawan, but not being familiar with the uncharted coast, ran ashore on a sand-spit in Motomolo Strait.

There the pursuing natives, in nearly a score of boats, overtook them the next day. Setting the native sailors on board to work at the windlass, under the muzzles of the white men's pistols, Briggs attempted to kedge the ship free, in the mean time preparing for defense. A parley ensued, in which the Malays demanded the girl, on penalty of instant death to Scurlock and the boy, whom they had in the boat with them. Despite the near-mutiny of his white crew, Briggs refused, and the two were decapitated. Briggs then turned his small cannon on the boat, sinking it and killing all in the boat, including Dengan Jouga and the witch doctor. Enraged, one of the native sailors dropped the windlass, knifed one of the officers, and before Briggs could use his gun sprang upon him.

CHAPTER IX.

ONSET OF BATTLE.

THE shot that Wansley fired, a chance shot hardly aimed at all—there had been no time for aiming—must have been guided by the finger of the captain's guardian genius. It crumpled the Malay with strangely sprawling legs. Kill him it did not. But the bullet through his lower vertebræ left only his upper half alive.

With a grunt he crumpled to the hot deck, knife still clutched in skinny fist. Shouts echoed. Briggs stood aghast, with even his steel nerve aquiver. Sometimes the flick of a second suffices for some horrible vision that a lifetime cannot obliterate. Such a vision was the quivering Malay, a half-dead thing that still lived. He writhed with contorted face, dragging himself toward Briggs. The knife-blade clicked on the planking, like the clicking of his teeth that showed black through his slavering lips.

"*Allah il Allah!*" he gulped, heaving himself upon one hand, slashing with the other. In a Malay, run *amok*, the life-forces drive superhumanly.

Why do men, in a crisis, so often do stupid, unaccountable things? Why did Briggs kick at him, with a roaring oath, instead of shooting? As Wansley came running, afraid to fire again lest he hit the captain, Briggs felt the bite of steel in his leg. That broke the numbing spell of unreason. The captain's pistol, at pointblank range, shattered the yellow man's skull. Blood, smeared with an ooze of brain, colored the stewing deck.

"*Allah!*"

The cry ended in a choking gurgle on lips that drew into a horrible grin. And wholly dead, now completely dead even beyond the utmost lash of Islamic fanaticism,

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for January 11.

the Malay dropped face down. This time the captain's kick landed only on flesh and bone past any power of feeling.

At the capstan-bars it was touch-and-go. Crevay was down, groaning, his hands all slippery and crimson with the blood that seeped through his clutching fingers. For a moment, work slacked off. Wansley was shouting, with revolver leveled, his voice blaring above the cries, oaths, imprecations. Things came to the ragged edge of a rush, but white men ran in with rifles and cutlases. Briggs flung himself aft, trailing blood.

Crazed with rage and the burn of that dragging wound, he fired twice and then a third time. Malays sagged down, plunged screaming to the deck. The captain would have emptied his revolver into the pack, but Wansley snatched him by the arm.

"Wait! Hold on!" he shouted. "That's enough—we need 'em, sir! No more!"

Prass, belaying-pin in hand, leaped in and struck to right, to left. Yells of pain mingled with the tumult that drowned the ragged, ineffective spatter of firing from the war-fleet. The action was swift, decisive. In half a minute, the capstan was clicking again, faster than ever. Its labor-power, diminished by the loss of three men, was more than compensated by the fear of the survivors.

"Overboard with the swine!" shouted Briggs, his face a devil's. He flung a furious hand sweepingly at the fallen Malays. "Overboard with 'em, to the sharks!"

"This here one ain't done for yet, sir," began Prass, pointing. "He's only—"

"Overboard, I said!" roared Briggs. "You'll go, too, by God, if you give me any lip! Mr. Wansley, keep that capstan working—"

As men stooped, laying hands on the Malays to drag them to the rail, Briggs dropped on his knees beside Crevay. He pulled away the man's hands from the gaping neck-wound, whence the life was irretrievably spurting.

"Judas priest!" he stammered, his jaw dropping—for here was his right-hand man as good as dead. He had not realized the truth till now. "Doctor! Where the devil is Mr. Filhiol?"

"In the cabin, sir," Prass answered.

"Cabin! Holy Lord! On deck with him!"

"Yes, sir."

"And tell him to bring his kit! That was what he went for, his kit?"

Prass had already dived below. His was no mood for explanations. The doctor was haled up again, with his bag, faster than he had been hustled below.

"Overboard with all that carrion!" Briggs flung at the sailors toiling with the dead and wounded Malays, while the doctor was being brought. Rage, hate and a kind of hard exultation blazed in his face. He seemed not to hear the shouts of war, the spattering fusillade from the canoes. His high-arched chest rose and fell, pantingly, with excitement. His hands, reddened with the blood of Crevay, dripped horribly. Filhiol, hustled on deck with scant courtesy, stared in amazement.

"A job for you, sir!" cried Briggs. "Prove yourself!"

Filhiol's professional spirit swiftly revived, sweeping away his rage and hate against the captain. He leaned over Crevay. But he made no move to open his kit-bag. One look had told him the truth.

The man, already unconscious, had grown waxen. His breathing had become a stertorous hiccup. The deck beneath him was terrible to look upon.

"No use, sir," said the doctor briefly. "He's gone."

"Do something!" blazed the captain. "Something!"

"For a dead man?" retorted Filhiol. As he spoke, even the hiccup ceased.

Briggs stared with eyes of rage. He got to his feet, hulking, savage, with swaying red fists.

"They've killed my best man," he snarled. "If we didn't need the dogs, we'd feed 'em all to the sharks, so help me!"

"You're wounded, sir!" the doctor cried, pointing at the blood-wet slash in the captain's trouser-leg.

"Oh, the hell with that!" Briggs retorted. "No time to bother with scratches now. Mr. Wansley, take two men and keep on guard at the capstan. You, and you," he added, jabbing a finger at two other sailors,

"carry Mr. Crevay down to the cabin—then back to your rifles at the rail!"

They obeyed, their burden sagging limply. Already the dead and wounded Malays had been bundled over the rail. The fusillade from the war-canoes was strengthening, and the shouts had risen to a barbaric chorus. The patter of bullets and slugs into the sea or against the planking of the Silver Fleece formed a ragged accompaniment to the shrill whistling of missiles through the air. A few holes opened in the clipper's canvas. One of the men who had thrown the Malays overboard cursed suddenly and grabbed his left elbow, shattered by a chance bullet.

"Take cover!" commanded Briggs. "The best you can find. Down, everybody, along the rail! Mr. Wansley, down with you and your men. You can keep the Malays covered at the capstan just as well when you're squatting. Get down!"

Indifferent to all peril for himself, Briggs turned toward the companion.

"Captain," the doctor began again. "Your boot's full of blood. Let me bandage—"

Briggs flung a snarl at him and strode to the companion.

"Below, there!" he shouted.

"Aye, aye, sir!" rose the voice of one of the foremast hands.

"Get that wench up here!"

"The wench, sir?"

"The yellow girl! Bring her up—and look alive!"

"Captain," the doctor insisted, following him, "I've got to do something for that gash in your leg, and I'm going to. Not that I love you, captain, but you're the only man that can save the situation. The life of every white man here is at stake, my own included. Sit down here, sir. You'll bleed to death where you stand!"

Something in Filhiol's tone, something in a certain giddiness that was already reaching for the captain's heart and brain, made him obey. He sat down shakily on deck beside the after-companion, beside the doctor. In the midst of all that turmoil of the approaching fleet, the firing, shouting, cursing, the slide and thudding of naked brown feet at the capstan and the metallic *click-click-click* of the yawl and ratchet—all underlaid by the slow, grinding scrape of the keel on the sand-bar—the physician performed his duty.

With scissors he sheared away the already stiffening cloth. A very wicked slash, five or six inches long, stood vividly, redly revealed.

"*Tss! Tss!*" clucked Filhiol. "This needs stitches, but no time for that now. Lucky if it's not poisoned. I'll just wash it out and draw it together till after the party and then—"

"Mr. Gascar!" shouted the captain. He was listening to none of Filhiol's remarks. "Come here!"

Gascar left his place by the rail, and obeyed.

"Go below," Briggs ordered, jerking a thumb downward at the cabin, whence scuffling sounds of a struggle, mingled with cries and animal-like snarls, had begun to proceed. "Go below and bring up the jug of rum you'll find in my locker. Serve it out to all hands. And, look you, if they need a lift with the girl below there, give it; but don't you kill that wench. I need her, alive! Understand?"

"Yes, sir," Gascar replied, and vanished down the companion. He swiftly reappeared with a jug and a tin-cup.

"They're handling her all right, sir," he reported. "Have a drop, or maybe two, sir?"

"You're damned shouting. I will!" the captain answered, reaching for the cup. Gascar poured him a stiff drink. He gulped it and took another. "Now deal it out and tell 'em there'll be plenty more when we've sunk the yellow devils—no, no, I'll tell 'em myself!"

He got to his feet, scorning further care from Filhiol, and stood there a strange, savage figure, wild and disheveled, with one leg of his trousers cut off at the knee and with his bandages already growing crimson.

"Rum for all hands, men!" he shouted. "And better than rum—my best wine, sherry, champagne, and all—a bottle a head for you, when this shindy's over!"

A cheer rose unevenly. Gascar started on his round with the jug. Even the wounded men, such as could still raise their voices, shouted approval.

"Hold your fire, men," the captain ordered. "Let 'em close in—then give 'em hell!"

CHAPTER X.

KUALA PAHANG.

THE doctor, having finished with Briggs, turned his attention to the other injured ones. At the top of the companion now stood the captain with the wickedest eyes you ever saw, as up the ladder emerged the two seamen with the struggling, clawing tiger-cat of a girl, daughter of old Dengan Jouga, the witch-woman.

The cruel beating the captain had given her the night before had not yet crushed her spirit. Neither had the sickness produced by the liquor he had forced her to drink. Bruised, spent, broken as she was, the spirit of battle still dwelt in the lithe barbarian. That her sharp nails had been busy to good effect was proved by the long, deep gashes on the faces and necks of both men. One had been bitten on the forearm. For all their strength, they proved hardly more than a match for her up the narrow, steep stairway. Their blasphemies, mingled with the girl's panting, whining, animal-like cries. Loudly roared the booming bass of the captain:

"Up with the she-dog! I'll teach her something—teach 'em all something, by the Judas priest! Up with her!"

They dragged her out on deck, up into all that shouting and firing, that turmoil and labor and blood. And as they brought her up a plume of smoke jetted from the bows of the proa. The morning air sparkled with the fire-flash of that ancient brass cannon. With a crashing shower of splinters, a section of the rail burst inward. Men sprawled, howling. But a greater tragedy—in the eyes of those sailormen—befell: for a billet of wood crashed the jug to bits, cascading the deck with good Medford. And, his hand paralyzed and tingling with the shock, Gascar remained staring at the jug-handle still in his grip and at the flowing rum on deck.

Howls of bitter rage broke from along the rail, and the rifles began crackling. The men, cheated of their drink, were getting out of hand.

"Cease firing, you!" screamed Briggs in a passion. "I'm master here—you'll fire when I command, and not before. Mr. Bevans!" he shouted at the gunner. "Loaded again?"

"All loaded, sir, and ready, when you say the word."

"Not yet, not yet! Lay a good aim on the proa. Keep her well covered. We've got to blow her out o' the water!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" And Bevans patted the rusty old piece with assurance. "Leave that to me, sir!"

Briggs turned again to the men with the struggling girl. A thin, evil smile drew at his lips. His face, under its bronze of tan, burned with wicked exultation.

"Now, my beauty," he mocked, "now I'll attend to you!"

For a moment, unmindful of the bullets whining in from the flotilla, he eyed Kuala Pahang. Under the clear, morning light, she looked a strange and wild creature indeed—golden-yellow of tint, with tangled black hair, and with the eyes of a trapped tigress. Bruises wealed her naked arms and shoulders, souvenirs of the captain's lessons with club and fist. Her supple body was hardly concealed by the short skirt she wore and by the tight Malay jacket binding her lithe waist and firm, young breast.

"Yes, my beauty, I'll attend to you!" Briggs repeated with savage mockery. He exulted over her, helpless and panting in the clutch of the two foremast-hands. "To the rail with her!"

"What you goin' to do, sir?" asked one of the men, staring. "Heave her over?"

Briggs menaced him with clenched fist.

"None o' your damned business what I'm going to do!" he shouted, while eyes of wonder fixed themselves upon him — of wonder and of fear, for even those maddened men crouching along the rail shrank from this brute's savagery. "To the rail with her! Jump, before I teach you how!"

They dragged her, screeching like the devil she was, to the starboard rail, obeying the captain's gesture. All the time they had to hold those cat-clawed hands of hers.

From side to side she flung herself, fighting every foot of the way. Briggs put back his head and laughed at the rare spectacle. Twice or thrice the sailors slipped in blood and rum upon the planking, and once Kuala Pahang all but jerked free from them. At the capstan, only the pistols of the three white guards held her kinsmen back from making a stampede rush; and not even the pistols could silence among them a menacing hum and murmur of rage that seethed and bubbled.

"Here, you!" shouted Briggs. "Mahmud Baba, you yellow cur, come here!"

Mahmud loosed his hold on the capstan-bar at which he had been laboring, and in great anguish of fear approached—fear and hate and rage that longed to kill. Very gladly would he have given up his life if in the giving he could have taken the captain's.

"Yas, sar?" whined Mahmud. "I come, sar."

Briggs leveled his revolver at the Malay. Unmindful of the nearing attack and of the spattering bullets, he spoke with deliberation.

"Son of a saffron dog," said he, "you're going to tell this wench something for me! If you don't tell it right, you know what you'll get! Understand?"

"Yas, sar. What piecee thing me tell?"

"You tell her that if the boats don't go back to land and let us alone I'll heave her over the rail. I'll feed her to the sharks, by God! Alive, to the sharks—sharks, down there! Savvy?"

"Me savvy."

"And you tell her she's got to tell that to the men in the canoes! She's got to shout it to 'em. Go on, now, tell her!"

Mahmud hesitated a moment, shuddered and grimaced. His eyes narrowed to slits. The captain poked the revolver into his ribs, with tautening trigger-finger. Mahmud quivered and laid a skinny hand on the shoulder of the girl, who had now grown strangely quiet. He fell into a sing-song patter of strange words with whining intonations. Suddenly he ceased.

The girl listened, her gleaming eyes fixed on Mahmud's face. A sudden question issued from her bruised, cut lips.

"What's she asking?" demanded Briggs.

"She ask where her mother, sar?"

"Tell her! Tell her I've shot the old she-devil to hell, and beyond! Tell her she'll get worse if she don't tell the canoes to stand off—worse, because the sharks will get her alive! Go on, you black scut o' misery, tell her!"

Mahmud spoke again, with nasally droning speech. He flung a hand at the enveloping half-circle of the war-fleet. The nearest boats now were moving hardly a quarter-mile away. Little smoke-puffs all along the battle-front kept pace with the popping of wild, ineffective gunfire. In the proa, oily brown devils were laboring to reload the brass cannon.

Mahmud's speech ended. The girl swept her look appraisingly along the fleet, then let her glance fall in scorn on the defenders. She stiffened, quivering, with clenched hands. The sailors, holding her wrist, could feel the whipcord tension of her muscles.

"Tell her to shout to the proa there!" shouted the captain in white fury. "Either they stand off or over she goes—and you see for yourself there's shark's enough!"

Again Mahmud spoke, and again grew silent. The girl grunted a monosyllable.

"What? What's that she says?" demanded Briggs.

"She say no, sar. She die, but she no tell her people so."

"The hell you say!" roared the captain. He seized her neck, shaking her violently.

"I'll break your damned, obstinate neck for you!" he cried, his face distorted with rage. "Tell your people to go back! Tell 'em!"

Mahmud translated the order. The girl only laughed. Briggs knew himself beaten, so far as getting that order obeyed might be concerned. In that choking, sneering laugh of Kuala Pahang's echoed a world of maddening defiance. He loosened his hold, and for a moment kept silence, trying to think how he should master her. The shuffling thud of bare feet and the monotonous clicking of the capstan rose on the shuddering air. Along the fleet, guns were going like kernels in a corn-popper. Another man grunted, by the rail, and slid to the deck, where a chance bullet had given him the long sleep.

Briggs, stung to action, whirled on Mahmud, grabbed him, squeezed his lean shoulder till the bones bent.

"*You* tell 'em!" he bellowed. "If she won't, you will!"

"Me, sar?" whined the Malay, shivering and fear-sick to the inner marrows. "Me tell so, they kill me!"

"Maybe. But if you don't, I will, so help me! Up with you, now—both of you, up, on the rail! Here, you men—up with 'em!"

The sailors hoisted the girl, still impassive, to the rail, and held her there. With such a hostage they felt safe; and in very fact the firing almost immediately died away. Mahmud tried to grovel at the captain's feet, wailing to all his gods, which were many. Briggs flung him up, neck and crop, to the rail. Mahmud grappled the after back-stays and clung there, quivering.

"Go on, now, out with it!" snarled Briggs, his pistol at the Malay's back. "And make it loud, or the sharks will get you, too!"

Mahmud raised a bony arm, waved it, howled unintelligible words that drifted out over the pearl-hued waters. Silence fell, along the ragged line of boats. In the bow of the proa a strange figure stood up, naked, gleaming with oil in the sunlight, which flicked a vivid, crimson spot of color from a nodding feather head-dress.

Back to the Silver Fleece floated a high-pitched question, fraught with a heavy toll of life and death. Mahmud answered. The figure at the bow of the war craft waved a furious arm, and fire leaping from the brass cannon there made reply.

The shot went high, passing harmlessly over the clipper and ricocheting beyond. But at the same instant a carefully laid rifle, from the gunwale of a canoe off to starboard of the proa, barked stridently. Mahmud coughed, crumpled and slid from the rail. He dropped plumb, and the shoal waters that lapped the clipper's hull—waters clear-green over the bar—received him.

As he fell, Briggs cursed horribly and struck the girl with a full drive of his trip-hammer fist. The blow broke the sailor's hold. But it called no scream of pain or terror from Kuala Pahang. She fell, writhing, plunged in foam, rose, and with splendid energy struck out for the canoes.

Briggs laughed then and leaned across the rail, as if no war-fleet had been lying within easy shot; and with hard fingers tugging at his big, black beard, watched the swimming girl, her lithe, yellow body gleaming through the water. Watched, too, the swift cutting of the sharks' fins toward her—the darting, black forms—the grim tragedy in that sudden, reddening lash of brine. Then he laughed again, his teeth gleaming like wolves' teeth, as he heard her scream.

"Broke her silence at last, eh?" he sneered. "They got a yell out of the she-dog, the sharks did, even if I couldn't—and to hell with her!"

Along the rail, hard-bitten and ruffianly as the clipper's men were, oaths broke out, and mutterings and evil words. Work slackened at the capstan, and for the moment the guards forgot to drive their lathering slaves there.

"Great God, captain!" sounded the doctor's voice, as he looked up aghast from his labors over a wounded man. "You—you've murdered us all!"

Briggs only laughed again and looked to his pistol.

"They're coming now, men," said he coolly. The lust of war possessed him.

For a moment he peered intently at the paddle-men, oiled and muscular, once more bending to their work; the brandished krises and long spears on some of which human heads were impaled; the spattering lash of bullets all along the water.

"Let 'em come!" he cried, laughing once more. "With hot lead and boiling water and cold steel, I reckon we're ready for 'em. Steady's the word, boys! They're coming—give 'em hell!"

CHAPTER XI.

HOME BOUND.

NOON witnessed a strange scene in the Straits of Motomolo, a scene of agony and death—one of those dark, unwritten pages of history so common in the

Far East half a century ago, before the white man's law had been given there and life had been made safe.

Over the surface of the strait and up the Timbago River, inborne by the floating tide, extended a broad field of débris, of shattered planks, of bamboos, of platted sails.

In mid-scene, sunk on Ulu Salama bar only a few fathoms from the spot where the Silver Fleece had lain, rested the dismantled wreck of the proa. The unpitying sun flooded that wreck—what was left of it after a powder-cask, fitted with fuse, had been hurled aboard by Captain Briggs himself. No living man remained aboard the wreckage. On that portion of the high stern still projecting from the sea — the stern whence a thin waft of smoke still rose against the sky — a few broken, yellow bodies lay half consumed by fire, distorted and hideous in death.

Of the small canoes, not one remained. Such as had not been reduced to matchwood, capsized and broken up, had lamely paddled back to shore with the few Malays who had survived the guns and cutlases and brimmed kettles of seething water. Here, there, corpses lay awash on the indrifting tide. The sharks no longer quarreled for them. Full-fed on the finest of eating, they hardly snouted at the remnants of the feast.

So much, then, for the enemy. And the Silver Fleece—what of her?

A mile or so to seaward from the bar, flying a few rags of canvas, the wounded clipper was limping on, under the urge of a little slant of wind that gave her hardly more than steerageway. Her kedge cable had been chopped off, her mizzen-topmast was down, and a raffle of spars, ropes and canvas littered her decks or had brought down the awnings, that smoldered here and there, where the fire-arrows had ignited them.

Her deck-houses showed the splintering effects of rifle and cannon-fire. Here, there, were empty pails and coppers that had held boiling water. Along her rails and lying distorted on her deck, dead men and wounded—white, brown and yellow men—were sprawling, as if the hand of a sower for Death's harvest had thickly strewn them. And there were wounds and mutilations that we must not look upon, and dead men still locked in grapples eloquent of fury—a quite indescribable, red shambles on the planks once so whitely holystoned.

The litter of knives, krises, cutlases and firearms scattered through all that crimson ruck told the story with no need of words; told that some of the Malays had boarded the Silver Fleece and that none of these had got away.

The brassy noonday fervor, blazing down from an unclouded sky, starkly revealed every detail. On the heavy air a mingled odor of smoke and blood drifted upward, as if from a barbaric pyre to some unpitying and sanguinary god—perhaps already to the avenging god that old Dengan Jouga had called upon to curse the captain and his ship—" the Eyeless Face that waits above and laughs."

A doleful sound of groaning and cursing arose from all that turmoil. Beside the windlass—deserted now, with part of the Malays dead and part under hatches—Gascar was feebly raising a hand to his bandaged head, as he lay there on his back. His eyes, open and staring, seemed to question the pitiless sun that cooked his bloodied face. Another man, a brown one, blind and aimless, was crawling on slippery red hands and knees, amidships, and as he crawled, he moaned monotonously. Two more, both white, were sitting with their backs against the deck-house. Neither spoke. One was past speech; the other, badly slashed about the shoulders, was groping fruitlessly in his pockets for tobacco, and, finding none, was feebly cursing.

Bevans, leaning against the taffrail, was binding his right forearm with strips torn from the shirt that hung on him in tatters. He was swearing mechanically, in a singsong kind of voice, as the blood seeped through each fresh turn of cotton.

From the fo'c's'le was issuing a confused sound of groans and execrations. At the wheel stood a sailor, beside whom knelt the doctor. As this sailor grimly held the wheel, Filhiol was bandaging his thigh.

" It's the best I can do for you now, my man," the doctor was saying. " Others need

me worse than you do. You'll have to make this go till I can get through with some of the others."

A laugh from the companionway jangled on this scene of suffering and agony. There stood Alpheus Briggs, wiping his bearded lips with a smear of his hirsute paw—for once again he had been at the liquor below. He blinked about him, set both fists on his hips, surveyed the prospect a moment, and then flung an oath of general, all-comprehensive execration at sea and sky and ship, at vanquished enemy and at his crew, dead or alive.

"Well, anyhow, by the holy Jeremiah!" he cried, with another laugh of barbaric merriment, "well, anyhow, I've taught those yellow devils one good lesson!"

A shocking figure the captain made, as he stood there at the top of the companionway. All at once Prass came up from below and stood beside him. Mauled as Prass was, he seemed untouched by comparison with Briggs. The captain's presence affronted heaven and earth, with its gross ugliness of rags and dirt and wounds, above which his savage spirit, drunken with rage and hate, seemed to rise indifferent, as if such trifles as mutilations lay beneath notice.

Across the captain's right brow a gash oozed redly down into his eye, half-closed, puffy, discolored. As he smeared his forehead, his arm knotted into hard bunches of muscle. His naked, hairy breast was slit with knife slashes, too; his tangled mop of beard had stiffened redly from a wound across his left cheek. Nothing of his shirt remained, save a few tatters dangling from his tightly drawn belt. All the rest had been torn away. His magnificent torso, muscled like an Atlas, was all grimed with sweat and blood and dirt. Save for his boots, nothing of his clothing remained intact; and the boots were slippery, sodden, red.

Now as he stood there, a bit unsteadily, peering out with his one serviceable eye under a heavy, bushy brow, and chewing curses to himself, he gave an impression of quite invincible strength and determination.

Here stood a man, if one ever breathed, unbeaten and unbeatable.

The captain's voice, as he grew somewhat coherent and passed from half inarticulate blasphemies to speech, gusted out raw and brutelike, along the shambles of the deck.

"Hell of a thing, this is!" he vociferated, with hands on belted hips. "And all along of a yellow wench. Devil roast all women! And devil take the rotten, cowardly crew. If I'd had that crew I went blackbirding with two years ago, up the Gold Coast, not one o' those hounds would have boarded us. But they didn't get the she-dog back, did they? They didn't get her back! It's bad, bad, but not too bad. Might be worse, so help me!"

Again he laughed, white teeth gleaming in his reddened beard, and lurched out on deck. Blinking he peered about him, on the after deck and midships. A brown body lay before him, face upward, with grinning teeth. Briggs recognized the turtle-egg seller, he who had thrown the kris. With an oath he kicked the body.

"*You* got paid off, anyhow," he growled. "Now you and Scurlock can fight it out together, in hell!"

He turned to the doctor, with a hard, sneering laugh, and limped along the deck.

"Doctor Filhiol!" cried he, sharply.

"Yes, sir?" answered the doctor, still busy with the man at the wheel.

"Make a short job o' that, there, and get to work on those two by the deck-house. We've got to muster all hands as quick as the Lord will let us—got to get sail on her, and away. These damned Malays will be worrying at our heels again, if we don't."

"Yes, sir," said Filhiol, curtly, giving a final turn to the helmsman's bandage. He made it fast, arose, took his kit, and started forward. Briggs laid a detaining hand on his arm—a hand that left a broad red stain on the rolled-up sleeve.

"Doctor," said he, thickly, "we've got to stand together, now. Bygones are bygones. There's a scant half-dozen men, here, able to pull a rope; and with them we've got to make Singapore. Do your best, doctor—do your best!"

"I will, sir. But that includes cutting off your rum!"

The captain roared into boisterous laughter and slapped Filhiol on the back, leaving another crimson blotch there.

"You'll have to cut my throat first!" he ejaculated. "No, no; as long as I've got a gullet to swallow with, and the rum lasts, I'll lay to it, and none the worse for it, sir. Patch 'em up, doctor, and then—"

"You could do with a bit of patching, yourself," the doctor put in, squinting critically at Briggs.

The captain waved him away.

"Scratches!" he cried. "Let the sun dry 'em up—waste no time on them!" He shoved the doctor forward, and followed him, kicking to right and left a ruck of weapons and débris that had fallen where the fighting had been hottest. Together the men advanced, stumbling or climbing over bodies.

"Patch those fellows up, I say, the best you can," directed Briggs, gesturing at the pair by the deck-house. "One of 'em, anyhow, may be some good. We've got to save every man possible, now. Not that I love 'em, God knows," he added, swaying slightly as he stood there, with his blood-stained hand upon the rail to steady himself. "The yellow-bellied pups! They got their due, right enough. But we've got to save 'em, now. Though if this was Singapore, I'd let 'em rot. At Singapore lascars are plenty, and beach-combers you can get for a song a dozen. Get to work now, sir, get to work!"

Life resumed something of order and efficiency aboard the Silver Fleece, as she wore slowly down Motomolo Strait. Briggs gave the men in the fo'c's'le the option of coming out, alive, or of being smoked to death with sulfur and of being brought out, dead. This fetched them out—five surly fellows, one of them slightly and two badly wounded. As for the few Malays of the crew who survived the fight and had failed to make their escape with the retreating forces, for the present they were kept locked in the deck-house. Briggs was taking no chances with another of the yellow dogs running *amok*.

The number of hands that mustered for service, including Briggs, Wansley, and the doctor, was only nine. This remnant of a crew, as rapidly as weak and wounded flesh could compass it—for some were grievously hurt—spread canvas and cleaned ship. A grisly task that was, of sliding the remaining bodies over the rail and of sluicing down the reddened decks with buckets of warm sea-water. Under urge of the land breeze, more and more canvas filled—canvas cut and burned, in places, yet still holding wind enough to drive the clipper at a fair pace. The Silver Fleece heeled gracefully and gathered way.

Slowly the scene of battle drew astern, marked by the thin waft of smoke still rising from the wreckage of the proa. Slowly the haze-shrouded line of shore grew dim. A crippled ship, bearing the remnant of a mutilated crew, she left the vague, blue headland of Columpo Point to starboard, and so—sorely broken but still alive—passed beyond all danger of pursuit.

And as land faded far astern, Captain Alpheus Briggs, drunk, blood-stained, swollen with hate and malice and evil triumph, stood on the shattered taffrail, peering back at the vanishing scene of one more battle in a life that had been little save violence and sin. Freighted with fresh and heavy crimes he stood there and exulted.

"Score one more for me," he sneered, his hairy fists clenched hard. "Hell's got you now, witch-woman, and Scurlock and all the rest that went against me. But I'm still on deck! They don't stick to *me*, curses don't. And I'll outlaugh that Eyeless Face—outlaugh it, by God, and come again. And so to hell with that, too!"

He folded his steel-muscled arms across his bleeding, sweating chest, heaved a deep breath and gloried in his lawless strength.

"To hell with that!" he spat, once more. "I win—I always win! To hell with everything that crosses me!"

CHAPTER XII.

AT LONG WHARF.

FOUR months and eighteen days from that red morning, the Silver Fleece drew in past Boston Light, past Nix's Mate and the low-buttressed islands in

Boston Harbor, and with a tug to ease her to her berth on the flood tide, made fast at Long Wharf.

All signs of the battle of Motomolo Strait had long since been obliterated, had been overlaid by other hardships, violences, evil deeds. Her bottom fouled by tropic weed and big, white barnacles, accumulated in West Indian waters, her canvas brown and patched, she came to rest. Of all the white men who had sailed with her, nearly two years before, now remained only Captain Briggs and Mr. Wansley and the doctor. The others who had escaped the fight had all died or deserted on the home-bound journey. One had been caught by bubonic at Bombay, and two by beriberi at Mowanga, on the Ivory Coast; the others had taken French leave as time and occasion had permitted.

Short-handed, with a rag-tag crew of half a dozen nations, the Silver Fleece made her berth. She seemed innocent enough. The sickening stench of the slave cargo that had burdened her from Mowanga to Cuba had been fumigated out of her, and now she appeared only a legitimate trader. That she bore, deftly hidden in secret places, a hundred boxes of raw opium, who could have suspected?

As the hawsers were flung over the mooring piles and the clipper creaked grindingly up against the wharf, there came to an end not the worst, perhaps, but surely one of the worst voyages that ever an American clipper-ship made. And this is saying a great deal. Those were hard days and hard ways--days when Massachusetts ships carried full cargoes of Medford rum and Bibles to the West Coast, and came back as blackbirders, with a few hundred head of "black ivory" groaning and dying under hatches—days when the sharks trailed all across the Atlantic, for the bodies of black men and women flung overboard - hard days and evil ways, indeed.

Very spruce and fine, when all formalities had been accomplished and when his men had been paid off, was Captain Briggs. Very much content with life he was, and with the strength that in him lay, that excellent May morning, as with firm stride and clear eye he walked up State Street, Boston. The wounds which would have killed a weaker man had long since healed on him. Up State Street from the waterfront he walked, resplendent in his best blue suit, with brass buttons, and with a gold-braided cap on his crisp, black hair. His black beard was carefully trimmed and combed; his bronzed, full-fleshed face seemed to glow with health and satisfaction; and the smoke of his cigar drifted behind him on the morning air. As he went he hummed an ancient chantey:

> "Oh, Sharlo Brown, I love your datter,
> Awa-a-ay, my rollin' river!
> Oh, Sharlo Brown, I love your datter,
> Ah! Ah! We're bound with awa-a-ay,
> 'Cross the wide Missouri!"

Past the ship-chandlers' stores, where ropes and anchors and all manner of sea things lay in the windows, he made his way, and past the marine brokers' offices; past the custom-house and up along the Old State House; and so he came into Court Street and Court Square, hard by which, in a narrow, cobbled lane, the Bell-in-Hand Tavern was awaiting him.

All the way along, from doors, from windows, or upon the broad-flagged sidewalk, here and there shipmasters, brokers, and seafaring folk nodded respectfully to Alpheus Briggs, or touched their hats to him. But few men smiled with friendship. You could see with half an eye they feared him. The reputation he bore, of hard fists and harder dealings, made men salute him. But no man seized him by the hand, or clapped him on the back, or haled him into any public house to toast his safe return.

Under the dark doorway of the Bell-in-Hand—under the crude, wooden fist that from colonial times, as even to-day, has held the the gilded, wooden bell—Briggs paused a moment, peered up and down the alley, then entered the inn. His huge bulk seemed almost to fill the dim, smoky, low-posted old place, its walls behung with colored woodcuts of ships and with fine old sporting prints. The captain raised a hand of greeting to Enoch Winch, the publican, passed the time of day with him, and called for a pewter of Four-X, to be served in the back room.

There he sat down at a deep-scarred table, in the half-gloom that seeped through the little windows of heavily laden bull's-eye glass. He put his cap beside him, on another chair, leaned back, drew deeply at his cigar, and sighed with vast content.

"Back home again," he murmured. "A hell of a time I've had, and that's no lie. But I'm back home at last. I'm back home!"

His satisfaction was doubled by the arrival of the pewter of ale. They serve strong ale, to-day, at the Bell-in-Hand: they served it just as strong, or stronger, fifty years ago. Some of the very same pewters are still in use—glass-bottomed pewters, heavy, thick, dented with perhaps a century of slaking great thirsts.

Briggs drank deeply of the cold brew, took breath and drank again, then dried his black beard with a handkerchief of purple silk. Not now did he smear his mouth with his hand. This was a wholly other and more elegant Alpheus Briggs. Having changed his latitude and raiment, he had likewise changed his manners.

He drained the pewter till light showed through the glass bottom—the bottom reminiscent of old days when to accept a shilling from a recruiting officer, even unaware, meant being pressed into the service. Many a young blood, accepting a drink with such an officer, had escaped military duty by having spied on the glass bottom the shilling that the artful man of arms had slipped into the ale; for a shilling in an empty mug was held as proof of enlistment, unless instantly detected and denied. Briggs squinted through the glass, smiling at memory of the trick that even in his own earlier days had been so often played.

"Clumsy stratagem," he pondered. "We're a bit slicker, to-day. Slicker, every way. In the old days it took time to make a fortune. Now, a little boldness turns the trick, just as I've turned it, this time!"

He smiled more contentedly, still, at thought of how very effectively he *had* turned it, and rapped on the table for another pewter of Four-X. Stronger liquors would better have suited his taste, but he had certain business still to be carried out, and when ashore the captain never let alcohol take precedence of business. For the present this ale would do very well, in quenching the bone-and-blood bred fever of long months away from ice and cooling drafts.

The second pewter put Captain Briggs in a reminiscent mood, wherein memories of the stirring events of the voyage just ended mingled with the comforting knowledge that he had much money in pocket—including all the doctor's wages, which he had won at cards in Batu Kawan, and on the strict payment of which he had insisted—and that still more was bound to come, before that day's end. As in a kind of mental mirage, scenes arose before him—scenes of peril, hardship and crime, now in security by no means displeasing to recall.

The affair with the Malay war fleet had already been half-obliterated by more recent violences. Briggs pondered on the sudden mutiny that had broken out, in the Indian Ocean, ten days from Bombay. The mutiny had been led by a Liverpool ruffian named Quigley, who tried to brain him with a piece of iron in a sock. Briggs had caught the man up and had simply flung him into the sea; then he had faced the others with bared fists, and they had slunk away forward.

He and Wansley had later flogged some of the others; had lashed them to the gangway and had given them the cat to exhaustion. Briggs felt that he had come out of this affair with honors. He smiled, and took another draft of ale.

Beating up the West Coast, he recalled how he had punished a young Irishman, McCune, whom he had shipped at Cape Town. McCune, from the supposed security of the foretop-gallant yard, had cursed him for a black-hearted bucko. Without parley, Briggs had run aloft, up the ratlines, and had wrenched McCune free from all holds; had flung him to the deck. The man had lived only a few minutes. Briggs nodded with satisfaction. He clenched his right fist, hairy, corded, hard as steel, and gazed at it, turned it this way and that, glad of its power. Greatly did he admire the resistless argument that lay in all its bones and ligaments.

"There's no man can talk back to *me!*" he growled. "No, by the Judas priest, they don't talk back to me the second time!"

Now came less pleasing recollections. Despite himself, Briggs could not wholly banish these. The slave cargo on the westbound voyage had been unusually heavy. Ironed wrist and ankle, the blacks—men, women, children, a miscellaneous catch purchased as a rather poor bargain lot from an Arab trader—had lain packed in the hold. They had been half starved when Briggs had loaded them and the fever had already got among them. The percentage of loss had been a bit too heavy. Some loss was legitimate, of course; but an excessive mortality was serious. Every head of human cattle that died on his hands meant a clear loss.

At one period of the trip, the death rate had risen so high that Briggs had even considered the advisability of improving conditions, of bringing some of the black ivory on deck, and increasing the ration. But in the end he had decided to hold through as he had begun, and trust to luck that he might arrive in Cuba with enough slaves to pay a good margin. Results had justified his decision. Briggs smiled as he felt the comfortable pad of bank-bills in his inside coat-pocket.

"I was right about that, too," thought he. "Seems like I'm always right—or else it's gilt-edged luck!"

Yet, in spite of all, that voyage had left some disagreeable memories. The reek and stille of the hold, the groaning and crying of the blacks—that no amount of punishment could silence—had vastly annoyed the captain. The way in which his crew had stricken the shackles from the dead and from those manifestly marked for death and had heaved them overboard to the trailing sharks, had only been an interesting detail.

But the fact that Briggs's own cabin had been invaded by vermin and by noxious odors had greatly annoyed the captain. Not all Dr. Filhiol's burning of pungent substances in the cabin had been able to purify the air. Briggs had cursed the fact that this most profitable of all traffickings had necessarily involved such disagreeable concomitants, and had consoled himself with much strong drink.

Then, too, a five-day blow that the Silver Fleece had encountered, three hundred miles west of the Cape Verdes, had killed off more than forty of his blacks and had made conditions doubly intolerable. Briggs remembered this as probably the most trying experience of his career at sea. Once more he formulated thoughts in words:

"Damn it! I might have done better to have scuttled her, off the African coast, and have drawn down my share of the insurance money. If I'd known what I was running into, that's just what I *would* have done, so help me! I made a devilish good thing of it, that way, in the old White Cloud two years ago, off the Guiana coast. And never was so much as questioned!"

He set down his ale, pondered a moment, frowning blackly.

"Maybe I did wrong, after all, to bring the Fleece into port. But then if I hadn't, I'd have had to sacrifice those hundred boxes of opium, that will bring me a clear two hundred apiece, or better, from Hendricks. So after all, it's all right. It 'll average right. I'm satisfied."

He drained the last of the Four-X, hauled out his watch and carefully inspected it.

"Ten fifteen," said he. "And I'm to meet Hendricks at ten thirty at the Tremont House. I'll hoist anchor and sail away."

He paid his score with scrupulous exactness, for in such matters he greatly prided himself on his honesty, lighted a fresh cigar, and departed from the Bell-in-Hand.

Cigar in mouth, smoke trailing on the fine May morning, he made his way to School Street and up it. A fine figure of a mariner he strode along, erect, alert, deep-chested, thewed and sinewed like a bull.

In under the columned portals of the old Tremont House—now long since only a memory of Boston town—he entered, to his rendezvous with Hendricks, furtive buyer of the forbidden drug.

And as he vanishes beneath that granite

doorway, for fifty years he passes from our sight.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER FIFTY YEARS.

IF you will call to mind and add into one total all that is warmest, sunniest, and most sheltered, all that hangs heaviest with the perfume of old-fashioned New England gardens, flowers, all that most cozily combines to round out the picture of an old-time sailor's home, you will form a picture of Snug Haven, dwelling and demain of Captain Alpheus Briggs, long years retired.

Snug Haven, with gray shingled walls, with massive chimney stacks projecting from its weather-beaten, gambreled roof—chimneys down the capacious flues of which, at evening, swallows circled and dropped to rest—seemed to epitomize rest after labor, peace after strife.

From its broad piazza, with morning-glory-covered pillars of rough-barked Norway pine logs from which the sawed branches still projected a foot or so, a splendid view opened to westward, of sea and shore and foam-ringed islets in the harbor of South Endicutt—a view commanding kelp-strewn foreshore, rock-buttressed headlands, sun-spangled cobalt of the bay; and then the white, far tower of Truxbury Light, and then the hazed and brooding mystery of open Atlantic.

Behind the cottage rose the slope of Croft Hill, sweet with brakes and ferns, with bayberries and wild roses crowding in among the lichen-covered bosses of its boulders and ribbed ledges, where gnarly, ancient apple-trees and silver birches clung. Atop the hill, a wall of mossy stones divided the living from the dead; for there, facing the hazy sky, the cemetery lay, its simple monuments and old, gray headstones of carven slate bearing some family names that have loomed big in history and that can never die.

Along the prim box-hedge that formed the boundary of Captain Briggs's front garden, the village street extended; the street that, wandering irregularly with the broken shore line, led past sleepy, time-grayed dwellings, past the little schoolhouse and the white, square-steepled church, to the lobstermen's huts, the storehouses and wharves on stilts, interspersed with "fish-flakes" or drying-frames that blended pungent marine odors with the fresh tang of the sea.

Old Mother Nature did her best, all along that street and in the captain's garden, to soften and disguise those sometimes rather insistent odors with her own perfumes of asters and petunias, nasturtiums, dahlias, sweet fern, and all the fresh, revivifying caresses of poplar, elm, and pine, of sumac, button-wood, and willow.

At times, with certain westerly breezes—breezes that bore to Snug Haven the sad, slow chant of the whistling buoy on Graves Shoal and the tolling of the bell buoy on the Shallows—oakum and tar, pitch, salt and fish seemed to have the best of it in South Endicutt. But with a shift to landward, apple-tree and sunflower, mignonette and phlox and myriad other blooms marshaled victorious essences; and the sleeping little village by the lip of the sea grew sweet and warm as the breast of a young and dreaming girl.

The afternoon on which Captain Alpheus Briggs once more comes to our sight—the 24th of June, 1918—was just one of those drowsy, perfumed afternoons, when the long roar of the breakers over Dry Shingle Reef seemed blended with the secrets that the breeze was whispering among the needle of the pines on Croft Hill, and when the droning of the captain's bees, among his spotted tiger-lilies, his sweet peas, cannas, and hydrangeas, seemed conspiring with the sun-drenched warmth of the old-fashioned garden to lull man's spirit into rest and soothe life's fever with a warmly soft nepenthe.

Basking in the sunlight of his piazza, as he sat there at ease in a board-armed rocker by a wicker table, the old captain appeared mightily content with life. Beside him lay a wiry-haired Airedale, muzzle on paws, seemingly asleep yet with one eye ready to cock open at the captain's slightest move. A blue cap, gold-braided, hung atop one of the tall uprights of the rocking-

chair; in the sunlight the captain's bushy hair, still thick, crisp, curling, though now spun silver, contrasted with his deep-lined face, tanned a deep brown. A certain glad expectancy showed in the expression of his deep-set eyes, clear and blue as they had been full fifty years ago, despite the fact that the bushy brows, once black, now matched the silver of his hair.

White, too, his beard had grown. Once in a while he stroked it, just a bit nervously, with a strong, corded hand. That hand showed the brown discolorations which bespeak old age, but still it did not tremble. It seemed, as his whole stout, square-knit body seemed, almost as vigorous as in the long ago—the troublous, half-forgotten, wholly repented long ago of violence and evil ways. Not yet had senility laid its clutch upon Alpheus Briggs. Wrinkles had come, and a certain stooping of the square, powerful shoulders; but the old captain's blue coat with its brass buttons still covered a body of iron strength.

The telescope that lay across his knees, its brass rubbed to an effulgence that winked and twinkled in the sunlight, was no more trim than he. Sunburned face and carefully tended beard of white, well-brushed coat and polished boots all alike proclaimed Alpheus Briggs a hale and proud old man. Though the heart and soul of him had changed, and had become wholly other than in the long ago, still Captain Briggs was true to type. In him no laxity inhered, no slouchiness, no falling away from the strict tenets of that shipshape neatness which had always striven to keep his decks holystoned and which now maintained Snug Haven as meticulously clean as his own person—which is saying all that any one can say.

The captain appeared to be expecting something, waiting for something. Once in a while he raised the telescope to his eye, and with a steady pointing that told how unbroken were his nerves, directed it toward the far blue sheet of the outer harbor, where the headland of Pigeon Cliff thrust itself against Dry Shingle Reef and the gray-green islet of the ship channel, swimming in a distant set of haze. Eagerly he explored the prospect, letting his glass rest on white lines of gulls that covered the tide-bars, on the whiter lines of foam over the reef, on the catboats and dories, the rusty coasting steamers and clumsy coal barges near or far away. With care he sought among the tawny sails as if hoping to find some special rig, and as each schooner tacked, its canvas now sunlit, now umber in shade, the captain's gaze seemed questioning: "Are you the craft I seek?"

The answer, as he studied the prospect, came always negative. With patience, Captain Briggs lowered his glass again, laid it across his knees once more, and so resumed his vigil.

"It's no use getting uneasy," said he, at last; and brought out pipe and tobacco from the pocket of his square-cut jacket, to while away the time with smoke. "It won't bring him a bit sooner, getting uneasy won't. He wrote me he'd be here some time to-day, and that means he'll surely be here before sundown. He's a Briggs. He may have his faults—we all do—but he's a Briggs. What he says he'll do he *will* do. No Briggs ever breaks a promise, and Hal is all clear Briggs, all the way through, from truck to keelson!"

Sitting there in the big rocker, waiting, pondering, the old man let his eyes wander over the little domain that had rewarded his life's work; the Snug Haven, indeed, of his last years; the place where he could keep his all-essential contact with sunshine and seashine, with the salt breeze and the bite of old ocean, yet where security and comfort and peace profound could all be his.

A pleasant domain it was, and in all its arrangements eloquent of the hand of the old sea captain. There life had been very kind to him, and there his darkest moments of bereavement had been, somehow or other, lived through, fought through, survived. Thither, more than five-and-forty years ago, he had brought the young wife whose love had turned his heart from evil ways and set his feet upon the better path from which, all these years of nearly half a century, they had not strayed.

In the front room, above his head, his only son, Edward, had been born; and from the door, close at hand, he had followed

the coffins that had taken away from him the three beings about whom, successively, the tendrils of his affection had grown and clung.

First the hand of death had closed upon his wife; but, profound as that loss had been, it had left to him his son. In this same house, that son had grown to manhood, and had himself taken a wife; and so for a few years there had been happiness and peace again.

But not for long. The birth of Hal, the old man's grandson, had cost the life of Hal's mother, a daughter-in-law whom Captain Briggs had taken to his heart and loved like his own flesh and blood; and, two years after, tragedy had once more entered Snug Haven. Edward Briggs, on his first voyage as master of a ship—a granite-schooner, plying between Rockport and Boston—had fallen victim of a breaking derrick rope. The granite lintel that had crushed the body of the old captain's son had, in a figurative sense, fallen also upon the captain's heart. Long after the grass had grown upon that third grave in the Briggs burial lot, up there on the hill overlooking the shining harbor, the old man had moved and lived as in a dream.

Then, gradually, the fingers of a child, the fingers of little Hal, fumbling at the latchets of the old man's heart, had in some miraculous way of their own, some all-powerful way that only childish fingers possess, opened that crushed and broken doorway; and Hal had entered in, and once more life had smiled upon the captain.

After summer is done and even the last gold and crimson leaves of autumn have fallen, sometimes wonderful days of Indian summer still for a little while warm the dying world and make men glad. Thus, with the captain. He had lost everything, or had seemed to lose everything; and yet, after all, Indian summer still had waited for him. In the declining years, Hal had become his sunshine and his warmth, once more to bid his soul expand and open, once more to bid him love. And he had loved, fully, completely, blindly, concentrating upon the boy, the last remaining hope of his family and his race, an affection so intense, so powerful, that more than once the child, hurt by the fierce grip of the old man's arms, had cried aloud in pain and fright.

Whereat the captain, swiftly penitent, had kissed and fondled him, sung brave sea chanteys to him, taught him wondrous miracles of splicing and weaving, or had fashioned boats and little guns, and boomerangs and bows and arrows, and so had brought young Hal to worship him as a child will when a man comes to his plane and is another, larger child with him.

With the threefold tragedy that had stricken the captain, life would have ceased to hold any purpose or meaning for him, had it not been for Hal. The boy, wonderfully vigorous and strong, had soon begun to absorb so much of the captain's interest and affection that the wounds in his heart had ceased to bleed, and that the acuteness of his pain had given place to a kind of dumb acquiesence. And after the shock of the final loss had somewhat passed life had reestablished itself and had taken root again, in Snug Haven.

Hal had prospered and thriven mightily in the sea air. Body and mind, he had developed at a wonderful pace. He had soon grown so handsome that even his occasional childish fits of temper—quite extraordinary fits, of strange violence though brief—had been forgiven him by every one. He had needed but to smile to be absolved.

Life had been, for the boy, all "wonder and a wild desire." The shadow of death had not been able to darken it. Memories of his father the boy soon had lost; his mother had never been anything to him but a name. Before very long he had come to know nothing of any human relationship save with his grandfather. The captain, proud of race, often spoke to him of his father and his mother, as he pointed out their pictures on the wall, or, leading Hal by the hand, trudged up the well-worn path to the cemetery on the hill, to show the boy the well-kept graves.

So Hal had grown up. Shore and sea and sky had all combined to develop him. School and play, and all the wonders of cliff, beach, tide, and storm, of dories, nets, tackle, ships, and sea things had strength-

ened him and filled both mind and body with unusual vigor.

The captain had told Hal endless tales of travel, had read to him, walked with him, taught him an infinite number of marvels. Before Hal had reached ten years, he had come to know every rope and spar of every kind of rig.

At twelve, he built a dory; and, two years later with the captain's help, a catboat, in which he and the old man took many a sail in all kinds of weather. If there were any tricks of navigation that the boy did not learn, or anything about lighthouses, buoys, day-marks and beacons, tides, currents and strange mysterious doings of the sea, it was only because the captain himself fell short of complete knowledge.

In everything the captain humored and indulged him. Did he "spoil" the boy? Some said so, but he steadfastly denied it. Even though he could never bear to inflict punishment, and even though young Hal grew up to have pretty much his own way, the captain denied spoiling him.

"Only poor material will spoil," he used to say, defiantly. "You can't spoil the genuine, thoroughbred stuff. No, nor break it, either. I know what I'm doing with that boy, and that's enough. Whose business is it, but my own?"

Sharing a thousand interests in common with Hal, the captain's love and hope burned ever higher and more steadily. As the bitter, violent, and grief-stricken past faded gradually into a vague melancholy, the future brightened, seemed beckoning with ever greater cheer. The captain came to have dreams of some day seeing Hal master of the biggest ship afloat. He formed a hundred plans and dreamed a thousand dreams, all more or less inwoven with the sea. And although Hal, when he had finished school and had entered college, had longed for other activities than sailoring, and had begun to show a remarkable aptitude for languages—especially the Oriental tongues—still the old man had never quite abandoned hope that some day Hal might stand on the bridge of a tall liner and guide it to its far, predestined goal.

For many years another influence than the captain's had had its part in molding Hal—the influence of Ezra Trefethen, whereof now a word or two. Ezra, good soul, had lived at Snug Haven ever since Hal's birth, less as a servant than as a member of the odd, little household. Once he had cooked for the captain, on one of Briggs's voyages out to Japan. His simple philosophy and unquestioning loyalty, as well as his exceeding skill with saucepans, had greatly attached the captain to him—this being, you understand, in the period after the captain's courtship and marriage had made of him another and a better man.

When Hal's mother had died, the captain had given Ezra dominion over the "galley" at Snug Haven, a dominion which had gradually extended itself over the whole house and garden, till it had come to share almost jointly in the management of the place and even in the care and upbringing of the boy.

Together, in a kind of hit-or-miss way that had scandalized the good wives of South Endicutt, Briggs and Trefethen had reared little Hal. The captain had given no heed to hints that he needed a housekeeper or even a second wife. Such suggestions had fallen harmlessly from his coat of mail. Trefethen had been a powerful helper, with the boy. Deft with the needle, he had sewed for Hal. He had taught him to keep his little room—his little "first mate's cabin," as he had always called it—very shipshape. And he had taught him sea lore, too; and at times when the captain had been abroad on the great waters, had taken complete charge of the fast-growing lad.

Thus the captain had been ever more and more warmly drawn toward Ezra. The simple old fellow had followed, with the captain, the body of the captain's son up there to the grave on the hill, and had wept sincere tears of grief at having seen the captain's sorrow. Together, Briggs and Ezra had kept the cemetery lot in order. Evenings without number, after little Hal had been tucked into bed, the two aging men had sat and smoked together on the piazza, in summer, or before the big fireplace in winter.

Almost as partners in a wondrous enterprise, they two had watched Hal grow to school age, and then to that decisive epoch of long trousers. Ezra had been just as proud as the captain, himself, when the sturdy, black-haired, blue-eyed boy had entered high school and had won his place at football, at baseball, and on the running-track. When "Hal" had become "Master Hal," for him, on the boy's entering college, the old servitor had come to look upon him with something of awe, for now Hal's studies had lifted him beyond all possible understanding. And with each prize won, whether of scholarship or athletics, old Ezra had thrilled with pride as real and as proprietary as Captain Briggs had felt.

CHAPTER XIV.

A VISITOR FROM THE PAST.

AS the captain sat there expectantly on the piazza, telescope across his knees, dog by his side, a step sounded in the hallway of Snug Haven, and out upon the porch issued Ezra, himself, blinking a little in the sunshine, screwing up his leathery, shrewd, humorous face, and from under a thin palm squinting out across the waters of the harbor.

"Ain't sighted him yet—er—cap'n?" demanded he, in a cracked, hoarse voice. "It's past six bells o' the aft'noon watch. You'd oughta be sightin' him pretty soon, now, seems like."

"I think so, too," the captain answered, with a vague note of disappointment in his voice. "He wrote that they'd leave Boston this morning early. Seems as if they should have made Endicutt Harbor by now."

"Right you are, cap'n. But don't you worry none. Can't nothin' of happened to 'em. They can't of fell foul o' nothin'. Master Hal, he's an A1 man. I'll trust *him* in any craft an' any sea. He'll make port afore night, cap'n, never you fear. He's *gotta!* Ain't I got a leg o' lamb on to roast, an' ain't I made his favor-ite plum-cake with butter-an'-sugar sauce? You know how Master Hal admires lamb an' plum-cake. Aye, he'll tie up at Snug Haven afore sundown, never you fear!"

The captain only grunted at this prognostication; and old Trefethen, after careful but fruitless examination of the harbor, went back into the house again, very much in the manner of those figures on toy barometers that come out in good weather and retire in bad.

Left alone once more, the captain drew deeply at his pipe and glanced with satisfaction at his cozy domain. A pleasant place it was, indeed, and trimly eloquent in all its arrangements, of the hand of an old seafaring man. The precision wherewith the hedge was cut, the whitewashed spotlessness of the front gate—a gate on the "port" post of which was fastened a red ship's-lantern, with a green one on the "starboard," which lanterns the captain or Ezra infallibly lighted every night, in all weathers—and even the sanded walks, edged with pink and brown conch-shells, all spelled "shipshape."

Trailing woodbine covered the fences that divided the captain's land from the yards to right and left, and along these fences grew thrifty blackberry, raspberry, and currant bushes. Apple-trees, whereon the little green buttons of fruit had already thickly set, shaded the lawn, here and there interspersed with flower-beds edged with shells and whitewashed rocks—flower-beds bright with a profusion of hollyhocks, peonies, and poppies.

Back of the house a vegetable-garden, jointly cared for by the captain and old Ezra, gave promise of great increase; and in the hen-yard White Leghorns and Buff Orpingtons of the purest strain pursued the vocations of all well-disposed, contented poultry. A Holstein cow, knee-deep in daisies on the gentle hill-slope behind Snug Haven, likewise formed part of the household; and last of all came the bees, denizens of six hives in a prim row not far from the elm-shaded well.

But the captain's special pride centered less in all these things than in the gleaming white flagpole, planted midway of the front lawn—a pole from which flew, every sunny day, the Stars and Stripes, together with a big blue house-flag bearing a huge "B" of

spotless white. This flag and a little cannon of gleaming brass, from which on every holiday the captain invariably fired a salute, formed his chief treasures; by which token you shall read the heart of the old man, and see that, for all his faring up and down the world, a certain curious simplicity had none the less maintained itself in him.

Thus on that June afternoon, sitting in state amid his possessions, the captain waited—waited, dressed in his very best, for the homecoming of the boy on whom was concentrated all the affection of a nature now powerful to love, as in the old and evil days it had been violent to hate. His face, as he sat there, was pensive, virile, patriarchal; it was dignified with that calm nobility which lies inherent in advancing years when old age is "frosty but kindly."

With placid interest he watched a worm-hunting robin on the lawn, and listened to the chickadees' piping monotone in the huge maple by the gate. Those notes seemed to blend with the metallic music of hammer and anvil somewhere down the tortuous village street. *Tunk-tunk! Clink-clank-clink!* sang the blacksmith's hammer from the shop of Peter Trumett as Peter forged new links for the port anchor-chain of the Lucy Bell, now in port for repairs. Then a voice, greeting the captain from the rock-nubbled roadway, drew the old man's gaze.

"How do, cap'n?" called a rough-clad man from the top of a slow-moving load of kelp. "I'm goin' up-along. Anythin' I kin do fer you?"

"Nothing, Jacob," answered Briggs. "But, thank you, just the same. Oh, Jacob! Wait a minute!"

"Hoa, *s-h-h-h-h!*" commanded the kelp-gatherer, reining in his horse. "What is it, cap'n?"

The old man arose, placed his telescope carefully in the rocking-chair, and slowly, yet with a firm step, walked down to the gate, along the white-sanded path. The Airedale followed close, anxious lest he lose sight of the beloved master. The dog's rusty-brown muzzle touched the captain's hand. Briggs fondled the animal a moment and smiling said:

"I'm not going to leave you, Ruddy. I can't go anywhere now. None of us can go anywhere. Hal's coming home to-day. Know that? We mustn't be away when he comes!"

Ruddy wagged a comprehending tail. The captain advanced once more. Half-way down the walk he paused, stooped, picked up a snail that had crawled out upon the distressful sand and that lay in peril of being crushed by any careless foot. He dropped the snail into the sheltering grass and went forward again. At the gate, flanked by the ship's lanterns, he stopped, leaned his crossed arms on the clean top-board, and for a moment peered in silence at Jacob perched on the load of kelp that overflowed the time-worn, two-wheeled cart.

"What is it, cap'n?" Jacob queried. "Somthin' I kin do fer you? If 'tis, you know I'm mighty glad—"

"No, nothing you can do for me," Briggs answered, "but something you can do for Uncle Everett and for yourself, if you will."

At sound of that name the kelp-gatherer stiffened with sudden resentment.

"Nothin' fer him, cap'n!" he ejaculated. "He's been 'bout as accommodatin' as a hog on ice to me, an' the case is goin' through. Nothin' at all fer that damned—"

"Wait! Hold on, Jacob!" the old man pleaded, raising his hand. "You can't gain anything by violence and hate. I know he's injured you grievously, or at least you think he has. He thinks the same of you. Perhaps you're both in the wrong. In his heart I know he's sorry. You and he were friends for thirty years or more till this petty little quarrel about the boat came up. Now I ask you, Jacob, is the whole boat worth losing such a friendship—worth cutting the cables of good understanding and letting yourselves drift on the reefs of hate? Is it, now?"

"You been talkin' with him 'bout me?" demanded Jacob irefully. "'Cause if you have—"

"Well, maybe I've said a few words to Uncle Everett," admitted the captain. "Enough, anyhow, to find out that uncle's willing to go half-way to meet you, or maybe even three-quarters."

"He'll meet me nowheres 'cept in the court-room down to 'Sconset!" retorted

Jacob with heat. "He done me a smart trick that time. I'll rimrack *him!*"

"We've all done smart tricks one time or another," soothed the old captain. The sunlight through the arching elms by the gate flecked his white hair with moving bits of radiance; it narrowed the keen, earnest eyes of blue. "One time or another, Jacob, we've all trespassed against our neighbor. That's human. It's better than human to be sorry and to do better, to make peace with your neighbor and with the world. Uncle Everett's not a bad man at heart, any more than you are. It wouldn't need more than half a dozen words from you to calk up the leaking hull of your friendship. Think it over. You're not going to go on hating uncle, are you, when you *could* shake hands with him and be friends?"

"Oh, ain't I, huh?" demanded Jacob. Though he still spoke truculently his voice had grown less angry. "Why ain't I?"

"Because you're a man and can think; not an animal, that can only feel!" the captain smiled. "Harkness and Bill Dodge were bitter as gall six months ago, and Giles was ready to cut Burnett's heart out, but I found they were human, after all. They listened to reason."

"Yes, but they ain't *me!*"

"Are you less a man than they were? Less intelligent, Jacob? Less reasonable?"

"H-m! H-m!" grunted Jacob, floored. "I—I reckon not. Why?"

"I've got nothing more to say for now," the captain answered. "Good-by, Jacob!"

The kelp-gatherer seemed indisposed to move along. He pushed back his straw hat, scratched his head, spat, and then broke out:

"Mebbe it 'd be cheaper, after all, to settle out o' court rather 'n go to law, uncle. I'll see 'bout that. But th[illegible]kin' hands part of it, an' the bein' neighbors with that —that—"

"Good day, Jacob!" the captain repeated, smiling very wisely to himself. "One thing at a time. And, by the way, if you come up-along to-morrow, lay alongside, and have another gam with me, will you?"

To this Jacob made no answer, but gathered up his reins and slapped them on the lean withers of his horse. Creakingly the load of seaweed moved away, with Jacob on top of it, a rather dazed expression on his leathery face. The captain remained there at the gate, peering after him with a smile, kindly yet shrewd.

"Just like the others," he murmured. "That's just the way they talked at first. Can't make port all on one tack. Got to watch the wind, and wear about and make it when you can. But if I know human nature, a month from to-day Jacob Plummer will be smoking his pipe down at Uncle Everett's sail-loft, and the lawyers at 'Sconset will be out of pocket to the extent of another case. They're not thanking me, the lawyers aren't," he added with a little laugh. He stroked his beard thoughtfully. "Not thanking me: but then we can't please everybody in this world."

The sound of high and piping voices, beyond the blacksmith-shop, drew the old captain's attention thither. His expression assumed a certain expectancy. Into the pocket of his square-cut blue jacket he slid an anxious hand; then, relieved, found something there, and withdrew the hand. Along the street he peered—the narrow, rambling street shaded and sheltered by great elms through which, here and there, a glint of sunlit harbor shimmered blue.

He had not long to wait. Almost at once, round the bend between the smithy and a low, gray house with gables toward the road, two or three children appeared; and after these came others, grouped round a bright-haired girl of twenty or so. All the children had school-bags, or bundles of books tightly strapped. Keeping pace with the teacher a little girl on either side held her hands. Even at that distance you could not fail to see the teacher's smile as wholesome, fresh, and winning as that June day itself.

At sight of the captain leaning over his front gate the boys in the group set up a joyful shout and some broke into a run.

"Hey, lookit! There's cap'n!" rose exultant cries. "There's Cap'n Briggs!"

Then the little girls came running, too; and all the children captured him by storm. Excited, the Airedale set up a clamorous barking. The teacher, tugged along by the

eager and excited girls at right and left, laughed gaily.

The riot ended only when the captain had been completely despoiled of the peppermints and the small change he had provided for this very contingency. Meanwhile the teacher, as trimly pretty a figure as you could meet in many a day's journeying, was standing by the gate, and with a little heightened flush of color was casting a look or two, as of expectancy, up at Snug Haven.

The old captain, smiling, shook his head.

"Not yet, Laura," he whispered. "He'll be here before night, though. You're going to let me keep him a few minutes, aren't you, before taking him away from me?"

She found no answer. Something about the captain's smile seemed to disconcert her very much. A warm flush crept from her throat to her thickly coiled, lustrous hair. Then she passed onward, down the shaded street; and as the captain peered after her, still surrounded by her bodyguard of children, a little moisture blurred his eyes.

"God has been very good to me in spite of all!" he murmured. "Very, very good, and 'the best is yet to be'! Come, Ruddy!" he added, stroking the head of the Airedale nuzzling against his hand. "Come, let's be getting back to our telescope. We mustn't miss him when he comes in sight!"

He turned and was about to start back toward the house when the *cloppa-cloppa-clop* of hoofs along the street arrested his attention. Coming into view, past Laura and her group of scholars, an old-fashioned buggy, drawn by a horse of ample years, was bearing down toward Snug Haven.

In the buggy sat an old, old man, wizen and bent. With an effort he reined in the aged horse. The captain heard his piping tones, quite clearly, on the still afternoon air:

"Pardon me, but can you tell me where Captain Briggs lives — Captain Alpheus Briggs?"

A babel of childish voices and the pointing of numerous small fingers quite obliterated any information Laura tried to give. The old man, with many thanks, clucked to his horse, and so the buggy came along once more. It reached the front gate of Snug Haven. There it stopped.

Out of it bent a feeble, shrunken figure, with flaccid skin on deep-lined face, with blinking eyes behind big spectacles.

"Is that you, captain?" asked a shaking voice that, in a flash, pierced to the captain's heart with a stab of poignant recollection. "Oh, Captain—Captain Briggs—is that you?"

The captain, turning quite pale, steadied himself by gripping at the top board of the whitewashed gate. For a moment his staring eyes met the eyes of the old, withered man in the buggy. Then, in strange, husky tones he cried:

"God above! It—it can't be you, doctor? It can't be—Dr. Filhiol?"

CHAPTER XV.

TWO OLD MEN.

"YES, yes, it's Dr. Filhiol!" the little old man in the buggy made answer. "I'm Filhiol. And you—you're Captain Briggs. Yes, I'd know you anywhere. Briggs! Captain Alpheus Briggs, so help me!"

He dropped the reins, took up a heavy walking-stick, and started to clamber down out of the buggy. Captain Briggs, flinging open the gate, reached him just in time to keep him from collapsing in the road, for truly the doctor's feeble strength was all exhausted with the long journey he had made to South Endicutt, with the drive from the station five miles away, and with the nervous shock of once more seeing a man on whom, in fifty years, his eyes had never rested.

"Steady, doctor, steady!" the captain admonished, with a stout arm about him. "There, there now, steady does it!"

"You—you'll have to excuse me, captain, for seeming so unmanly weak," the doctor proffered shakily. "But I've come a long way to see you, and it's such a hot day—and all. My legs are cramped, too. I'm not what I used to be, captain. None of us are, you know, when we pass the eightieth milestone and see the ninetieth looming up ahead of us!"

"None of us are what we used to be; right for you, doctor," the captain answered with deeper meaning than on the surface of his words appeared. "And, what's more, you needn't apologize for being a bit racked in the hull. Every craft's seams open up a bit at times. I understand how it is."

He tightened his arm about the shrunken body, and with compassion looked upon the man who once had trod his deck so strongly and so well. "Come, come along o' me, now. Come up to Snug Haven, doctor. There's good rocking-chairs on the piazza and a good little drop of something to take the kinks out of your knees. The best of timber needs a little calking now and then. Come along with me, now. Good Lord above! Dr. Filhiol again—Filhiol, after fifty years!"

"Yes, that's correct—after fifty years," the doctor answered, pulling himself together with an effort. "Here, let me look at you a moment!" He peered at Briggs through his heavy-lensed spectacles, which strangely distorted his blinking eyes. "It's you all right, captain. You've changed, of course. You were a bull of a man in those days, and your hair was black as black; and now—but still you're the same. I—well, I wish I could say that about myself, Captain Briggs!"

"Come, now, we've got no time for nonsense!" the captain boomed at him, drawing him toward the gate. "Wait till you've got a little tonic under your hatches, 'midships. Wait till you've spliced the main brace a couple of times and get settled down in one of my rocking-chairs, then you can reminisce all you want to. But not now, doctor; not now!"

"The horse!" exclaimed Filhiol, bracing himself with his stout cane. He peered anxiously at the animal. "I hired him at the station, and if he should run away and break anything—"

"I'll have Ezra go aboard that craft and pilot it into port," the captain reassured him. "We won't let it go on the rocks, you can be sure of that. Ezra, he's my chief cook and bottle-washer, and a good strong man he is, too. He can handle that cruiser of yours, O. K." The captain's eyes twinkled a bit as he looked at the profoundly dejected animal. "Come along o' me, doctor. Up to the quarter-deck with you, now!"

Half-supported by the captain, half by his cane, old Dr. Filhiol limped through the gate and up the white-sanded path. As he went, he glanced here, there, taking in all the details of Snug Haven that his confused perceptions could assimilate. As if in a kind of daze he kept murmuring:

"Captain Briggs again! Who'd have thought I could really find him? Half a century — a lifetime — Captain Alpheus Briggs!"

"Ezra! Oh, Ezra!" the captain hailed, as they came to the porch. Carefully he helped the aged doctor up the steps. Very feebly, with stiff joints and trembling muscles, the doctor crept up; his cane clumped hollowly on the boards. As they reached the top step, Ezra appeared.

"Aye, aye, sir?" he queried, a look of wonder on his long, thin face. "What's orders, sir?"

"An old-time friend of mine has come to visit me, Ezra. It's Dr. Filhiol, that used to sail with me, way back in the 60's. I've got some of his fancy-work stitches in my leg this minute. A great man he was with the cutting and stitching; none better. I want you men to shake hands."

Ezra advanced, hospitality and admiration shining from his honest features. Any man who had been a friend of his captain, especially a man who had embroidered his captain's leg with fancy stitches, was already taken to the bosom of his affections.

"Doctor," said the captain, "this is Ezra Trefethen. If we'd had cooks like him in the old days we wouldn't have swapped tables with the crowned heads. When you get some of the grub from his galley aboard you, you'll be ready to lick the Kaiser single-handed."

"I'm very, very glad to know you, Ezra," the doctor said, putting out his left hand—the right, gnarled and veinous, still gripped his cane. "Yes, yes, we were old-time shipmates, Captain Briggs and I." His voice, "to childish treble turning," broke pipingly, so that pity and sorrow pierced the heart of Alpheus Briggs at sound of it. "It's been a sad, long time since we've

met. And now, can I get you to look out for my horse, if you will? If anything should frighten him, and he should run away and do any damage or hurt anybody, I'm sure that would be very bad."

"Righto!" Ezra answered, his lean and wrinkled face assuming an air of preternatural seriousness as he observed the aged animal standing there already half asleep by the gate, head hanging, spavined knees swollen and bent. "I'll steer him to safe moorin's fer you, sir. We got jest the handiest dock in the world fer him, up the back lane, in the cow-barn. I'll manage him; he won't git away from me, sir, never you fear."

"Thank you, Ezra," the doctor answered, releasing Ezra's honest grip. He seemed much relieved. The captain eased him into a rocker, by the table. "There, that's better. You see, captain, I'm a bit done up. It always tires me to ride on a train; and then, too, it's such a hot day, and the drive from the station was exhausting. I'm not used to driving, you know, and—"

"I know, I know," Briggs interrupted, a strange expression in his eyes, as though sadness and smiling contested for mastery. "Just sit you there, doctor, and keep right still. I'll be back in half a twinkling."

And, satisfied that the doctor was all safe and sound in the big chair, he turned and stumped into the house; while Ezra whistled to the dog and strode away down the front walk, to go aboard the buggy as navigating officer of that sorry equipage.

Even before Ezra had safely berthed the horse in the stable up the lane, bordered with sweetbrier and sumacs, Captain Briggs returned with a tray, whereon was a bottle of his very best Jamaica, now kept exclusively for the contingencies of sickness or a cold, or, it might be, for some rare and special guest. The Jamaica was flanked with a little jug of water, with glasses, lemons, and sugar. At sight of it the doctor left off brushing his coat, all powdered with the fine, gray rock-dust of the Massachusetts north shore, and smiled with sunken lips that revealed sad havoc in his dentition.

"I couldn't have prescribed better myself," said he. "I've got as little use for alcohol as I hear you have now, yourself; but at times—at times—well, there's nothing quite takes the place of it, after all."

"Correct, sir," agreed the captain. He set the tray on the piazza table. "I don't hardly ever touch it, any more. But as a medical man you know it's got its uses, now and then. You need a good, stiff drink, doctor, and I'm going to join you, for old times' sake. Surely there's no sin in that, after half a century that we haven't touched glasses, no, nor yet laid eyes on one another!"

Speaking, he was at work on the manufacture of a brace of drinks, pure objects of art if old-time skill joined to the finest of ingredients could produce such.

"It's my rule not to touch it," he added. "But there's exceptions to every rule, and I've got to make one to-day. Sugar, sir? Lemon? All O. K., then. Well, doctor, here goes. Here's to—to—"

"To fifty years of life!" the doctor exclaimed, his voice growing suddenly deep and virile once more. He stood up, raising the glass that Briggs had given him. His eye cleared: for a moment his aged hand held firm.

"To fifty years!" the captain echoed. And so the glasses chinked, and so they drank that toast, bottoms-up, those two old men so different in the long ago, so very different now.

When the little ceremony was at an end, and when Filhiol had resumed his seat, the captain drew a chair up close to him and sat down, side by side, with the doctor, both of them facing the sea. Through the doctor's spent tissues a little warmth began to diffuse itself, a little transitory strength. But still he found nothing to say; nor, for a minute or two, did the captain. A pause, a little silence, strangely tense and awkward, drew itself between them, now that the first surprise and stimulus of the meeting had spent itself. Where, indeed, should they begin to knit up so vast and deep a chasm as had opened itself between them in those five decades?

Each man gazed on the other, trying to find some word that might be fitting, but each muted by the dead weight of silence and oblivion that for half a century had parted them. Filhiol, the more resourceful

of wit, despite his now on-drawing second-childhood, was first to speak.

"Yes, captain, we've both changed, though it's only a matter of plain truth to acknowledge you've held your own a great deal better than I have. I've had a great deal of sickness; probably that's had much to do with my falling into senility. And I'm an older man than you, besides. Four or five years older, anyhow. I'm eighty-three—I'll be eighty-four, sir, if I live till the 16th of next October. A man's done for at that age; no use blinking the fact. And you've had every advantage over me, not only in years, but also in strength and constitution. I was only an average man, at best. You were a Hercules, and even to-day you look as if you'd be a pretty formidable antagonist, if aroused. In a way, I've done better than most, captain. I've outlived all my relatives of the same generation, and practically all my friends and contemporaries."

The doctor smiled and nodded, with that peculiar boasting pride which inevitably comes with advanced age. "Yes, I've done well in my way," he repeated. "Still, I'm not the man you are to-day. That's plain to be seen."

"We aren't going to talk about that, doctor," the captain interposed, his voice soothing and gentle, as he laid a strong hand on the withered one of Filhiol that was holding the arm of the rocker. "Let all that pass. What I want to know now is how you got wind of me? I'm laying at anchor in a sheltered harbor here, doctor. What breeze bore you news of me? Tell me that, and tell me what you've been doing all this time. What kind of a voyage have you made of life? Fair weather, or rough? And where are you berthed, and what cargo of this world's goods have you got stowed in your lockers?"

"Tell me about yourself, first, captain. You seem to have a jewel of a place here. What else? Wife, family, all that?"

"I'll tell you, after you've answered my questions," the captain insisted. "You're my guest; you're aboard my craft, here, sitting on my decks, and so you've got to talk first. Come, come, doctor—let's have your log!"

Thus urged, Filhiol began to speak. With some of the digressions of a mind somewhat shaken by long years of suffering and loneliness, of poverty and isolation, yet in the main clearly enough and even at times with a certain animation and dry humor that distantly recalled his mental acuity of the long ago, he outlined his life-story.

Briefly he told of his retirement from the sea, following a wreck off the coast of Chile, in 1876—a wreck in which he had taken damage to his spine, from which he had never fully recovered—and narrated his establishing himself in practise in New York. Later he had had to give up the struggle there, as too intense, and had gone up into a New Hampshire village, where life, though poor, had been comparatively easy.

Five years ago he had retired, with a few hundred dollars of pitiful savings, and had bought his way into the Physicians' and Surgeons' Home, at Salem, Massachusetts. He had never married; had never known the love of a wife, nor the kiss of children. His whole life, the captain could see, as he followed the narrative with keen attention broken only now and then by a searching glance out over the harbor, had been given unhesitatingly to the service of his fellowmen. And now mankind, when old age had paralyzed his skill and crowded him from the ranks of utility, was passing him by, indifferently, as if he had been no more than an old and broken-up wreck upon the shores of the sea of human existence.

Briggs watched the old man with a kind of sad pity—pity that this once trim and active man should have faded to so weak and bloodless a shadow of his former self. Close-shaven the doctor still was, and not without a certain neatness in his dress, despite its poverty; but his bent shoulders, his loose and baggy skin, the blinking of his eyes all told the tragedy of life that fades—life, that strange drama which begins with joy and strength and the overflowing of high spirits, only by slow stages to sink into the anticlimax of cold and feebleness, on which the dropping of the last, black curtain comes as blessed respite after pain.

With a pathetic moistening of the eyes, the doctor spoke of this bitter but inevitable

decay, this falling away from life and its activities; and with a heartfelt wish that death might have laid its summons on him while still in active service, turned to a few words of explanation as to how he had come to have news again of Captain Briggs.

It had been but yesterday, he said, that chance had brought him word of the captain. A new attendant at the home had mentioned the name Briggs; and memories had stirred, and questions had very soon brought out the fact that it was really Captain Alpheus Briggs, and none other, who now was living at South Endicott. The attendant had told him something more—and here the doctor paused, hesitated, feeling for words that should convey his meaning without offense.

"Yes, yes, I understand what you mean," said Briggs. "You needn't be afraid to speak it right out. It's true, doctor. I *have* changed. God knows I've suffered enough, these past long years, trying to forget what kind of a man I started out to be, long, long ago; trying to forget, and not always able to. If suffering and repentance and trying to sail a straight course now can wipe out that score, maybe it's partly gone. I hope so, anyhow; I've done my best—no man can do more than that, now, can he?"

"I don't see how he can," answered the doctor slowly.

"He can't, and that's a fact," said the captain with conviction. "Of course I can't give back the lives I took, but so far as I've been able, I've made restitution of all the money I came by wrongfully. What I couldn't give back directly I've handed over to charity. There's some cash coming to you, too, doctor. That's a debt I've had on my conscience for years and years. I'm powerful glad that I can pay it now."

"Debt? What debt?" asked the doctor, startled.

"The wages I cheated you out of, gambled out of you, in the Straits, in 1868, Remember now?"

"Oh, that!" exclaimed Filhiol. "For Heaven's sake, captain, forget all that! It's outlawed, ages ago. My own fault, too. I gambled just as much as you did, and if I'd won—"

"Ah, but you couldn't have!" said Briggs. "The cards were crooked. My own pack. 'Blocked' cards, doctor. Don't talk to me; *I* know. The money's yours. I've kept it all these years, every penny of it, hoping I might find you sometime, and now I have, and before you leave this house it's going back into your pocket. So *that's* settled!"

"All right, all right," acceded Filhiol, to whom a few hundred dollars would really come as a godsend. "We won't argue. I've told you my story, captain. Now, let's have yours." And through his glasses, which seemed to make his eyes so strangely big and questioning, he peered at Captain Briggs.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CAPTAIN SPEAKS.

THE captain, still obsessed with the sense of evil done in the long ago, clenched his right fist, and turned it to and fro, studying it with rueful attention.

"My undoing was the fact that nature gave me brute strength," said he. "Those were hard, bad days, and I had a hard, bad fist; and together with the hot blood in me and the Old Nick that seemed to possess me, things went pretty far. Hard, bad days, doctor. Lots of the things I did were needless, cruel, and beyond all condemnation. I'm only hoping that, here or there, some of the things were necessary. If I could only get a little of the guilt and sorrow off my mind, that would be something."

"You're morbid, captain," answered Filhiol. "You've made all the amends that anybody can. You can't do any more than that, as I've already told you. Let's forget the wickedness, now, and try to remember the better part. You've changed, every way. What changed you, and what's your life-story been?"

"Just let me have another look through the glass, and I'll tell you what I can."

Briggs raised his telescope and with it swept the harbor.

"H-m!" said he. "Nothing yet."

"Expecting some one, captain?"

"My grandson, Hal."

"Grandson! That's fine! The only one you have?"

"The only one." Briggs lowered his glass with disappointment. "He's the sole surviving member of the family, beside myself. No others. All the rest are up there, doctor. Up there in that little cemetery on the hilltop."

Filhiol's eyes followed the captain's pointing hand, as it indicated the burial-ground lying there under the vagrant cloud-shadows of the fading afternoon, peaceful and "sweet with blade and leaf and blossom." A lustrous crow, motionless in a pine against the richly luminous sky, seemed to suggest memories of "Nevermore." Somewhere, unseen, a bluejay was scolding. As a contrabass to the musical rhythm of the blacksmith's hammer, the far, booming murmur of the sea trembled across the summer air. The captain paused a moment, then went on:

"I've had great losses, doctor. Bitter, and hard to bear. After I fell in love and changed my way of life, and married and settled here, I thought maybe fate would be kind to me, but it wasn't. One by one my people were taken away from me—my wife, and then my son's wife, and last of all, my son. Three, I've lost, and got one left. Yet it isn't exactly as if I'd really lost them. I'm not one that can bury love, and forget it. My folks aren't gone. They're still with me, in a way.

"I don't see how people can let their kin be taken away and buried in strange places and forgotten. As for me, I want to keep mine always near me, where I can look out for them, and where I know they won't feel lonesome. I want them to be right near the home place, doctor, where it's all so friendly and familiar. Maybe that's an old man's foolish notion, but that's the way I feel, and that's the way I've had it."

"I—think I understand," the doctor answered. "Go on."

"They aren't really gone," continued Briggs. "They're still up there, very, very near to me. There's nothing mournful up there, in the lot; nothing sad or melancholy. No, Ezra and I have made it bright and cheerful, with roses and petunias and zinnias and all kinds of pretty flowers and bushes and vines. You can see some of those vines now on the monument." He pointed once more. "That one, off to starboard of the big elm—yes, right there. It's a beautiful place, really. The breeze is always cool, up there, doctor, and the sun stays there longest of any spot round here. Strikes that hill first thing in the morning, and stays till last thing at night. We've got a bench there, a real comfortable one that I made myself; not one of those hard, iron things they usually put in cemeteries. I've given Hal lots of his lessons, reading and navigation, up there. I go up every day a spell, and take the dog with me, and Ezra goes, too; and we carry up flowers and put 'em in jars, and holystone the monument and the headstones, and make it all shipshape. No weeds up there, doctor, no, nor no moss or lichens on the monument. It's all as bright as a button; regularly shipshape, and so it's going to be, as long as I'm on deck."

"I think you've got the right idea, captain," murmured Filhiol. "Death, after all, is quite as natural a process, quite as normal, quite as much to be desired at the proper time, as life. I used to fear it, when I was young; but now I'm old, now it's so near, I find I'm not at all afraid. Are you?"

"Never! If I can only live to see Hal launched from the ways and off on his life journey, with colors flying and everything trig aloft and alow, I'll be right glad to go. That's what I've often told my wife and the others, sitting up there in the sunshine, smoking my pipe. You know, that's where I go to smoke and think, doctor. Ezra and I go to see them, one time or another, every day, and there we sit and smoke, and sometimes we take the old checker-board up there, too, and have a game or so. We take the telescopes and sextant up, too, and make observations there. It kind of scandalizes some of the stiff-necked old Puritans, here in South Endicutt, but Lord love you! I don't see any harm in it, do you? It all seems nice and sociable; it makes the death of my people seem only a kind of temporary going away, as if they'd gone on a visit, like, and Hal and Ezra and I were just waiting for them to come back.

"I tell you, doctor, it's a right pleasant place, as homy and comfortable as anything you ever saw. I'm truly very happy, up there. Yes, in spite of everything, I reckon I'm a happy man. I've got no end of things to be thankful for. I've prospered in a material way. I've got this little place, Snug Haven, here, and there's no end of comfort in flowers and vegetables, in a cow and bees and a good dog. I've got Ezra, who's more a partner in everything than a handy man. And best of all, *the* main thing without which, of course, everything else would not be worth a tinker's cuss, I've got my grandson, Hal!"

"I see. Tell me about him, captain," the doctor asked. "Even though I haven't got chick nor child of my own, I can enjoy hearing about yours."

"Quite right, sir! I will. He's been two years in college already, and he's more than made good. He's twenty-one, and got shoulders on him like Goliath. You ought to see that fellow's arms and chest when he's at work in the gym he's fitted up in the barn! Oh, doctor, he's a wonder! His rating is A1, all through."

"I don't doubt it. And you say he's coming home to-day?"

"To-day—which makes this day a great, wonderful day for his old grandfather, and that's the living truth. Yes, he's coming home, for the summer vacation, or for as long as he'll stay with me, though he's got some idea of going out with the fishing-fleet, for what he calls local color or some such thing. He's quite a fellow to write stories; says he wants to go to sea a while, so he can do it right. Though, Lord knows, he's full enough of sea-lore and sea-skill. That's his grandfather's blood cropping out again, I suppose, that love for blue water. That's what you call heredity, isn't it, doctor."

"H-m! yes, I suppose so," answered Filhiol, frowning a little. "I suppose you might call it that. Though heredity's a peculiar factor in life. We don't always know just what it is, or how it acts. Still, if a well-marked trait of a father or grandfather comes out in the offspring, we call it heredity, for lack of a better name. So he's got your love of the sea, has he?"

"He surely has, and in full force. There's salt in *his* blood, all right enough!"

"H-m! You don't notice any—any other traits in him that—remind you of your earlier days?"

"If you mean strength and activity, and the love of hard work, yes. Now see, for example. Any other boy would have come home by train, and lots of 'em would have traveled in the smoker, with a pack of cigarettes and a magazine. Does Hal come home that way? He does not! He writes me that he's going to work his way up on a schooner, out of Boston, for experience. That's why I'm keeping my old glass on the harbor, off and on. He told me the name of the schooner. It's the Sylvia Fletcher. I'd know her in a thousand. The minute she sticks her jib round Truxbury Light, out there, I'll catch her."

"Sylvia Fletcher?" asked the doctor. "That's an odd coincidence, isn't it?"

"What is?"

"Why, just look at those initials, captain. Sylvia Fletcher—S. F."

"Well, what about 'em?"

"Silver Fleece. That was S. F., too."

The captain turned puzzled eyes on his guest. He passed a hand over his white hair, and pondered a second or two. Then said he:

"That *is* odd, doctor, but what about it? There must be hundreds of vessels afloat, with those initials. You—you're not trying to make out—"

"By no means. It only struck me as peculiar, that's all. But of course it can't mean anything. As you say, S. F. must be common enough initials among ships. So then. Hal's amphibious already, is he? What's he going to be? A captain like yourself?"

"No telling, though I'd like him to be. I don't hardly think so, though," Briggs answered, a little distraught. Something in the doctor's conversation the last few minutes had singularly disturbed him. Now and then he cast an uneasy glance at the withered little man in the chair beside him.

"It's going to be his own choice, his profession is," he went on. "I won't force him toward anything. He's got to settle that for himself. But I know this much—any-

thing he undertakes, he'll make a success of. I don't care what it is, he'll carry it out to the last inch. He's a wonder, Hal is. Ah, but he's a fellow to warm the heart! There's nothing of the sissy in *his* make-up. He's none of your mollycoddles, in spite of all the high marks and prizes and things he's taken. No, no, nothing at all of the mollycoddle."

The captain's face lighted up with pride and joy, with longing and a profound eagerness.

"There isn't anything that boy can't do, doctor," he continued. "Football, baseball, and all that; and he's on the 'varsity crew; and he's gone in for some of the hardest studies, too, and beaten men that don't do anything but get round-shouldered over books. He's taken work outside the regular course—strange, Eastern languages, doctor. I hear there never *was* a boy like Hal. You don't wonder I've been sitting here all afternoon with my old spy-glass, do you, waiting and watching for Hal?"

"Indeed I don't," Filhiol answered, a note of envy in his feeble voice. "You've had your sorrows and your troubles, just as we all have, but you've got something still to live for, and that's more than I can say. You've got everything, everything! It never worked out on you, after all, the curse that fell on you—the terrible, black curse that was put on you—fifty years ago. It was all nonsense, of course, and I knew it wouldn't. It couldn't. All that stuff is pure superstition and humbug—"

"Of course it is! Why, you don't believe such rubbish?"

"Certainly not! But still—well, I've often thought of it, and wondered—but now I see—"

"I've lived that all down and done away with it, half a lifetime ago," the captain said. His robust and virile speech contrasted strongly with the timid, stammering manner of the doctor. "Two or three times, when death came into my home and took away those I loved, I thought maybe the curse of old Dengan Jouga was really striking me, but it wasn't. For that curse said *everything* I loved would be taken away, and there was always something left to live for; and even after I'd been as hard hit as a man ever was, almost, after a while I could get my bearings again and make sail and keep along on my course. Because, you see, I always had Hal to think about and love and pin my hopes to. I've got him now. He's all I've got—but, God! how wonderfully much he is!"

"Yes, yes, you're quite right," the doctor answered. "Even though I've never had any of my own, I understand. He must be a splendid chap, all round. What does he look like?"

"I'm going to answer you in a peculiar way," said Briggs. "Maybe it would sound kind of strange to one who didn't understand, but our acquaintance runs back far enough so I can say it. That boy, sir, that grandson of mine, he's the living spit and image of what I was, fifty-five or sixty years ago!"

"Eh, what? What's that you say?"

"It's wonderful, I tell you, to see the resemblance. His father—my son—didn't show it at all. He was like his mother. A fine, handsome man he was, doctor, and a good man, too. Everybody liked him; he never did a bad thing in his life, or a mean or crooked thing. He sailed a straight course, and went under his own canvas, all the way; and I loved him for what he was, an honest, upright man. But he wasn't brilliant. He never set the world on fire, no, nor any corner of it. He was just a plain, good, average man.

"But, Hal! Hal—ah, now there *is* something for you! He's got all the physique I ever had, at my best, and he's got a hundred per cent more brains than ever I had. It's as if I could see myself, my youth and strength, rise up out of the grave of the past, all shining and splendid, doctor, and live again and fill my heart with joy and make my soul sing with the morning stars, for gladness, as it says in the Bible or somewhere, sir!"

The old captain, quite breathless with his unaccustomed eloquence, paused, stroked his beard, and then, pulling out a huge handkerchief, wiped his forehead where the sweat had started. He winked eyes wet with sudden moisture. Filhiol peered at him with a strange, brooding expression.

"You say he's just like you, captain?"

asked he. "He's just the way you used to be, in the old days?"

"Why—no, not in all ways. God forbid! But in size and strength he's the equal of me at my best, or even goes ahead of that. And as I've told you before, he's got more brains than ever I had."

"How's the boy's temper?"

"Temper?"

"Ever have any violent spells?" The doctor seemed to have fallen back into his professional air, as if diagnosing a case. Briggs looked at him with an expression none too well pleased.

"Why—no. Not as I know of," he answered, though not with any emphatic denial. "Of course all boys get mad at times. They sometimes slip their anchors, and run foul of whatever's in the way. That's natural for young blood. I wouldn't give a brass farthing for a boy that had no guts, would you?"

"No, no. Of course not. It's natural for—"

"*Ship ahoy!*" the captain interrupted, with a joyful hail. His keen old eye had just caught sight of something, far in the offing, which had brought the glass to his eye in a second. "There she is, doctor! There's the Sylvia Fletcher, sure as guns!"

"He's coming, then?"

"Coming! He's almost here! See, right to south'ard of the light? That's her, doctor—that's the Sylvia, and my boy's aboard her. She'll be at Hadlock's Wharf in half an hour or less. He's almost home. Hal's almost home again!"

The captain stood up, laid his telescope on the table, and faced the doctor, radiant. Joy, pride, and anticipation beamed from his weather-beaten old face; his eyes sparkled, blue, with pure happiness. The contrast between his vigor and his glad exuberance, and the chill feebleness of the old physician, still further widened the gap between them. Briggs said:

"Well, I'm going down to meet him. Can you go, too? Do you want to go, doctor?"

"How far is it?"

"Mile, or a little better. I'll make it, easily, before the Sylvia gets in. I'll be there on the wharf, all right, to welcome Hal."

"I—I think I'll stay here, captain," the other answered. "I'm lame, you know. I couldn't walk that far."

"How about the horse? Ezra 'll hitch up for you."

"No, no. It tires me to ride. I'm not used to so much excitement and activity. This has been a hard day, a mighty hard day for me, captain. If it's all the same to you, I'll just sit here and wait. Give me a book or a magazine, or something, and I'll wait for you both."

"All right, doctor, suit yourself," the captain assented. The relief in his voice was not to be concealed. Despite his best and most friendly hospitality, something in the doctor's attitude and speech had laid a chill upon his heart. The prospect of getting away from the old man an hour or so and of meeting Hal quite alone, allured him. "I'll give you books enough for a week, or magazines, or anything you like. And here in this drawer you'll find a box of the best Havanas."

"No, no, I've given up smoking, long ago," the doctor smiled, thinly. "My heart wouldn't stand it. But, thank you, just the same."

"That lets me out, then," the captain said, taking his gold-braided cap from the top of the rocking-chair. "I really forgot all about offering you a cigar. I was so surprised to see you. But it's all right now, seeing as you don't smoke."

The figure of Ezra loomed in the doorway, and, followed by the dog, came out upon the porch.

"Sighted him, cap'n?" asked the old man joyfully. "I heered you hailin'—knowed he'd hove in sight. That's him, sure?"

"There's the Sylvia Fletcher," Briggs made answer. "You'll see Hal before sundown."

"Gosh, ain't that great, though?" grinned Ezra, his leathery face breaking into a thousand wrinkles. "If I'd of went an' made that there cake, an' fixed that lamb, an' he hadn't of made port—"

"Well, it's all right, Ezra. He's as good as here," said Briggs. "Now I'm off. Come, Ruddy," he summoned the Airedale. "Master's coming. Want to go and meet him with me?"

As the dog got up, yawned and stretched, the doctor painfully rose from his chair. Cane in hand, he limped along the porch.

"It's just a trifle chilly out here, captain," said he, shivering slightly. "May I go inside?"

"Don't ask, doctor. Snug Haven's yours, all yours, as long as you want it. Make yourself at home! Books, papers, everything in the library—my cabin, I call it. And if you want, Ezra 'll start a fire for you in the grate, and get you tea or coffee--"

"No, no, thank you. My nerves won't stand them. But a little warm milk and a fire will do me a world of good."

"Ezra 'll mix you an egg-nogg that will make you feel like a fighting-cock. Remember, now, Snug Haven's just the same as home to you. Now I must be going. I mustn't be late at the wharf. Hal mustn't come ashore and not find me waiting. Come, Ruddy! Good-by, doctor—Ezra 'll look out for you. Good-by, Ezra; so long!"

"Tell Master Hal about the plum-cake an' the lamb!" called the faithful one, as Captain Briggs, a brave and sturdy figure in his brass-buttoned coat of blue and his gold-laced cap, tramped down the sandy walk. "Don't fergit to tell him I got it special!"

At the gate Briggs turned, waved a cheery hand and passed through. The doctor, peering after him with strange, sad eyes, shook a boding head. He stood there leaning on his stick, till Briggs had skirted the box-hedge and disappeared around the turn by the smithy. Then, shivering again—despite the brooding warmth of the June afternoon - he turned and followed Ezra into the house.

"After fifty years," he murmured, as he went. "I wonder if it could be—after fifty years?"

CHAPTER XVII.

VISIONS OF THE PAST.

COMFORTABLY installed in a huge easy-chair beside the freshly built fire in the "cabin" of Snug Haven—a fire cheery to look upon, although it still smoked a bit—and with one of Ezra Trefethen's most artful egg-noggs within easy reach, the aged doctor leaned back, sighed deeply, and once more shook his head.

"Maybe the captain's right," said he to himself. "Maybe, in spite of what he can't help admitting, the boy's all right. I hope he is. It's possible; but I don't know, I don't know."

Blinking, his eyes wandered about the room, which opened off from an old-fashioned hallway lighted by glass panels at the sides of the front door, and by a leaded fanlight over the lintel; a hallway with a curved stairway that would have delighted the heart of any antiquarian. The cabin itself gave an impression of exceeding strangeness. Upon its construction and its furnishing the captain had obviously lavished a great deal of thought and time and money. At first glance, save that the fireplace was surely an incongruous note, one would have thought one's self aboard ship, so closely had the nautical idea been carried out in nearly every detail.

To begin with, the windows at the side, which opened out upon the orchard, were unlike any ever seen on land. Though a bit larger than the ordinary port-holes of a vessel, they were circular and rimmed with shining brass, and had thick panes inward-swinging in round, brass frames. A polished fir column, set a trifle on a slant, rose from floor to ceiling, which was supported on white beams, the form and curve of which exactly imitated marine architecture. This column measured no less than a foot and a half in diameter, and gave precisely the impression of a ship's mast. On it was hung a chronometer, boxed in a handsome case of polished mahogany, itself the work of the captain's own hand.

All the lamps were hung in gimbals, as if the good captain expected Snug Haven at any moment to set sail and go rolling and pitching away over storm-tossed seas. The green-covered table, of most ample dimensions, bore a miscellany of nautical almanacs, conspicuous among which was the latest edition of Whittaker's; it accommodated, also, a variety of charts, maps, and meteorological reports. The captain's own chair at that table was a true swing-

ing-chair, securely screwed to the floor; and this floor, you understand, was uncarpeted, so that the holystone planking shone in all the glory of its immaculate cleanliness as the declining sun through the portholes painted long, reddish stripes across it. Numbers of brass instruments lay on the table, and from them the sun flecked little high-lights against the clean, white paint of the cabin and against the cobble-stones of the fireplace which surely ought never to have been in such a room.

At the left of the table stood a binnacle, with compass and all; at the right, a handsome globe, four feet through, its surface all marked and scored with numerous names, dates, and memoranda, carefully written in red ink. The captain's log-book, open on the table, also showed writing in red. No ordinary diary sufficed for Alpheus Briggs; no, he would have a regulation ship's log to keep the record of his daily life, or he would have no record at all.

In a rack at one side of the cabin rested two bright telescopes, with an empty place for the glass now out on the piazza. Beneath this rack a sextant hung, and at one side the daily government weather report was affixed by brass thumb-tacks to a white-painted board.

A sofa-locker, quite like a ship's berth, still showed the impress of the captain's body, where he had taken his after-dinner nap. One almost thought to hear the chanting of sea-winds in cordage, aloft, and the creak and give of seasoned timbers rolling over hills of brine. A curious, a wonderful room, indeed! And as Dr. Filhiol studied it, his face expressed not only amazement but also a kind of yearning eagerness; for he, too, had sailed far seas, and to his fading life this connotation of the other, braver, stronger days brought back memories and longings for things that once had been, that now could never be again.

Yet, analyzing everything, he put away these thoughts. Many sad years of sickness, poverty, and loneliness had broken the spirit in him and turned his thoughts more to see the worse aspects of everything than the better. He shook his head again dubiously, and his thin lips formed the words:

"This is very, very strange. This is some form of mental aberration, surely. If it's not a kind of madness, I'm sure it shows at least great unbalance. No man wholly sane would build and furnish any such grotesque place. It's worse, worse than I thought."

Contemplatively he sipped the egg-nogg and continued his observations, while from the kitchen—no, the galley—sounded a chink and clink of coppers, mingled with the piping song of old Ezra, interminably discoursing on the life and adventures of the unfortunate Reuben Ranzo, whose chantey is beknown to all seafaring men. The doctor's eyes, wandering to the wall nearest him, now perceived a glass-fronted cabinet, filled with a most extraordinary *omnium gatherum* of curios, even to name the chief of which would be to introduce a catalogue into this narrative.

Corals of divers hues, sponges, coir, nuts, pebbles and bits of ore, dried fruits, strange puffy and spiny fishes, specimens in alcohol, and a thousand and one oddments picked up all over the seven seas jostled each other on the shelves without the least attempt at any logical arrangement.

Nor was this all to excite the doctor's wonder. For hard by the cabinet he now perceived the door of a safe, set into the wall, its combination flush with the white boards.

"The captain can't be so foolish as to keep his money in his house," thought Filhiol. "Not when there are banks that offer absolute security. But then, with a man like Captain Briggs, anything seems possible."

He drank a little more of Ezra's excellent concoction, and turned his attention to the one remaining side of the cabin, that which was almost filled by the huge-throated fireplace and by the cobbled chimney rising from it. And here he saw still another proof of the old captain's evident penchant for collecting souvenirs.

"More junk!" said Dr. Filhiol unsympathetically.

Against the cobble-stones, suspended from hooks screwed into the cement, hung a regular arsenal of weapons: yataghans,

simitars, sabers, and muskets—two of them rare Arabian specimens with long barrels and silver-chased stocks. Pistols there were by the dozen, some of antique patterns bespeaking capture or purchase from half-civilized peoples. Daggers and stilettos had been worked into a kind of rough pattern. A bow and arrows, a "Penang lawyer," or heavy club, from the Malay Peninsula, and a couple of boomerangs were interspersed between some knobkerries from Australia, and a few shovel-headed spears and African pigmies' blowguns. All the weapons showed signs of wear or rust. All, the doctor judged, had seen actual service. In every probability, all had taken human life.

Odd, was it not, that the captain, now so mild a man of peace, should have maintained so grim a reliquary? But, perhaps (the doctor thought), Briggs had accumulated and preserved it as a kind of strange, contrasting reminder of his other and more evil days, just as more than one reformed drunkard has been known to keep the one-time favorite little brown jug that formerly was his undoing.

Filhiol, however, very deeply disapproved of this collection, just as he was coming to disapprove of almost everything at Snug Haven. Old age and infirmity had by no means rendered his disposition more suave. Viewing all these objects of war and death, he muttered words of condemnation. He drank off a little more of the egg-nogg, and once again fell to studying the collection. And suddenly his attention concentrated, fixing itself with particular intentness on a certain blade that until then had escaped his scrutiny.

This blade, a Malay kris with a beautifully carved lotus-bud on the handle, seemed to occupy, as it were, a sort of central position, a post of honor, toward which the other knives converged. The doctor adjusted his spectacles and studied it for a long minute, as if trying to focus his memory, to bring back some recollections not quite clear—for what *is* clear after half a century of life? Then he got up lamely, still holding to the arm of the chair, and squinted up at the kris, his bent neck looking very much like that of a turtle when it peers curiously upward from its shell.

"That's a kris," said he slowly. "A Malay kris. It can't be — good Lord, it couldn't be — *the* kris, could it?"

He reached for the mantelpiece, for without his cane or some other support he could not take even a step, and remained there a little while, observing the weapon. The sunlight, ever growing redder and more red as the sun sank over Croft Hill and the ancient cemetery, flicked lights from the brass instruments on the table, and for a moment seemed to crimson the vicious, wavy blade of steel. The doctor raised a lean hand, about to touch the kris, then drew back.

"Better not," said he. "That's the one, all right enough. There's the groove, the poison groove. There couldn't be two exactly alike. I remember that groove especially. And curare lasts for years; it's just as fatal now, if there's any left that hasn't been scraped off, as when it was first put on. That kris is mighty good to let alone!"

A dark, rusty stain on the blade set him shuddering. Blood, was it — blood, from the long ago? Who could say? The sight of the kris evoked powerful memories. As in a vision, the battle of Motomolo Strait rose up before him. The smoke from the wood-fire in the grate seemed, all at once, that of the burning proa, drifting over the opalescent waters of that distant sea. The illusion was extraordinary. Dr. Filhiol closed his eyes, held tightly to the edge of the mantel, and with dilated nostrils sniffed the smoke. He remained there, transfixed with strange and poignant emotions, trembling, afraid.

It seemed to him as if the dark, shadowy hand of some malignant *jinnee* had reached out of the violent and bleeding past, out into the peaceful quiet of his old age, and had laid hold on him—a hand that seized and shook his heart with an envenomed, bony clutch.

"God!" he murmured. "What a time that was—what a ghastly, terrible time!"

He tried to shake off the oppression of this obsessing vision, opened his eyes, and sank down into the easy-chair. Unnerved,

shaking, he inadvertently struck the glass still holding some of the egg-nogg, and knocked it to the floor.

The crash of the breaking glass startled him as if it had been the crack of a rifle. Quivering, he stared down at the liquor, spreading thickly on the holystoned floor. Upon it the red sunlight gleamed; and in a flash he seemed to behold once more the deck of the old Silver Fleece, smeared and spotted with blood.

Back he shrank, with extended hands, a strange and half-superstitious fear at his heart. Something nameless, cold, and terrible seemed fingering at the latchets of his soul. It was all irrational enough, foolish enough; but still it caught him in its grip, that perfectly unreasoning, heart-clutching fear.

Weakly he sank down farther into the easy-chair, and pressed a shaking hand over his eyes. With bloodless lips he quavered:

"After fifty years, my God! Yes, after fifty years!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LOOMING SHADOW.

OLD Captain Briggs, meanwhile, entirely unconscious of the fears and perturbations of his guest, and absorbed in the happiest and most cheerful speculations, was putting his best foot forward on the road to Hadlock's Wharf. A vigorous foot it was, indeed, and right speedily it carried him. With pipe in full eruption, leaving a trail of blue smoke on the late afternoon air, and with boots creaking on the hard, white road, the captain strode along; while Ruddy, the Airedale, trotted ahead as if he, too, understood that Master Hal was coming home.

Past the smithy and the church he made his way, and out of the village; and so struck into the road to Endicutt itself, where lay the wharves. "The mingled scents of field and ocean" perfumed the air, borne on a breeze that blent the odors of sea and weedy foreshore and salt marsh with those of garden and orchard, into a kind of airy nectar that seemed to infuse fresh life into the old captain's blood. His blue eyes sparkled almost as brightly as the harbor itself, where gaily painted lobster-trap buoys heaved on the swells, where dories labored to and fro, and where the wheeling gulls spiraled or hovered over their ever-changing hunting-ground of surf and wave.

Briggs seemed to love the sea, that afternoon, almost as he had never loved it—the wonderful mystery of tireless, revivifying, all-engendering sea. Joy filled him that Hal, the one remaining member of his family, who alone bore his name, and in whose life lived all the hopes of his race, should have inherited this understanding and this love of the all-mother, ocean. How bitter had it been for the captain if the boy had shrunk from this tremendous power, majesty, and beauty, and—choosing only the tame security of the land—had feared and shunned the element that, all the captain's life, had been so very near to him, so very deeply loved!

Deeply the captain breathed, as he strode onward, and felt that life was being very good to him. For the most part, rough hillocks and tangled clumps of verdure, of pine and hemlock and gleaming birches, hid the bay from him; but now and again these gave way to sandy stretches along the shore, leaving the harbor broad-spread and sparkling to his gaze. And as the old man passed each such place, his eyes sought out, among the other sails, the incoming canvas of the Sylvia Fletcher, that seemed to him shining more whitely, uprearing itself with more stately power, than that of any other craft.

Now and then he raised his hand and waved it, hailing the boy as if Hal could hear him across all that watery distance. His hearty old voice, ringing out from the shore, lost itself in the ebbing, flowing murmur of the surf that creamed up along the pebbles, and dragged them down with a long, confused and rattling slither on the shingly beach. Everything seemed glad to Captain Briggs—fishing-boats and dories dragged up on the sands; blocks, ropes, and drying sails; lobster-pots and fish-cars; buoys, rusty anchors half-buried—everything seemed to wear a festive air. For was

not Hal, idol of his old heart, now homeward bound, now almost here? Did not even the far, faint cries of the wheeling gulls seem to be echoing consonantly with the wind-voices in the tree-tops: "Hal is coming! Hal is coming home again!"

So overflowing were the old man's spirits that with good cheer even beyond his usual hearty greeting he passed the time of day and gave the glad news to all and sundry along the road, to those he met on foot or driving, and to those who stopped their labors and looked up from their rest in yards and houses along the way, to give him a good-evening.

"It *is* a good evening for me, neighbor," he would say, with a fine smile and a wave of the strong hand, his white beard snowy in the sun now low across the western hills. "A fine, wonderful evening! Hal's coming home to-night; he's on the Sylvia Fletcher, just making in past the Rips, there—see, you can sight her, yourself."

And then he would pass on, exultant, glad, triumphant. And as he went, hammers would cease their calking, brushes their painting; and the fishers who were mending their brown and russet nets spread over hedge or fence would wish him joy with words of friendship and good will.

Here, there, a child would take his hand and walk with him a little way, till the captain's stout pace tired the short, childish legs, or till some good mother from a cottage door would call the little one back for supper. Just so, fifty years ago, yellow-skinned Malay mothers had called their children within doors, at Batu Kawan, lest *Mambang Kuning*, the demon who dwelt in the sunset, should do them harm. And just so the sunset itself, that wicked night at the Malay *kampong*, had glowered redly.

A mist was now rising from the harbor and the marshland, like an exhaltation of pale ghosts, and floating vaguely over the land, quite as the smoke had floated above Batu Kawan. The slowly fading opalescence of the sky, reddening to westward over the hills, bore great resemblance to those hues that in the long ago had painted the sky above the jagged mountain-chain in that far land. But of all this the captain was taking no thought.

No, nothing could enter his mind save the glad present and the impending moment when he would see his Hal again, should feel the boy's hand in his, put an arm about his shoulder and, quite unashamed, give him a kiss, patriarchal in its fine simplicity and love as any in the ancient days of the Old Testament.

"It *is* a good evening!" he repeated. "A wonderful evening, friends. Why, Hal's been gone nearly six months. Gone since last Christmas. And now he's coming back to me, again!"

So he passed on, with an eagerness and strength surprising in a man of his ripe years. One thing he did not note: this—that though all the folk along his way gave him Godspeed, no one inquired about Hal. One thing he did not see—that after he had passed, more than one shook a dubious head or murmured words of commiseration. Some few of the fisherfolk, leaning over their fences to watch after him, talked a little together in low tones, as if they feared the breeze might bear their words to the old man and wound his heart.

Of all this, however, the captain remained entirely unaware. On and on he kept, into the straggling outskirts of Endicutt. Now he could see the harbor only at rare intervals; but in the occasional glimpses he caught of it, he saw the Sylvia Fletcher's tops'ls crumpling down and perceived that she was headed in directly for the wharf. He hurried on, at a better pace. Above all things he must not be late. Hal must not come, and find no grandfather waiting for him, there. That, to the captain's mind, would have been unthinkable treason on his own part.

At a gait that would have tried the legs of many a younger man, the captain strode along the cobblestoned main street of Endicutt, past the ship-chandlers' stores, the sail-lofts, fish markets and quaint old shops, and so presently turned to the right, into Hadlock's Wharf. Here the going was bad, because of crates and barrels of iced fish and lobsters, and teams and trucks, and a general miscellany of obstructions. For a moment the captain was entirely blocked by a dray across the wharf, backing into a fish-shed. The driver, at the horse's head,

greeted him with a smile and a wave of the hand.

"Hello, cap!" cried he. "Gee, but you're lookin' fine. What's up?"

"It's a great day for me," Briggs answered. "A rare fine day."

"What's doin'?"

"Hal, my boy, is coming home. He's on the Sylvia Fletcher, just coming in from Boston. Can't you let me past, some way?"

"Why, sure! Back *up!*" the driver commanded, savagely thrusting at the bit. "Right this way, cap'n. You can make it, now, I reckon."

Then, as Briggs squeezed by, he stood looking after the old, blue-clad figure. He turned a lump in his cheek, and spat.

"Gosh, ain't it a shame?" he murmured. "Ain't it rotten, gorrammed shame?"

By the time Captain Briggs, followed by the faithful Ruddy, reached the stringpiece at the end of the wharf, whence now he could command a full view of the prospect, the schooner was already close. The captain, breathing a little fast—for he had been keeping a great pace and emotions were busy with his heart—leaned against a tin-topped mooring-pile, and with eager eyes scrutinized the on-coming vessel. All along the stringpiece, or sitting on boxes and casks, the usual contingent of sailors, longshoremen, fishers, and boys had already gathered. To none of them the captain addressed a word. All his mind and heart and soul were now fast riveted to the indrawing schooner, from whose deck plainly drifted in words of command, and down from whose sticks the canvas was fast collapsing.

With skilful handling and hardly a rag aloft, she eased alongside. Whishing through the air, ropes came sprangling to the wharf. These, dragged in by volunteer hands, brought hawsers. And with a straining of hemp, the Sylvia hauled to a dead stop, groaning and chafing against the splintered timbers.

Jests, greetings, laughter volleyed back and forth from craft to wharf. The captain, alone, kept silent. His eager eyes were searching the deck: searching, and finding out.

"Hello, cap'n! Hey, there, Cap'n Briggs!" voices shouted at him. The mate waved a hand at him, and so did two or three others; but there seemed an unusual restraint in their greetings. Usually the presence of the captain at the incoming of a schooner loosened tongues and set the sailormen glad with enthusiasm. But now—surely, a difference was making itself felt.

Puzzled and with a certain tightening round the heart, the old captain remained there, not knowing what to do. He had expected to see Hal on deck, waving a cap at him, shouting to him, giving back his welcome. But Hal remained invisible. Where might he be? What could have happened? The captain's eyes scrutinized the deck, in vain. Neither fore nor aft was Hal anywhere to be seen.

Briggs hesitated a moment longer, then stepped on the low rail of the schooner and went aboard. With a firm step he walked aft, to the man at the wheel. Ruddy followed close at heel.

"Hello, cap'n," greeted the steersman. "Nice day, ain't it?" His voice betrayed uneasiness, embarrassment.

"Is my boy, Hal, aboard o' you?" demanded Briggs. "Did he come up from Boston, aboard o' you?"

"Yup."

"Well, where is he?"

"Below."

"Getting his dunnage? Is that it?"

"Guess so." The steersman sucked at his cob pipe, obviously very ill at ease. Briggs stared at him a moment, then turned toward the companion.

Just at this moment a man's head and shoulders appeared up the companionway. Out on deck clambered the man—a young man, black-haired and blue-eyed, with mighty shoulders and a splendidly corded neck visible in the low roll of his opened shirt. His sleeves, rolled up, showed arms and fists of a Hercules.

"*Hal!*" cried the captain, with a world of gladness in his voice. A peculiar silence fell, all about: every one stopped talking, ceased from all activities; all eyes centered on Hal and the old captain.

"Hal! My boy!" exclaimed Briggs once more, but in an altered tone. He took a step or two forward. His hand, that had gone out to Hal, dropped at his side again.

At his grandson he peered, with troubled and wondering eyes. Under the weather-beaten tan of his face, a certain quick pallor became visible.

"Why, Hal," he stammered, "what—what's happened? What's the meaning of—of all this?"

Hal stared at him with an expression the old man had never seen upon his face. The boy's eyes were reddened, bloodshot, savage with unreasoning passion. The right eye showed a bruise, that had already began to discolor. The jaw had gone forward, had become prognathous like an ape's, menacing, with a glint of strong, white teeth. The crisp black hair, rumpled and awry, the black growth of beard—only a couple of days old, yet strong on that square-jawed face—and something in the full-throated poise of the head, brought back to the old captain, in a flash, vivid and horrible memories of the long-dead past.

Up from that hatchway he saw himself arising, once again, not as a wraith or specter of the far, evil days, but tangibly and in the living flesh. In the swing of Hal's huge fists, the squaring of his shoulders, his brute expression of blood-lust and battle-lust, old Captain Briggs beheld, line for line, his other and barbaric self of fifty years ago.

"Good God, Hal! What does this mean?" he gulped, once more, while along the wharf and on deck a staring silence fell. But his question was lost in a hoarse shout from the cabin, below:

"Here, you young devil! Come below, an' apologize fer that!"

"Apologize?" Hal roared down the companion. "To a lantern-jawed P. I. like you? Like hell I will!"

Then he stood back, crossed both arms, lifted his head and laughed scornfully.

From below sounded a wordless roar. Up the ladder scrambled, simian in agility, a tall and wiry man of middle age. Briggs saw in a daze that this man was white with passion. Captain Fergus McLaughlin, of Prince Edward's Island, had come on deck.

"You—" McLaughlin hurled at him, unprintably, while the old man stood there aghast, quivering, paralyzed. "If you was a member o' my crew, damn y'r lip—"

"Yes, but I'm not, you see," sneered Hal, fists still on hips. "I'm a passenger aboard your rotten old tub, which is almost as bad as your grammar and your reputation." Contemptuously he eyed the Prince Edward's islander from rough woolen cap to sea-boots, and back again, every look a blistering insult. His huge chest, rising, falling, betrayed the cumulating fires within. The hush among the onlookers grew absolute, ominous. "There's not money enough in circulation to hire me to sign articles with a low-browed, sockless, bean-eating herring-choker like—"

McLaughlin's leap cut short the sentence. With a raw howl, the P. I. flung himself at Hal. Deft and strong with his stony-hard fists was McLaughlin, and the fighting heart in him was that of a lion. A hundred men had he fell to his decks, ere now, and not one had ever risen quite whole, or unassisted. In the extremity of his rage he laughed as he sprang.

Lithely, easily, with the joy and love of battle blazing in his reddened eyes, Hal ducked the rush. Up flashed his right fist, a sledge of muscle, bone, sinew. The left swung free.

Crack!

The impact of Hal's smash thudded sickeningly, with a suggestion of crushed flesh and shattered bone.

Sprawling headlong, hands clutching air, McLaughlin fell. And, as he plunged with a crash to the planking, Hal's laugh snarled through the tense air. From him he flung old Briggs, now in vain striving to clutch and hold his arm.

"Got enough apology, you slab-sided herring-choker?" he roared, exultant and ablaze. "Enough, or want some more? Apologize? You bet—with these! Come on, you or any of your crew, or all together, you greasy fishbacks! *I'll* apologize you!"

Snarling into a laugh horrible to hear he stood there, teeth set, neck swollen and eyes engorged with blood, his terrible fists aswing and eager with the lust of war, about to begin afresh.

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.

Out of Egypt

by Charles B. Stilson

"NIGHT after night he's at it, 'way up there, all alone by hissel'. What it is he finds to do, fair boggles me."

To himself and under his breath, Hank Binnie thus soliloquized as he stepped from the elevator to the fifth floor of the Millchester Museum of Arts and Antiquities, whereof he was the night watchman. Hank's speculation was called forth by the light which shone through the marbled glass of the transom over the door to the curator's office at the far end of the corridor. The "he" to whom Hank referred was Standise, the curator.

"Old Kiley was never like yon," Binnie continued querulously. "Come half past four, and he was content to close shop and go home to his rest like a decent body. But this one—I believe *he* gets no sleep whatever."

A glance at his watch told Hank that the hour was eleven-eighteen. He jingled his keys reflectively. "Guess I'll be rousting him out," he muttered. "He'd oughta thank me for it."

Except for the flare from an incandescent in the elevator and the faint radiance shed through the transom-glass, the long corridor was unlighted. Binnie, a careful soul, was not wont to waste any of the museum's "juice," so he shuffled along in the dark toward the curator's door.

"Cripes a-mercy! What's that?"

An agonized, wordless shriek, the cry wrung from the throat of a man in the grip of supreme horror, burst from the curator's office and thrilled the corridor. Before it had ceased to echo came another cry entirely unlike the first — a short, grating screech, almost animal in its ferocity. There was the sound of a heavy fall, then silence.

"*My Gawd!*" whispered Binnie out of a throat which was too dry for aught but whispers. At that first dreadful wail, the watchman had let fall his keys. He now fell against the side of the corridor, his hands spread against the wall at each side of him, his nails sinking into the calcimined plaster, his knees sagging. Every separate hair on his gray old head felt like a wire. For perhaps the space of a minute he clung there, his ears attuned to terror, his eyes fixed unwaveringly on that closed door.

Nothing further happened.

Though his legs yearned mightily for the shelter of the elevator and its swift plunge to the safety of the street level, his head told Binnie that he should go to that door and make inquiry. Inch by inch along the wall, for he was not a reckless man, Binnie went, coercing his unwilling hobnails to each step. He stood at the door. Still nothing came out of the silence of the room. Thrusting a thumb in his mouth to quiet his clacking teeth, the watchman laid a hand on the doorknob. Gently, very gently, he turned it. But the door was locked.

Not at all sorry for that, Hank went down on his knees and applied an eye to

the keyhole. He could see nothing. The hand that had turned the key had left it sticking in the wards.

Some credit is due to old Hank Binnie's Scotch persistence for what he did next. Scared stiff though he was, and with his white chin-whiskers bristling straight out in front, he lifted up his quavering voice and called:

"Mr. Standise!"

No answer came, and the watchman cried out again:

"Mr. Standise! What's wrang wi' ye, mon? Speak up i' God's name!"

There was no reply.

Emboldened by the noise of his own voice, Binnie struck sharply on the door-panels with his fists. He even kicked them. Neither knuckles nor toes elicited any response. His efforts echoed in the corridor. The soft light filtered through the marbled glass. The door was inscrutable.

Laying an ear to the keyhole, the watchman listened intently. At first he heard nothing but the ticking of the clock on the office wall. But what was that? Something surely moved within the room! Not a footfall, but a soft slithering, whispering sound, as of draperies trailed across the wooden floor. A board creaked. Something fell with a clink like metal. Silence again. What was with Standise in that room?

More frightened, if that were possible, than he had been by the shrieks, old Binnie drew back from the door. He dared not turn from it. Carefully, never for an instant relaxing his gaze on the panels, he felt his way backward along the wall until he reached the angle opposite the entrance to the elevator. A small table stood in the corner. On it was an extension telephone. The watchman pressed the switch-button in the wall and flooded the corridor with light. That was much better. For the first time, he thought of the revolver which he carried in a coat pocket, and he took it out and placed it on the table.

"Gi' me the poleece," he said hoarsely to the sleepy "central" who answered his twiddling of the telephone hook.

Connections established with the drawling voice of the night lieutenant at headquarters, Binnie felt vastly relieved.

"You'll be coming as fast as you can," he queried anxiously as he ended his report of his predicament. "And you'll climb the fire-ladder to the fifth floor, and smash a window," he added. "There's a something unco' horrid in yon room. I'll be watching the door until you come."

When Binnie's message came over the wire to headquarters, Detective Captain Scott Makris was just leaving the building. To him the lieutenant made report.

"The Museum—fifth floor—fire escape," repeated Makris. "I'll go. Sounds out of the ordinary. Come on, Ernesti," to the sergeant whom he had been talking with. "And you, Doran, and Schaad," as he picked up with his eyes the two plain-clothes men lounging at the windows. "My car's outside."

Ten minutes later, Hank Binnie, crouched in the doorway of his elevator, one hand on its cable and the other clutching the butt of his revolver, heard the crash of breaking glass at the end of one of the transverse corridors, followed by the steady tread of square-toed shoes. And he heaved a great sigh of relief as he stepped out to meet them.

There had been no further sound or sign from the curator's office.

On a table placed against the door Ernesti stood and tried the transom. When it failed to yield to his efforts, he smashed the glass with the point of his elbow, and his curly black head followed his pistol arm through the aperture.

"Man on the floor here, and much blood," he reported. "Nothing else in sight; but there's another room beyond."

Makris turned to the watchman.

"What's in the farther room?" he asked.

"Naught but speeciments—and—and"—Binnie shivered—"whatever was wi' him the nicht. *It* canna be gone, unless it ha' droppit five stories."

"Careful, Ernesti! Keep an eye peeled," warned Makris.

The sergeant had reached the joint in the transom-bar, and under his hand the frame swung inward. Ernesti wriggled through the opening and swung lightly to his feet. The lock clicked, and the door immediately swung open.

Revolvers drawn, Makris and the plainclothes men pushed into the room. The watchman followed.

It was a small office, a scant fourteen by fourteen feet, plainly furnished and not overcrowded—the workshop of a methodical and competent man, by its look. Artistic it was too, befitting the precinct of the steward of an institution that was of more than local fame. But none of the antiques and objects of virtu which adorned the walls, interesting as some of them were, held more than the passing attention of the five men who had entered the room. For them the center of the picture was a heavy, flat-topped mahogany desk which stood a little way out from the wall opposite the door.

At the left of the desk as they faced it, a man lay on the floor, his feet toward the doorway, his head almost touching the wainscot under the northernmost of the two windows between which the desk stood. It was Standise, the curator.

He lay with his face upturned to the ceiling, his limbs distorted as though he had been flung there by violence. His left arm was doubled under his body; his right extended back and above his head, the knuckles of the hand resting on the edge of the wainscot. One of his legs was crossed over the other like a grotesque figure 4. He was a short, stocky man of some forty years, with thick, blue-black hair, worn rather longish. His face was smoothly shaven. His cheeks were flabby; and, due to the position in which he had fallen, the folds of his neck and jowls were forced down over his collar, and his mouth was shut. His eyes, too, were closed. He was in his shirt-sleeves. A coat, overcoat, and hat hung on a clothes-tree, which occupied a corner of the room.

As Ernesti had said, there was much blood. Standise's face and his exposed hand were smeared with it. It had stained his white shirt-sleeves, and there was a splotch of red on the flooring at his side. A spurt of crimson had sprinkled a litter of papers on the desk-top.

For a tense instant the five men paused within the threshold, seeing these things. Then Ernesti stepped forward and bent over the still figure. At wrist and temples the sergeant felt with quick, light fingers.

"He's done for," he said.

"God ha' mercy!" quavered Hank Binnie. Tears ran down his cheeks as he stared at the fallen man. The old watchman, despite his grumblings, had liked the curator.

By common instinct, the eyes of the four man-hunters were turned to the doorway, the aperture of which yawned darkly in the white of the northern wall. It would be for other hands to care for the silent tenant of the office where they stood. Their business now lay in that farther room.

There was no door in that doorway. It was a narrow entrance; and they eyed it narrowly, not knowing what might lurk in the darkness beyond it.

At a word from Makris, Schaad planted himself at the threshold to the corridor. The other three went forward.

The way was not wide enough for two men abreast. It fell to Doran to enter it first, and he did so, instinctively hunching his right shoulder and swinging it ahead, and drawing in his neck, turtlewise. Level with his breast, his gun pointed, steady as a finger. The rays of his electric torch cut the blackness before him. One step inside the doorway he paused, his broad back blocking his companions.

"Well; what's there?" asked Makris, prodding Doran in the back to make way.

"Nothin'," replied Doran as he swung his search-light in an arc. "Nothin' but a guy who's been dead for about two thousan' years." Disappointment, disgust, and somewhat of relief were in the plain-clothes man's tones. He turned on a light.

"That's him," he said, pointing with his revolver toward the east window, "a damned *Ee*-gyptian dummy, an' that's *all*. Look at his nibs."

Under the window and resting on a couple of low wooden horses, was a great mummy-case, carved and gilded, and patterned in dull reds and greens. The case was open, and within it, stark and stiff in its many swathings of dust-brown cloth, its long-time occupant lay, waiting that fulness of years wherein the gods had promised the return of a soul from Amenti. The cover

of the case, on which skilled hands in the long ago had fashioned and painted the image of him who was to rest under it, had been removed from the casket and swung around. Its carven feet touched the floor, and its head leaned against the side of the case. It smiled with painted lips and eyes at the discomfited detectives.

Doran had said it. That was all! Besides themselves there was no living thing within the chamber.

In the dimensions the room differed little from the outer office. It had only one window. A few racks of books about the walls, a small portable laboratory and brazier, a deal table, a bag of golf-sticks in a corner, the mummy-case, and the débris of the crate and fiber packing in which it had been shipped—those were all that the room contained.

Nevertheless, the men searched methodically and minutely. They moved the book-cases. They sounded the walls and the flooring and rapped along the baseboards. They opened the doors of the portable laboratory. They found nothing that might have concealed a cat, much less an assassin. Even the bandaged figure in the mummy-case was not sacred to Makris's searching hands. Whoever he had been, the Egyptian had departed a giant's body. Makris, who had visited many museums, judged that he had never seen so large a mummy. But when he placed his hands under the broad shoulders and lifted, the swathed bulk came up easily; for it was light, as mummies are.

"Ugh!" said Doran, watching that proceeding, "I wouldn't touch him for a two-spot. Goin' to give him the third degree, cap?"

"It's a cinch he didn't do it—not with his hands tied like that," he added, with a touch of Irish imagination.

Makris shook his head thoughtfully. He let the mummy sink stiffly back to its resting-place.

The three returned to the outer office. Old Binnie had not followed them. He stood near the desk. As they reentered he stared at them, wide-eyed.

"What hae ye foun'?" he queried in a rasping whisper.

"Nothing," Makris replied. "Ernesti, call the coroner and the morgue."

While the sergeant was gone to the telephone, the detective captain examined the windows in the two rooms. All of them were closed. The stout catches on all were fastened tightly. He opened the one at the left of the desk and looked down the front of the building. The walk far below and the lawns were bright in September moonlight. There was nothing to be learned there. Only a winged thing could have passed down that height unharmed—and the windows had been fastened.

"What next?" Ernesti asked as he returned from his errand. Makris was of few words when he was busy. Just now his thoughts were racing. He did not answer. What next, indeed?

"Looks to me as if this Standise did it himself," observed Doran. "But what with?" He bent over the body of the curator. "There's no knife here."

"Na, na; 'twas no suiceed!" protested Binnie with conviction. "Didna I tell ye," he pursued becoming more and more Scotch as his excitement mounted, "didna I tell ye I heard *twa* in here the nicht. I heard Mr. Standise ca' oot as though hell's-fire that touched him—an' then I heard *it*. That screel was no his voice. His was varra disconcertin'; but the ither—ma fleesh fair creepit to the soun' o' it."

"What do you think that it was?" asked Makris.

It might ha' been a wild beastie; but seein' ye hae foun' no trace o' it, it must ha' been Auld Bogie hissel'—or one o' his sendin'."

At that, Schaad and Doran laughed outright, and Makris smiled. But Ernesti, who was sprung from warmer blood, rolled his eyes and felt ice at his back. He was ready to snap the bracelets on anything that lived, was the sergeant, or to die in the attempt; but the Old Scratch—that was different.

Makris continued on his round of the office. He was approaching the doorway to the inner room again when an exclamation escaped him. He stooped and picked something from the floor under a small pedestal-table that stood at the right of the

doorway. The others gathered around him as he took it to the desk.

It was a dagger of antique pattern, double-edged, and with a twisted cross-guard and hilt of silver. The blade was some six inches long. Both steel and silver were smeared with blood.

"That's the knife!" exclaimed Doran. "He must of threw it." The plain-clothes man was sticking to his theory of suicide.

"Mon, I'm tellin' ye he didna throw it whatever," broke in the night watchman. "'Tis what I heard clink on the floor when I stood wi' ma ear to the keyhole after Mr. Standise lay stretchit where ye foun' him, an' I heard *it* glidin' ower the boards like a serpent. 'Tis the same dirkie Mr. Standise aye kept on his desk to open letters wi'—an' the hand that struck him doon let it fa'."

Doran, stubborn in his own conclusions, shrugged his shoulders. Handling the dagger delicately by its point and hilt-guards, Makris held it under the desk-lamp and examined it for finger-prints. He found none, and presently he laid the weapon on the desk and went back to the spot where he had found it. Where the dagger had lain, under the pedestal-table, he found two or three minute red stains on the floor, flicked there from the blade when it fell. From the floor his searching glance traveled up the frame of the table and beyond.

He whipped out his flash-light and magnifying lens.

A squat and heavy vase of green stone stood on the table. It was an Egyptian funeral urn, from the sarcophagus, may-hap, of some long-forgotten Pharaoh. On the swell of it, where it flared downward from its neck, the quick eyes of the detective had discerned three small oval stains on the luster of the polished stone. Under the glass and the light, they were resolved into the prints of three finger-tips, done in the fluid which had been shed so profusely elsewhere in the room.

Lines and whorls of the prints were well defined, emphatically so, as though one in passing had pressed his fingers heavily on the vase for support. Here was a clue.

Returning to the body of Standise, Makris produced from his pockets a couple of squares of paper glazed over with celluloid, and a pencil of dark grease-paint. With those he took the prints of the index middle, and ring fingers of each of Standise's hands.

With Ernesti to hold the light, the detective captain compared the prints he had made with those on the green stone urn, studying each in turn under his lens.

"You're wrong, Doran," he said. "This was murder. Another was in this room with Standise to-night, and left the proof of it here on this vase for any eye to see. But how did he get out again?—if he is out."

Once more the atmosphere in the room became tense. Again the two offices were ransacked. The second search was as fruitless as the first had been. In the midst of it a bell rang loudly in the lower corridor of the building.

"That will be Coroner Arnold or the morgue men," said Makris, and he sent Schaad down the elevator with Binnie, who was too frightened to go alone. The visitor proved to be Thompson, the morgue attendant.

"When Coroner Arnold heard you was here," he said to Makris, "he said he wouldn't need to come up. He'll view the remains at the morgue. Give me a lift with it, will you?" he asked of Doran. They picked up the limp form of Standise and carried it away.

When Doran returned to the fifth floor with the watchman, the city clocks were chiming midnight. Makris's men looked to him for further instructions. So far as they were concerned the case had fetched up against a blank wall. But the detective captain was far from discouragement. With the trail still warm and the better part of the night ahead of him, he was determined to persist in the untanglement of a puzzle which was entirely dissimilar to any he had ever set his mind to, and which offered a challenge to his professional mettle that he had no intention of refusing.

Sadly racked by the course of events old Binnie was on the verge of collapse, seeing which, Makris directed Schaad to take him home and not to come back. Doran he dismissed also.

"You and I will have a try at it," he

said to Ernesti. The sergeant was nothing loath. At sight of those bloody finger-prints, the fear of the supernatural had passed from him. The devils and ghosts of Ernesti's imagination did not leave finger-prints.

After the others were gone, the sergeant closed the door to the corridor, drew a chair near to it and sat down. Makris seated himself at Standise's desk. He took up again the silver-handled poniard. Under the crimson stains on its slender blade, in quaint old lettering which the wear of time had half effaced, he read the inscription, "*Il Scorpione.*"

"'The Scorpion,' eh?" mused Makris. "So you are Italian, Scorpion. How many folk have you stung in your time, I wonder—and by the look of you, you might have been forged in Cesare Borgia's day. So they made a common, every-day paper-cutter of you, Scorpion? But to-night you turned to your ancient trade. A strange tale you could tell, if you had a tongue, I'll warrant—and a part of it I'd like most mightily to hear."

But *Il Scorpione* was mute, and the detective laid it by.

Many other objects were on the curator's desk. A tiger, exquisitely wrought in bronze, supported one end of a row of leather-bound reference books, and at the other was a miniature in marble of the Laocoon group. By odd chance a jet of blood had so spurted against the side of the tortured priest that it gave a grim semblance of reality to the agony of the serpent's fangs. A long sheet of paper nearly filled with close-written lines, two bulky brown rolls of Egyptian papyrus, and an open fountain pen were evidence of Standise's latest occupation. Besides these, the desk contained a litter of manuscripts and pamphlets. An envelope with a foreign stamp attracted the attention of Makris. It was postmarked Alexandria.

Makris took out the letter. It was from the firm of Raston & Hummel, dealers in Egyptian antiques at Alexandria, and it read:

DEAR MR. STANDISE:

We are shipping to your address a mummy recently taken from a newly discovered tomb beyond Karnak. It is to be sent on approval to the Chicago Museum. Before it goes on to its destination, however, we should like you to confirm our estimate of its value, which lies, we believe, not so much in the mummy and case—both remarkably fine—as in the manuscripts contained in the case.

The mummy is that of Neb-Sis, a nobleman of the fifth dynasty. The manuscripts seem to us to be a new and interesting specimen of the Book of the Dead. We call your special attention to the interpolations in Chapters I and XVII.

We shall be very greatly obliged if you will examine these manuscripts, and communicate to us your opinion. The mummy will reach you on the afternoon of the 6th ult. May we further trespass on your generosity to the extent of asking you to examine the manuscripts at once? Our agent will call upon you on the 7th, and will see to the reshipment of the case.

Y'rs resp., *et cetera.*

"Well, old Neb-Sis came through on schedule time," thought Makris. "And a jolly mess he landed in. I'm afraid that Messrs. Raston & Hummel are doomed to disappointment in the matter of that opinion—unless that is what Standise has written here."

But the curator's labors appeared to have been directed to a translation of the papyrus manuscripts, and he had not completed the task when *Il Scorpione* struck.

Thousands of years ago were written the lines which Standise had translated. Makris's eyes wandered down the page, and he read:

O ye who give bread and beer to beneficent souls in the house of Osiris, do ye give bread and beer at the two periods to the soul of Neb-Sis, who is with you.

"Meant to be well provided for," thought the detective. Another line struck his eye:

I shall not be given up; my adversary shall fall before me; he hath been given up to me, and shall not be delivered from me.

"By George! old fellow, if your hands weren't tied, as Doran said, I might almost be brought to believe that you *did* do it, Neb-Sis," Makris muttered. "But this isn't getting any closer to what I'm after."

Over the edge of the paper sheet he glanced at Ernesti and saw that the sergeant was nodding in his chair. The room was very quiet.

For some time Makris had noticed a peculiar odor, a faint, and not altogether pleasant, perfume. He had smelled it when he first entered the office. It had been apparent when he disturbed the rigid figure of old Neb-Sis in the farther room. It was particularly noticeable in the vicinity of the curator's desk—a persistent, almost sickening aroma. Now, as he laid down Standise's writing and took up for a moment one of the papyrus rolls, it was doubly strong. He sniffed at the ancient record, and immediately was aware of the source of the odor. The papyrus reeked with it.

Curious symbols these: strange, crooked hieroglyphs, little figures of men and beasts and birds, tiny ships and chariots, traced with a reed point, no doubt, by some drudge of a priest, and dedicated to the salvation of the soul of the mighty nobleman, Neb-Sis. But how they smelled! Makris pushed the papyrus from him with sudden disgust. He rested his hands on the desk-top and began to ponder his problem, seeking for a starting-place. Ernesti had ceased to nod and was sound asleep on his chair, his chin sunk in his coat-collar.

Some moments elapsed. Makris started to arise from the desk. That is, his brain sent out such an impulse to his limbs. But to his utter consternation, his body failed to obey. His hands remained quietly on the desk. His legs did not move. Ordinarily, such a realization would have sent at least a tremor through him, a nervous start. And in his brain he *did* start; but his frame remained as motionless and unresponsive as the wood on which he leaned. He was paralyzed!

He tried again. From the center of his being, with all the strength of his will, he sent out along the thousand little telegraph lines of his body, a call for action. No quickening of the muscles answered the call, insistent though it was. He was like a man locked in a room at the top of a lofty building, who finds that his telephone wires have been cut and he is shut off from communication with the rest of his world. He was helpless.

Panic succeeded surprise, and he strove desperately in his prisoned brain. He tried to cry out, to call to Ernesti, who was sleeping there, not ten feet from him. But his throat was dead too, and not the slightest whisper issued from it. Even his eyelids had ceased to function, and his eyes were dry and painful from lack of lubrication.

Was he dreaming? Had he, too, fallen asleep? No; that could not be. His surroundings were too clearly defined. On the desk before him lay Standise's manuscript, and he could read the words that were written there. Thank God he could still see! To his other infirmity the addition of darkness would have been too terrible. What faculties were left him that he could command? He took stock quickly. He could see, and he could move his eyeballs a very little, though the friction of the dry lids made that painful. He could hear. The steady ticking of the clock, the rumble of a distant owl car, and the heavy breathing of Ernesti; he could hear all those. He was breathing regularly, but slightly. Ah, yes! and he could still smell. The odor of that accursed Egyptian papyrus beat up to his nostrils in waves.

For one of the few times in his life, Scott Makris was afraid, with a cold, deadly, all-pervading fear that reached and laid hold of him in the inmost recess of his being. What if he should never regain control of himself? In his mind arose the picture of Standise being carried away to the morgue.

God! had this thing happened to Standise, too? Was the curator overwhelmed by the poisonous perfume of this unholy relic of forgotten ages, and struck down while he was helpless? Struck by what? The suggestion chilled Makris's brain. Cool and sane as the detective was by nature, at that moment the apparition of the mummy of Neb-Sis, stiff in its grave-clothes, standing beside his chair, would not have surprised him very much.

He reviewed the events of the night. Yes; that was how it had happened. Standise had been overcome by the fumes of whatever drug it was with which the papyrus was saturated. And then some presence which had lurked in the room—which might still be in waiting in its secret hiding-place—had crept upon him. Would it come forth again? If it should, it might play a merry game with the men

who had set out to track it down. For one of them was powerless and the other was asleep. The irony of it! He, Makris—almost an international figure because of the crimes he had ferreted out—to go down like this! Well, let it come quickly.

Thr-r-r-r-r! Flap! A noise behind him, almost at his elbow, caused another great start in Makris's brain. Had it come? He held his breath and waited the blow.

He felt big, cold drops of perspiration trickling down his temples and his ribs. He rolled his eyes around in a mad attempt to see what it was that menaced him; but their range was too limited. Crossed assagais on the farther wall, the clock, a Sioux war-bonnet of gaily dyed feathers, the wall itself, the blue-coated sergeant asleep in his chair—Makris could see nothing more.

Flap, again! Ah! it was nothing but a bat that had flown in through the window which the detective had left open. It skittered aimlessly about the walls and the ceiling and then flew out into the night.

In the corridor the telephone-bell rang, long and intermittently; but there was no one to answer it.

Minutes passed. Makris watched them drag by on the clock-face across from him. The phone bell was silent again. Would Ernesti never awake?

An automobile chugged in the street below, and halted. The elevator hummed up the shaft. Voices and footsteps sounded in the hall. The door was opened and Kerwood Arnold, the coroner, shouldered in. Behind him came the coroner's physician, Dr. Van Wark, and a third man, at sight of whom the awakened Ernesti sprang back against the wall with a cry of amazement.

It was Standise, the curator! Shaky and scared-looking, with eyes goggling and hair awry, and his cheeks the color of paste; but Standise, alive, and apparently unhurt!

"What ails you chaps up here, that I couldn't get you on the phone?" began Arnold. "Havin' a party, or—" He caught sight of Makris's face and stopped.

The other three men followed Arnold's glance. At sight of the detective captain, Ernesti cried out again. Standise, breathing audibly, fell into the chair which the sergeant had vacated. Makris sat like a man of wax. His face was as white and, except for his eyes, as expressionless as the plastered wall. But his eyes moved, and from them he sent forth an agony of appeal that turned the blood cold in the veins of the men who saw it.

First to recover himself, the physician sprang across the room. He shook Makris by the shoulder. The detective would have toppled from the chair if Van Wark had not held him up. The doctor called Arnold to help him, and between them they lifted the inert form from the chair. Van Wark sniffed.

"That same damnable odor that I smelled when Standise began to breathe down there on the morgue table," he muttered. "Fetch cold water," he said to Ernesti. "Quick! That's what seemed to help the other chap most."

Arnold and the physician walked, or rather dragged, Makris up and down the room. Presently he began to take faltering steps on his own account. Ernesti filled his cap with ice-water from a cooler in the corridor, and they threw it in Makris's face. He shuddered, gasped, and in his throat they heard the inarticulate rattle of returning speech. He was a strong man, and he had not been subjected to the poisonous fumes for so long a period as had Standise. After a few moments he shook off the supporting hands, and took a staggering turn or two up and down the room, chafing his temples hard with his palms.

Suddenly he snapped himself erect, crossed the office, and thrust his dripping face on a level with Standise's staring eyes.

"Now," said Makris, his voice strained and unnatural, "we'll have the bottom of this. What hell's mess took place here tonight? What happened?"

Anger had succeeded fear in the detective. His dark eyes bored into the curator's blue ones like gimlets.

Standise returned the gaze listlessly. He sank lower in the chair. He seemed to be only three-quarters conscious.

"I don't know," he said weakly.

"Where was he hurt?" asked Makris, turning to the doctor.

"Not a scratch on him." Van Wark replied.

"What!" Makris and Ernesti ejaculated in double.

"What has he told you?" the detective asked.

"Nothing at all." Arnold put in. "He began to kick on the table at the morgue. We tried to get you on the phone to tell you; but we couldn't raise you. So we brought him along. He's been mum as a mouse."

"He doesn't know how we found him?" Makris queried.

"Guess not."

"Just as well," the detective said. He laid a hand on Standise's arm.

"You must remember something of what happened." he said more gently. "Tell us what you can."

"I—I—it was—a dream." Standise's voice was vague.

"Yes. But what *was* the dream? What were you doing?" Makris jogged the curator's arm. Blood had been shed in that office; not Standise's, it seemed. Whose, it was the detective's business to find out.

"I was working at the desk—translating. It was a most unusual manuscript. Then all at once I seemed to be paralyzed. I could not move hand or foot. I could not even wink my eyes—" He hesitated.

"Yes," said Makris with sympathy. "But that was not a dream. That happened to *me*, too, and I ought to know that it was no dream."

Standise nodded.

"I know," he said. "That was not a dream—but—the other."

"What other?"

"Oh, I know you'll think it's a child's nightmare I'm telling," went on the curator. He seemed to rouse himself. "I thought that as I sat powerless to move I heard a noise—there—in the inner room."

"What kind of a noise?"

"A creaking at first, and then the swish of garments, flowing garments, across the floor. Then from the corner of my eye I saw *it*." He halted again.

"What did you see?"

The curator's hands twitched. He smiled resignedly.

"I saw a tall figure clad in long, white robes, and—" The smile faded. An expression of terror came into the curator's eyes. "Please do not ask me to go on," he pleaded.

"But we must know." urged Makris. "What happened next?"

"It, the figure, bent down over me. It clutched my arm with its fingers."

"Did you see its face?" Makris interrupted. He was watching the curator keenly. The man was trying to withhold something. The detective was determined that he should not.

"No—only the eyes." Standise answered.

"And they were the eyes of some one whom you knew—some one whom you feared." Makris spoke quickly.

"No!" Standise started.

"Think," said Makris. "We *must* have the truth, Mr. Standise—and you are not telling it. Who was it? Man or woman—and who?"

"It was a dream, I tell you—but," desperately, "those were the eyes of Suleyman El Dalk." His voice trembled painfully.

"And he is—"

"It was years ago—in Egypt. I met him there. He was a strange man—a strong man—a terrible will. He believed himself to be the last representative of an ancient strain—a descendant of Harmachis, the last of the Egyptian Pharaohs. I was to help him with his researches. Even then I had acquired great knowledge of the Egypt that is dead.

"He had a daughter. We loved. We fled from him—were married. He swore to revenge himself—to follow us to the ends of the earth. I changed my name. We wandered. She died many years ago. His last message—I remember it"—shuddering—"was, 'When you look again upon the face of Suleyman, prepare for death!' I have always feared him.

"That is all." He sank wearily in the chair.

"But in the dream," persisted the detective captain, "what happened when this figure clutched your arm?"

Standise made a hopeless gesture.

"It seemed in the dream that that touch

on my arm sent a thrill of horror through every nerve, and that my muscles for an instant were once more mine to command. I sprang to my feet. On the desk lay an old Italian dagger that I used for a paper-cutter. I seized it with a shriek and struck out blindly. An answering shriek rang in my ears—is ringing there still."

"And then?"

"That is all, sir, on my word of honor. I knew no more until I awoke to find men working over me, and the cold water in my face."

Makris stepped to the desk and returned.

"So you struck—in the dream—with this?"

He laid *Il Scorpione* in Standise's hand.

The curator took the poniard, turned it in his fingers, saw the red stains on hilt and blade. He cast it from him with a hoarse cry and sprang up from his chair.

"*God!*" he whispered.

From one to another the men looked. Ernesti's olive skin turned as sickly white as the curator's. None spoke. Then—

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap-a-tap!

It was the keen ear of Makris that heard it—something falling, softly, slowly, like water dropping upon wood. It was in the farther room.

The detective captain sprang through the doorway, and the others followed; Standise last of all and swaying as he walked.

It was under the mummy-case of Neb-Sis. There was a little pool of it on the floor. It was red. More of it was falling, drop by drop.

While the other men stared, fascinated, Makris seized the swathed form of the mummy and hurled it from its case. It fell on the floor with a dry, crunching sound, as of dead twigs breaking.

In the bottom of the case, where the mummy had lain, was a long, wide panel of thin wood. That, too, the detective tore out and let fall.

In the crypt below the false bottom lay a tall, thin man, clothed in the loose, white robes of the East. His face was covered. Makris removed the covering. The face revealed was that of an old man, the skin like wrinkled leather, the hair and beard as white as fleece. There was a smile on the face. The man was dead. Blood from a gash in his neck had stained his white garments. It had crept along the bottom of the casket until it had soaked through the thin wood.

Standise thrust his head over the shoulder of Makris and gazed down at the face of the dead man.

"*Sulcyman!*"

The word burst from the curator in a shriek. He staggered back, clutching at his breast, and fell. Van Wark bent over him.

"He's gone this time," said the doctor, after a brief examination. "He had a weak heart."

With the morrow came the "agent" mentioned in the letter from Raston & Hummel. He came unwarned by the newspapers; for the night's doings at the Millchester Museum had not yet been given to the press. He found what he came to seek, did the agent, but not as he had expected to find it. He presented at the museum a card which bore the name and legend, "Achmet Zuelim, Dealer in Curios." He was ushered into the presence of Detective Captain Scott Makris.

Quite the mode as to dress was this Achmet, expansive of shirt-front, profuse of glossy-black hair and curling mustaches, voluble of speech and effusive in manner. But his suavity and veneer all melted from him like wax when the detective led him into the inner office of the curator, and he stood before the body of Suleyman El Dalk, which, for lack of a better bier, still reposed in the mummy-case of Neb-Sis. All that he had acquired of the West and its ways fell away from Achmet when he looked down at the dead man, and he became what he was, a son of the East and the desert.

"Allah! Allah!" he cried, and with a burst of tears and wailing went down on his knees by the casket.

Under questioning by Makris, Achmet told how they—Suleyman, whose servant he was, and himself—had brought the mummy-case from Egypt to Millchester and prepared it. Another servant of the old man had mailed the letter—which was, of course,

a forgery—in Alexandria on a given day. On the date named in the letter for the arrival of the mummy, Suleyman, who had saturated the papyrus with a drug known to him, and sealed it so that he would not himself fall a victim to its powers, had entered the case. Achmet then had packed it and summoned an expressman to their lodgings, whence the case had been delivered to the museum.

Of the purpose of his master, the servant professed ignorance. Achmet had done as he had been bidden, and he had come again, as had been arranged, to take the case away.

Makris told the Easterner of the transactions of the night, and asked him why Suleyman should have borne such an undying and relentless hatred for Standise.

"It was because of the daughter of the great one who is gone," answered Achmet, pointing at the casket. "I cannot talk of that. But"—and his face grew stern—"thees man, thees Standise, as he he call him—he was verree great scoundrel."

As Achmet had done no crime, and there was no occasion to detain him, he was allowed to go, and to take with him the body of his beloved master, to be buried under the sweep of the desert sands.

It is written in the Book of the Dead:
"My adversary shall fall before me."
And Standise had not told all the truth.

LADY OF MINE

BY KEITH MEIGS

LADY of Mine, with the wide gray eyes,
Wistful and wise and smiling,
Warm with the glow of the thoughts that rise
Out of their depths beguiling;
Troubled with sorrow or bright with tears,
Who is to make them shine
Softly aglow through the coming years,
Lady of Mine?

Lady of Mine, with the soft warm lips,
Filling my heart with longing,
Promising heaven's and earth's eclipse,
Swiftly the dreams come thronging;
Dreams of a future with you—with you,
Pulsing my veins like wine,
Promising happiness, sweet and new,
Lady of Mine.

Lady of Mine, I have little to give,
Only a love unending,
Only the years we have left to live,
Only an arm for fending
Troubles away in those years to come
When I kneel to a single shrine,
You, my dearest, just you—and home,
Lady of Mine.

Pincher Puts One Over

by Varick Vanardy

Author of "Why Pincher Went Straight," "Alias The Night Wind," "That Man Crewe," etc.

CHAPTER I.

ENTER PINCHER.

FOR the first time in his checkered career Pincher was experiencing the complacence and unctuousness of a life in Easy Street. And Pincher didn't like it a little bit. Not but that Pincher had seen the time—and many a one—when his wallet had been fat with kale, and his pockets were lined with yellowbacks, and he could jingle gold coins in his hands or sift them between his fingers while he walked.

But in those days the possession of temporary wealth—and it had always been temporary—had not constituted all that was necessary for a residence in the street called Easy. There had always been a fly in the ointment—a bug in the amber—that was spelled by the members of his fraternity and kindred ones b-u-l-l-s.

In those days the "bulls"—that is to say, the plain-clothes men at police headquarters—had been forever on his trail, on the lookout for a chance to cop him, to "take him down," and to "send him up." Then it had been a constant test of wits, with Pincher's individual talents pitted against the combined resources and abilities of the headquarters staff of sleuths; for Pincher had never belonged to, nor fraternized with, that common class of "dips" who work together in combinations of three to seven persons, and are characterized as "mobs." Pincher, having been an expert at his craft, an artist in his profession, had always worked alone.

Then, as out of a clear sky, with no premeditation whatever on his part, had come that never-to-be-forgotten day when Pincher had given his promise to "go straight"—the urge and incentive to the giving of that promise having been nothing more nor less than the voice and eyes and personality, likewise the momentary propinquity, of a young woman named Anita Delorme.

Pincher had never seen her but once, and then only for a moment, before that day; he had never laid eyes on her since it; and he had been in her company not to exceed a half-hour, during which Detective-Lieutenant Cooper from headquarters had remained close at his elbow and at hers.*

But Pincher had given Anita Delorme his word, and he had kept it. For Pincher, you must know, had been born a gentleman—which means that he was a descendant, on both sides of the family, of forebears who had held honor to be an asset that was more precious than life itself, and that truth, the sacredness of one's given word, was the keystone of honor. That he had become a thief, a cutpurse, and pickpocket is true, but that he had also been faithful

* See "Why Pincher Went Straight," published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY of October 21, 1916.

in his fashion to a certain set of moral principles is likewise true, notwithstanding the anomaly. Even the cops, his natural enemies, had always admitted that Pincher never lied to them.

He had known the pangs of hunger, and what it meant to be on his uppers. He had been the modern Ishmaelite, with his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him. And there had been a certain form of fascination about that kind of life—when it had been a question of skill, of intelligent effort, being hunted, to outwit the hunters.

The mere possession of cash did not spell Easy Street in those days; but a conscious competence of it, together with the certain knowledge that he was no longer numbered among the hunted, did spell and mean just that.

And Pincher didn't like it a little bit when, on a Saturday afternoon in the month of September, 1917, he stood at the entrance to the Hudson Hotel and nodded his head in sociable recognition to two plain-clothes men of the headquarters staff who were passing and had nodded to him.

"This being on the level is some stunt, believe me!" he muttered to himself inaudibly. "A little more'n a year ago them two guys would 'a' stopped mighty sudden, seein' me standin' here as if I owned the place—or I'd have ducked for cover before they had a chance to lamp me if I'd seen them first, as I did just now.

"It looks like somebody's always takin' the joy outa life." He sighed. Pincher could talk good college American, the very best, when he had a mind to do so, but habit was strong in him, and the vernacular of his late environment was ever more ready at his tongue's end than academic English.

His glance unconsciously followed the two detectives he had greeted. He saw them stop at the corner, where a third man, whom Pincher did not know, joined them. Then, as the three appeared to engage each other in earnest, low-toned exchange of confidences, he discovered that the stranger was eying him with evident interest. Pincher shrugged and turned his head and eyes toward Sixth Avenue.

"Hello, Boniface," a quiet, deep-toned voice said at his elbow a moment later—for the term Pincher, applied to him as a cognomen as well as a calling, had long since ceased to be, and Boniface Maxwell, his right name, long unused, had been rehabilitated.

"'Lo, Cooper," he replied, turning a smiling face upon the man whom he believed to be the one best friend he had ever had. "What's eatin' you, eh? Are you and your side partner goin' to order me offen the premises? Gee, Cooper, it seems like old times to have you pussyfootin' behind me like that!"

"You know better than that, Pincher," the detective-lieutenant rejoined.

"Sure, Mike; an' that's what gets my goat, Cooper; it sure does. This bein' on the level is well named. The guy that picked that word for it was some picker, believe me! It's a *dead* level, with never a rut to slough into, nor so much as a pebble in the path to turn you aside, or to make you grab and hang onto the steering-wheel. Goin' straight! Bein' on the level! Gee! And every bull in the whole burg your bosom friend for life!"

Cooper grinned genially.

"That sounds," he said, "as if you sometimes felt a hankering for the old life; as if you'd like to lift some of the fat leathers that drift past you. Do you ever have that sort of itching, Pincher?"

"Nope; and I reckon maybe that that's part of what's the matter. The itchin' is gone; the appetite is dead. I'm so respectable that it hurts—and the great difficulty is that the respectability is inside of me where I can't dig it up and hold it in my hand, and maybe drop it for a few minutes at a time. Say, who's the good-lookin' guy that's talking with Jenkins?"

"Name's Scranton," Cooper answered. "That's what brought me back here to chin with you."

"What is? Scranton?"

"Uhuh."

"What's ailin' him?"

"He's up against a stunt that has done to him what the dead level has done to you—it's got his goat. He was just now telling Jenkins and me about it. He's a life-long friend and pal of mine, Boniface;

we used to go to school together, and all that. They don't make 'em any whiter than Billy Scranton is."

"Sounds good, comin' from you, Cooper. What's his lay?"

"He is working for a man named Mr. Flynn. Get me?"

"Sure."

"He said something that made me think of you; so, when he fell in with a suggestion of mine in regard to you, I decided that I'd talk to you about it. Then I discover that you're spoiling for excitement."

"What's the answer? I don't get you, Cooper."

"How would you like to have a go at your old game?"

"Just consider that I have repeated myself, and keep on chinning."

"Scranton wants some information. The man who's got it carries it around with him, in his pockets, and Billy can't get hold of it. When the guy that carries it with him goes to bed there's always one, and sometimes two, wide-awake men on guard.

"No stranger can get any closer to him than he is willing to permit, day or night. If he has occasion to refer to the information, he does so in the center of a sort of human ring that forms around him. Get that?"

"Sure. I'm on. You want me to—"

What Pincher did not express in words was more eloquent than the most emphatic enunciation would have been.

Cooper nodded.

"I hate to ask you to do it, old chap," he said with an apologetic grin; "but it is in a good cause. You'll be working for your Uncle Samuel, and besides—"

"Aw, can it, Cooper! Give me the right dope, and I'll eat it up."

"Scranton 'll have to do that. I've told you all that he has told me."

"Well, lead me to him."

"No," Cooper replied; "you dive into the subway and get out at Sixty-Sixth. Start for it five minutes after the three of us part company. Go into the Van Wert and take a seat. Pretty soon you'll be paged."

"As—"

"As Mr. Boniface Maxwell. Follow the boy. That's all."

"Say, Cooper, does your friend know—"

"He knows, from me, that you're the squarest and straightest guy that ever stretched a lot of kinks out of his system."

"All right. I'll listen to Scranton's spiel, anyhow; but, if I take it on, you've got to square me beforehand down below. I'm pretty slick, but there is such a thing as being pinched, and— Well, I want a clean slate to show when I meet up with Miss Delorme again—if I ever do."

"I'll see to that, Pincher."

"You will do something more than see to it, Cooper, if I do this job."

"What more?"

"This: As soon as I've had my run-in with Mr. Billy Scranton, I'll hike for headquarters—before I begin with the job—and your skipper has got to give me a little passport, written on one of his own letterheads, duly signed and sealed, and addressed to whom it may concern, to the effect that any stunt, professional or otherwise, that I may do to-day, to-morrow, or next day, till this particular job is finished, is done under orders from him, for the good of the country or the community. Otherwise, Lieutenant Cooper, it's all off before it begins."

"You're on, Pincher," Cooper responded, smiling, well pleased. "And I'm off. So-long. Follow directions."

Pincher watched him as he rejoined the others at the corner, and there was a covert and inscrutable smile on Pincher's countenance while he did so.

He saw the three detectives separate; saw Scranton go into the subway, and Cooper and Jenkins cross Forty-Second Street to the up-town side, and smiled again more pronouncedly. Then in barely audible words he murmured:

"If my old safety-valve doesn't give one helluva pop while I tote the skipper's hands-off passport next to my heart, I miss my reckon-so!"

Five minutes later Pincher went into the subway.

Pincher spent the better part of an hour with Billy Scranton, operative, in his room

at the hotel, "getting the right dope," as he would himself have expressed it.

The prospective victim of Pincher's skill was named, no doubt temporarily, Mr. G. Z. Thompson. He had next to nothing of the appearance of a German. He spoke genuine American, properly interlarded with colloquialisms, without a flaw in his enunciation, and he managed to carry about with him wherever he went the breezy air of a Westerner.

The department of which Scranton was a representative had long had an eye upon the activities of Mr. G. Z. Thompson, but it had never succeeded in advancing in actual knowledge of him, beyond the point officially described as "well-founded suspicion based upon coincidental circumstantial evidence," which complex statement, you will agree, is about as comprehensive as the twenty-sixth rule of syntax.

The man occupied a suite of three rooms at a prominent hotel which we will identify as the Hotel Pyramid. He had the habits, the bearing, and evidently the pocketbook, of a man of wealth. He was approximately forty years old; was tall, rather good-looking, with just a suggestion of dignity and power in his attitude toward others. He seemed fond of company, entertained lavishly, was received graciously in the best society, and was highly regarded by those who claimed to know him best.

With that much for an opening statement, here is what Scranton added for Pincher's individual benefit:

"Now, Maxwell," he said in his characteristic tone of quietude which could not have been overheard by a third person at the opposite end of the same room, "this man Thompson is so thoroughly under cover—camouflaged, I believe they call it now—that it has been impossible to trace his antecedents. He is either absolutely innocent of any form of guile, and of all the things we suspect about him, or he is the most consummate actor who ever came down the pike."

"Tell me, before you go any further, just exactly what you *think* he is," Pincher suggested.

"We believe," Scranton replied, carefully choosing his words and uttering them with slow emphasis, "that Thompson is the main guy, the head and front, the director-general and general manager of that class of aliens, near-aliens, naturalized citizens with foreign sympathies, and seditious Americans whom we have grouped together under the meaning of the two words, enemies within."

"I get you," Pincher announced.

"Well, I want you to get him," Scranton replied. "That is why I asked you, through my old friend Cooper, to come here."

"Tell me exactly *how* you want me to get him, and precisely *what* you want me to get," Pincher said.

"I'll answer the latter part of your question first: Thompson carries with him, no matter where he goes, a black, seal-leather folding wallet that is held together when it is closed by a strap which fastens with a snap. He does not always carry the wallet in the same pocket; I personally have seen him take it from different pockets on several occasions, and I have seen him take it from one pocket and later put it into another one.

"Thompson is never alone, even for a moment. Always he is guarded. I have never observed him produce that wallet, for reference to its contents—which he appears frequently to have occasion to do—when he was not practically surrounded by two, three, or more companions; his body-guard, I call them.

"When he goes to his rooms there is always at least one other person with him. When he sleeps, night or day, it is the same. The man is never off his guard—or without guards to watch over him while he *is* off it."

"Some guy, eh?"

"Yes. Now, I want that black wallet—or, rather, I want the contents of it."

"What does he take out of it—when he has occasion to refer to its contents, I mean? Of course, that doesn't really matter, or concern me; but—"

"It is a natural question. The wallet contains, with other articles that I have not been able to see plainly, several folded sheets of paper. I have seen four of them: a blue one, a yellow one, a white one, and a green one.

"I have good reason to believe that those

different-colored papers carry lists of the names of four groups of men who are among our enemies within. I want those lists, and, incidentally, any and all other information that the wallet may hold.

"Cooper told me all about you. Cooper says that you can do the trick. If you can do it, and will do it, there is—"

"Hold on a minute, Scranton. Are you going to offer me pay?"

"Yes."

"Then I won't even attempt it. Pinchin' leathers is a dead issue with me. I've retired from business."

Scranton stared for a moment; then, with a half smile of approval, he said:

"Will you undertake the job as a favor to a fictitious but intensely real gentleman who is called Uncle Sam, and of whom we are all very fond?"

"Sure."

"Do you think you can accomplish it—that you can get past his guard, and—"

"Aw, ask me something easy! I said I'd try it on; and I'll add this much to that statement: I have never gone after a thing of that sort yet that I didn't get, sooner or later."

"Good."

"But I want a free hand. I don't want you or any of your kind, nosing around, unless I make the specific request."

"You're on, Pincher— Excuse me."

"Oh, that's all right."

"And you will report to me—"

"Not on your tintype! I'll report to Cooper."

"You will want me to point out Thompson to you."

"Nix. I'll find his nibs, all right, without any help: Mr. G. Z. Thompson, stopping at the Pyramid. So-long, Scranton."

"When—"

"As soon as possible. By-by."

CHAPTER II.

THE WHEREFORE OF A WALLET.

PINCHER spent four days "rubbering." Possibly, four *evenings* better expresses the idea, for he stuck to his regular job during office hours and used the late afternoons and evenings for his study of Thompson and Thompson's environment. In the forenoon of the fifth day he told his employer frankly what had been requested of him, and asked for his afternoons off duty until the thing was accomplished—and got them.

Throughout Pincher's past career as an expert dip—which is parlance for pickpocket—he had always made it a point to observe a prospective victim of his skill with great care and scrutiny; to study his habits and methods of using his hands; to take mental note of his pockets, their location and cut, and the exact manner in which they were used, as well as the general character of article to which each pocket was assigned.

In this particular instance he used up two or three afternoons in making a close study of the black leather wallet itself—the wallet that he was expected to cop—and because he had had considerable experience with various makes of wallets, he believed that he had sized up that one of Thompson's accurately. In other words, he felt quite sure that he knew where he could procure another one like it—of the same general pattern, anyhow, and of the same make.

Therefore, on that first free afternoon he visited a shop in Fifth Avenue, spent the better part of an hour in the place, and when he came out he carried with him another wallet that was very nearly a replica of the one that Thompson carried, and which he had been so carefully studying.

Later he subjected it to certain ministrations which destroyed its appearance of newness; he secured, folded, and placed within it slips of colored papers like those that Thompson occasionally took out of his own, and stowed the new one away in his pocket, ready for any occasion which might arise to make use of it.

In the mean time, equipped with steamer-trunk and hand-bag, he had "arrived" at the Hotel Pyramid, under his own name, and had objected to the first, and also to the second, quarters in the famous hostelry to which he was assigned, and was finally lodged to his entire satisfaction in a room directly opposite the suite occupied by his

prospective prey; the entrance door to the suite and the door to Pincher's room and bath exactly faced each other.

With the advent of the sixth day after his talk with Billy Scranton, Pincher began to have the time of his life.

He was literally in his element, for he could "practise his profession" to the limit without let or hindrance—and Pincher had a theory that there were two good and sufficient reasons why he should practise it literally.

The more important one, so far as he was personally concerned, was that he wanted to get into practise before he tackled the rather hard proposition that he was up against; the other reason—Scranton would have deemed it the more important one, doubtless—was because he wished to stir up a sort of mare's nest inside of that hotel, in the shape of making it quite apparent that an expert pickpocket had found its corridors and parlors, its lobby, its bar, and its dining-room good browsing-grounds. By that means, should Mr. Thompson happen to lose his wallet, the loss would be laid to a common pickpocket, not to a deliberate effort to deprive him of it.

Pincher systematically helped himself to anything and everything that offered; and to one of his peculiar expertness much, very much indeed, did offer.

At the fiscal close of that sixth day the manager sought the proprietor in his private office and announced:

"Say, Mr. Goeghegan, there's been hell to pay around the house to-day! There's a regular lulu of a dip at work. He's pinched Archie Skidmore's bank-roll, Morton Deering's diamond-studded watch that the Elks gave him when he stopped being E. R., Mrs. Barrington's pearl dog-collar which she was carrying in her chain-gold wrist-bag, and—"

"What does Jim Craig have to say about it?" the proprietor interrupted.

Jim Craig happened to be the name of the house detective.

"Jim is up in the air. He hasn't seen a known dip inside of the place in six long months—and he claims to know all of them—I don't think! His idea is that it's a foreigner from London, or Paris, or Vienna, or Timbuctoo, whom the war has blown here."

"Well, call up headquarters."

Detective-Lieutenant Cooper happened to have walked into the inspector's private office in the detective bureau at the precise moment when the telephone call came in from the Pyramid Hotel. He carried a small package in one hand and a letter that he had just been reading in the other. He wore a grin that would have put to shame the cat that ate the canary.

"Say, Cooper, for the love of Mike!" the inspector exploded after he had made a few penciled notes on a convenient pad and hung up. "What in thunder do you s'pose that reformed crook of yours has been up to, hey? I told you when you insisted on his having that hands-off passport from me that it was giving him altogether too much license; I told you that he wouldn't be able to resist the temptation; that he'd go through that hotel like quicksilver through a crack. And he has! He is—"

"Hold on a minute, inspector," Cooper interrupted.

"Well?"

"I've got a small package here, which I was asked to deliver to you; also a letter, addressed to me, which you are expected to read."

"What the—"

"Here's the package. Open that first, and check off the contents on that pad where you've been making memoranda. After you have done that, read the letter."

The inspector's eyes began to twinkle as he received the package and the letter from Cooper.

"You don't mean—" he began, and stopped. He tore open the package and, from it, put down on the desk in front of him a roll of bills as big as one of his own fists, a gold watch with a diamond-and-ruby elk's head and B. P. O. E. emblazoned on the case, and a beautiful pearl collar.

"Well, I'll be—blowed!" he exclaimed. "They're all here, Cooper; exactly what the day manager of the Pyramid just now reported and described to me. Say, whadda-you-know-'bout-that?"

"Read the letter," Cooper suggested.

He did so—and here it is:

DEAR COOPER:

I am sending you a few trifles, which you may pass on to the skipper with my compliments. The bank-roll belongs to Archie Skidmore, the bookie; the watch feels at home in the pocket of J. Morton Deering; the pearl collar is Mrs. Penelope Barrington's; and all three will probably be raising Cain around here about the time you receive them. It occurs to me that if you and the skipper put your heads together, and don't blab, you both ought to get the long-credit marks for quick and efficient detective work when you send the junk to the hotel management, to be returned to the owners. More later. No Sig.

"Well, I like his nerve!" the inspector ejaculated when he had finished reading.

"So do I," Cooper responded fervently. "It's refreshing. Can I offer a suggestion, skipper?"

"Sure."

"Follow Pincher's advice. Call up the hotel in the morning and tell the manager that you're on the track of the stolen property, and that you'll have all of it before night. Then, just before dinner-time, send up the stuff."

"And accept a reward for recovering it? They've already offered one."

"No. Refuse it. Tell 'em we're not that kind of cops."

"Huh! They'll sure think we're a *new* kind, all right."

"It 'll help Pincher out. Don't you see his game—his two games, in fact?"

"No; I'm blowed if I do!"

"Well, for one thing, he's having the time of his life—working at his old stunt. For another—and this is the main point—when he does cop Thompson's leather the loss will be attributed to a regular dip, on the lookout for kale, and not to—"

"I get you, Cooper. I'll do it."

Pincher, in the mean time, as we know, had experienced no difficulty in identifying Mr. G. Z. Thompson, and in getting a line on him.

At approximately the same time that Cooper and the skipper were discussing the return of the stolen property, he was seated at a table in the hotel café, two tables removed from another around which Thompson and three companions had gathered.

Pincher had no difficulty in overhearing their conversation. Indeed, the manner and character of it were such that he very soon became imbued with the notion that they not only *intended that it should be overheard by anybody who cared to listen, but actually desired that it would be listened to;* and, quite naturally, the question that was uppermost in his mind in regard to it was, *Why?*

"That bunch is just a mite too uncareful with their chin-music," was Pincher's unspoken comment; and he thought on: "It's a common enough stunt to write cipher letters and make memoranda in cipher; but it certainly is a new one on me to listen to a bunch of guys *talkin'* in cipher—and that's what they're doin', or I'm a liar.

"You'd think," Pincher continued voicelessly, addressing himself, "that Mr. Foxy G. Z. T. was entertaining three of his pet brokers, and tellin' them how to buy and sell at the opening of the market in the morning, with all that guff about D. and R. G., St. Paul, A. T. and S. F., and that kind of dope; and that those colored slips of paper was just his personal, ready-reference memoranda, made on different colors for the sake of brevity and expedition in using them. But that's not the answer, I'll take my oath."

He began to ponder upon the idea that had occurred to him, and with such concentration that he heard nothing more of what the four were saying until he was startled to return consciousness of his surroundings by the shoving back of their chairs as they left their table.

"Come along up to the room with me, Colton," he heard Thompson say to one of his companions. "I won't keep you long. Good night," he said to the other two. He was returning the black wallet to one of his inside pockets while he turned away.

Pincher remained at his table a little while after they had gone, still pondering. Presently he sought his room thoughtfully. His lips were pursed and his brows were wrinkled, while he undressed and extinguished the light and got into bed.

He had been there an hour, motionless, when, with a jerk, he sat upright.

"By the great boot in Chatham Street, I've got it!" he exclaimed aloud. "Cipher-talk! Sure! D. and R. G. means a man, or a locality, or something of the sort. So do all of the references to stock abbreviations. They might mean munitions-plants or grain-elevators, or any old thing that's to be blown up or destroyed by fire or otherwise chucked into the discard. And the different-colored papers are signals—surest thing you know!

"Also, and likewise, and by the same token, so to speak, as it were that black wallet that his nibs guards so carefully holds the key to the cipher, and it's now up to little Willie to cop it. Good! Now I'm going to sleep."

CHAPTER III.

THE PEOPLE IN THE PIECE.

WHEN Pincher returned to the hotel from his place of regular employment the following afternoon at one thirty, he saw Thompson and Colton seated together on one of the lounge divans. Two chairs had been drawn up, facing it, and they were occupied by two faultlessly attired women, one of middle age, the other much younger—and undeniably "some skirt," if we express the idea according to Pincher's mental classification.

Pincher dropped upon a chair at one of the pillars, opened a newspaper, and pretended to read; but he watched the four furtively over the top of it, and because he he had been careful to keep his distance he could do so without attracting attention.

While he watched, Thompson produced the ubiquitous wallet, extracted the white paper only, referred to it, made some comments to the younger woman while he held it in his hand, returned it to the wallet—and stored the wallet away inside of his waistcoat.

Then he made a remark to Colton, who immediately arose and sauntered unhurriedly toward the café. Thompson bent forward nearer to the women and began to talk earnestly to both, who leaned nearer to listen.

Pincher left his chair and followed Colton. He found him standing at the bar, and went and stood beside him, not too close, just as he was served with a Scotch highball.

The bar at that time of day was well patronized; in fact, Colton and Pincher occupied the only available space along its entire length at the moment of their entrance—with the consequence that they were obliged to stand quite close together, so that if Pincher had not assumed a half-sidewise position toward the bar their elbows would have touched.

Just here it is well to be reminded of the fact that few persons other than the initiated—that is to say, the professional pickpockets themselves and the officials who hunt them—are aware of their extraordinary skill. And we must keep in mind the fact that Pincher had ever been an adept.

He remained standing at the bar just long enough to gulp down in some haste the imported ginger ale he had ordered; also, he let fall his umbrella, which he carried swung on his left arm, the arm nearest to Colton.

In the consequent effort to catch it, and in the act of recovering it from the floor, he quite naturally brushed against Colton; but, inasmuch as he had already swallowed the ginger ale and received his check, he offered no apology as, with face averted, he crossed swiftly to the cashier's desk, put down his check, together with the exact amount it called for, and passed out of the café, going directly to the chair against the pillar that he had formerly occupied, where he resumed the reading of the newspaper.

Across the top of it he saw Colton enter from the café—and he knew that if Colton had observed his first entrance, from the street, or had noticed him seated on the chair by the pillar, that he would not appear to have moved from that position.

Colton came to a stop near the hotel desk. He glanced sharply around him, scrutinizing in turn each and every man within the spacious lounge; next he turned to the desk and engaged one of the clerks in earnest conversation; then he crossed to

the divan and dropped down beside Thompson, who scowled at him at first, as if he resented the interruption, then listened attentively, and then accompanied him to the hotel desk, where there was more earnest conversation in which two of the clerks took part.

Meanwhile, Pincher continued the reading of his newspaper.

Thompson and Colton parted. Thompson rejoined the women; Colton went to the telephone booth. At the same moment a man entered the lounge by the revolving doors and went straight to Thompson and his two companions. He gave Thompson a slip of paper—apparently a memorandum—which Thompson hastily glanced over and gave into the hand of the younger woman. Then they parted, the women making their way gracefully toward the street door just as Colton reappeared, rejoined Thompson, and they, with the newcomer—who had been one of the men at the table in the café the preceding evening—turned away toward the elevator.

Pincher saw that much while he got up on his feet and passed out of the hotel by way of the café—and swung around the corner outside in time to sight the two women, who had turned north and were walking.

He had seen the young woman fold the memorandum-slip with care and stow it away in her wrist-bag, which, with the loop of it still around her wrist, she nevertheless held in the grasp of her gloved fingers.

Pincher kept near to them, but behind them.

Now, when a woman walks up or down Fifth Avenue, if she is not in great haste, or has not made a definite appointment, it is as natural to her to be lured into intermittent pauses in front of show-windows as for a steel needle to leap to a magnet; when two women are together the attraction is quadrupled. Pincher's long acquaintance with that feminine frailty had, in the old days, made the store windows along Fifth Avenue his favorite and most profitable stamping-ground.

He knew, because of the character of their appearance, that these two were not immune—and the fact that Miss Youthful, by comparison only, retained her grip upon the wrist-bag did not in the least disturb him. He knew exactly how to overcome that slight difficulty.

Sure enough it was not long before a window, very artistically dressed, attracted them.

They stopped; so did Pincher. They walked on, after a moment, to pause at another; so did Pincher. Then, farther along, a third, a fourth, and a fifth one attracted them; and behind the plate glass of the fifth one they discovered an article which admitted of argument between them.

Miss Youthful lifted her disengaged hand to point; then she raised the other one, that had been gripping the wrist-bag, in order to gesture with both hands—as if she were describing how the beautiful gown in the window would hang upon her own exceedingly attractive person.

It was Pincher's opportunity, and he took it, being immediately behind the two and quite close. Also, he took the thing he wanted.

Five seconds later he *preceded* them up the avenue, walking a little way in advance of them, pausing at windows occasionally to observe them, not the window decorations, until he saw that the younger of the two was again gripping the wrist-bag and was happily ignorant of the fact that it had been pinched open, and likewise noiselessly pinched shut again, while her hand had been temporarily off guard.

Being satisfied that she would not discover her loss for some time to come—for Pincher had been careful to remove nothing but that folded paper from the bag—he turned into a side street and departed.

Twenty minutes later he was inside of his room at the hotel, with the door locked. One by one he produced and laid upon the dresser in front of him the several articles he had acquired since his arrival at the hotel from his place of employment. Then he enumerated them:

A watch, pinched off at the ring—a cheap one, worth little or nothing; an indexed address-book, of the size that fits into a waistcoat-pocket; a leather bill-fold, devoid of money, but containing several slips of paper cut to the size of currency so as to

be readily contained within the bill-fold; two letters, still enclosed in envelopes, between the folds (these from Colton, in the café); the much-folded memorandum slip from the charming young woman of the shop-windows.

Pincher speedily discovered that all of the memoranda, so far as his understanding of it was concerned, might as well have been written in Choctaw; so he sat himself down to the task of making exact copies of them, save for the one taken from the young woman. He decided to keep the original of that one, since she could not possibly know when or where she had lost it. The others, after copying them, he restored to the bill-fold, together with a memorandum of his own, which was terse and to the point.

It read, in printed lettering:

Why in blazes don't you carry cash where it should be carried, and why don't you blow yourself to a decent watch?

The memoranda sheets that he copied—there were five of them—may best be described by the repetition here of a single entry from the first one.

It was:

Am Smlt 1500 * . . . Curt Aero — (?) or —8th Stl . . . * —5500 . . . —?Mo P (by 0/15 to 20).

Pincher's mental comment, after he had studied that particular entry quite a time, was:

"The guy that runs may be able to read, as the saying goes; but I'll be blowed if he could read that gibberish."

Nevertheless, he made careful copies of every item of the five slips.

The paper taken from the young woman's wrist-bag had seemed to be nothing more than a transcript balance-sheet made on ledger-ruled paper of note size. It contained only figures and abbreviations of the names of well-known stocks, bonds, and outside securities—and two words at the bottom:

Without delay.

The two letters were written in German, which Pincher could not read. The envelopes were addressed to K. J. Colton, Pyramid Hotel, New York, and were postmarked Norfolk, Virginia.

Presently—it was then after five o'clock, he noticed—he made a package of the recently acquired articles, and of the copies he had made, and sought a telephone booth of another central than that used by the hotel circuit. He called up headquarters, and was fortunate in finding Cooper there, with the inspector.

"Say, Cooper," he said, "I've got to see you, and I reckon I ought to see your friend Billy at the same time. It's most dinner-time, and I flagged my lunch. There's a sea-food joint in Eighth Avenue—Swazey's, you know the place—where we won't be noticed. Can you get in touch with Billy, and can you make it? All right. In less than an hour. You'll find me there waiting."

Scranton arrived at the restaurant in a limousine car, in which, after the sea-food meal, the three were driven away by the chauffeur, whom Scranton described as "one of our men."

The car went slowly toward and into the park; the curtains were drawn so that the three might not be seen together. The operative inspected the several articles which Pincher supplied, by the aid of an electric torch, and he retained possession of the copies that Pincher had made of Colton's memoranda; also, he kept the two letters in German, which he could read, but which he said contained nothing of value, although they doubtless would be found to carry in their context a message of importance which only the department's expert would be able to decipher.

The originals of the memoranda were restored to the bill-fold and given into the hand of Cooper, to return to Colton in person when that individual should make complaint about the loss of his property. The watch, very evidently a plated brass one, he was on the point of passing to Cooper, when he withheld it, looked at it more closely, and remarked:

"That is a queer-looking watch. A. J. Small dial, big case, very thick; almost too thick, eh?"

He placed it, face down, in the palm of his left hand, and with his right unscrewed

the back of the case—to discover, as he had more than half anticipated, a receptacle beneath it.

Within the space, which was fully an eighth of an inch in depth, he found a lot of disks of thin but fine-textured paper that had been cut to an exact fit; and upon each one of them there was a quantity of fine writing in German script.

"More cipher," Scranton murmured as he shuffled the paper disks between his fingers and methodically replaced them inside of the watch-case. "I'll keep the watch, Cooper. Perhaps I'll let you find it for Colton later, in some pawn-shop.

"Also I will keep the address-book. It seems that we are up against four different systems of cipher-writing, but I think that our expert will be equal to them." Then he addressed Pincher, adding:

"You have done a good job, so far. I am glad that I gave you your head in the matter. The thing to do now is to get after that black wallet that Thompson carries about with him—and to do it quick."

"All right," Pincher replied. "Let me out. Say, Cooper," he added while Scranton signaled to the chauffeur, "didn't Colton report his loss to the skipper?"

"Sure."

"Are you goin' to find the stuff for him?"

"Of course; that is, the bill-fold with the original memoranda and your message inside of it; the watch, later on, after Billy has made copies of the writing on those paper disks."

Pincher nodded. He was about to get out of the car, but paused an instant to turn again to Scranton.

"I'm just a bit curious about the probable meaning of the cipher memoranda," he said. "Maybe you feel like giving me a leg-up about it, Scranton."

"Certainly," Scranton relied. "Our country is at war. The greatest danger we face at the present moment is from our *enemies within.* They kindle fires along the water-fronts of our ports; they burn grain-elevators, storehouses, food, and munitions-laden vessels; they blow up factories, plants, flour-mills. Now, the theory is this: that Thompson and his lieutenants are directing all that work, supplying the funds, selecting the men to do their biddings.

"Thompson poses as a capitalist—which he doubtless is, by proxy. He pretends to play the Wall Street game. Colton is a partner of the brokerage firm of Jasmin & Co. Henshaw and Kramer, the other two men whom you have seen with Thompson, are ostensibly associated with reputable brokerage firms. All of that we regard as a blind. The two women are new; I don't know anything about them.

"Now, this is the idea: The stock abbreviations doubtless refer to persons or localities or properties, or all three." He selected one of the memorandum slips, and went on: "Take this entry, for example: 'Am. Smlt. 1500,' followed by a plus sign, may be translated as meaning, 'Give John Smith as much as $1500, or more;' and so forth. And the rest of the memoranda of that entry probably indicates exactly what John Smith is to do."

"I see. I'm on," Pincher said. "Much obliged. I'll duck now; an' say, I'm going to make one helluva bid for that black leather wallet of Thompson's before you're forty-eight hours older! So-long."

"He's a slick one, all right," was Scranton's comment to Cooper after Pincher had gone. He left them at the Seventy-Second Street entrance to the park, on Eighth Avenue.

"You bet he is, Billy!" Cooper replied. "He will get what he's after, too. And say, I've got a hunch that he will start something in the Pyramid to-night! What do you say to the idea that you and Jenkins and I blow into the café, there, about ten or so to-night, occupy a corner table, and look on, eh?"

"Bully!" Scranton agreed.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER.

IF you or I had been in the Pyramid Café that evening at half past ten, when Boniface Maxwell, otherwise Pincher, entered, either of us would have pro-

nounced him "pretty well lit up." Not intoxicated, mind you; just mellow. He did not stagger, was not boisterous; but he wore a set smile and an open countenance toward every person who chanced to look into his eyes. He seemed to feel extremely friendly to everybody, and he practised an exaggerated courtesy toward all.

"Watch him," Cooper said in a low tone to Scranton, where, with Jenkins, they occupied a corner table. "I'll bet you a box of perfectos that he'll pick more than one pocket in this café before he leaves it, and that, although you are forewarned, you won't catch him in the act."

"You're on," Scranton replied.

Thompson, with his usual three companions, occupied their accustomed table near the middle of the floor; and they were discussing, as was their habit, not loudly, but in tones that might be heard by anybody who cared to listen, stock quotations, purchases and sales, financial matters generally.

Pincher went to the bar, smiled genially at the bartender, asked the men who stood at either side of him to "have something with me, f'r comp'ny; hate t' drink alone, y' know; 'gainst princ'ples. Had too much already, so'll take seltz' 'n' lem'n. What 'll you have? An' you? Glad t' meet you both. My name's Maxwell. Made a killin' in the Street to-day, an' I'm celebratin', Sure! Cleaned up a wad, I did."

A few minutes later he moved along toward the end of the bar, and repeated much the same formula; then he started toward the door into the lounge, and struck the leg of Thompson's chair violently in passing.

He stopped instantly and turned.

"Beg pardon," he said with exaggerated politeness, and passed on; but instead of going into the lounge he approached the far end of the bar, found a narrow space between two animated groups of patrons, ordered another seltzer, drank it, received his check, which he dropped—and recovered from the floor with no little difficulty. Then he crossed to the cashier's desk, paid his accumulated checks and passed the swing-doors into the lounge.

Within two or three minutes he was back again, with an evening paper in his hand. He crossed to the corner where the three detectives were seated, and dropped upon a chair at the next tazle.

"'Lo, Cooper," he said, smiling genially; and then, without apparently noticing Cooper's displeasure at the recognition and use of his name, he added: "Seen th' evenin' paper?"

He left his chair and stood beside Cooper, putting the newspaper down upon the table in front of his friend.

"Look it over," he said, and in a low tone he added: "*Look under it, and be careful.*"

After which he started across the room again, taking his course past the table at which Thompson and his friends were seated.

Cooper felt beneath the newspaper with his hands, before he looked, and the expression upon his face when he did so was a study. It was as if he did not know whether to laugh or swear with anger—for his searching fingers encountered no less than five watches and three stick-pins under the spread-out printed sheets.

In the mean time—just when Cooper was swearing softly to himself and grinning at the same time, while he surreptitiously dropped the several articles into one of his coat-pockets—Pincher crossed toward the swinging doors into the lounge a second time.

But before he had quite got to it he stopped, searched his pockets with half-frantic gestures, wheeled about in his tracks, and shouted, so that everybody in the room could hear him:

"Say! Shut the doors! Stand guard over them. I've been robbed. Don't let anybody outa here till we find out who's who. There's a pickpocket in this room."

Within a moment there were several others present who agreed with him; something resembling a small commotion ensued. The house detective was summoned. He passed from group to group and from table to table, investigating—until the personality and integrity of all present was accounted for satisfactorily. Cooper and Jenkins were known to him, and they vouched for their companion. Five men who were

strangers—Pincher being one of the five—readily agreed to be searched, but were passed as being above suspicion, without the formality. The house detective took down a list of the lost property, and promised to see what could be done. (N. B.—One of the watches and one of the stick-pins which Cooper found under the newspaper belonged to Pincher himself; no less.)

"Confound him!" Cooper muttered in an undertone to his friends. "I wonder what that bunch would think if they knew that I've got their property in one of my pockets right now? What will he do next, I wonder?"

Pincher was doing it!

The small commotion having subsided, Pincher found opportunity to wink slyly at Cooper, who scowled at him; then he went past the swing doors into the lounge just as a page entered the café shouting:

"Mis-ter Gee-Zee Tom-son! Mis-ter Tom-son!"

In the lounge, just in the act of turning away from the desk, Pincher saw the young woman whose wrist-bag he had pinched open and shut that afternoon. The other woman and a man in evening clothes were awaiting her, standing over by a window, and seated upon a chair, quite close to them, was another woman engaged in turning the leaves of the *London Illustrated News*. Pincher gave her only a passing glance. Later he regretted bitterly that he had not looked more closely at her.

He passed behind the waiting group of three and stood at the window with his back toward them when Thompson came from the café and joined them—whereupon the young woman began to talk rapidly in a language which Pincher did not understand.

There were two chairs at either side of the window at which Pincher was standing. They were big, high-backed, high-armed, leather-upholstered chairs, immovably fastened to the floor.

The woman with the *London Illustrated News* occupied one of the pair at the east side of the window; Thompson and Miss Youthful, after a few moments of earnest talk, moved over to the other pair at the west side of the window and occupied them. The man in evening clothes and the elder woman remained standing and conversing in low tones.

Pincher, facing the window, with his back toward all of them, produced a small, round mirror from one of his pockets, raised it in one of his hands, and held it so that he could observe, within it, nearly every motion that Thompson and his companion made. After a moment his vigilance was rewarded.

He had correctly surmised that they were discussing the inexplicable loss of the memoranda—which must have been lost, and not stolen, since nothing else than it had been found missing from the wrist-bag. His reward for watchfulness was that he saw, presently, reflected in the small mirror, Thompson produce the black leather wallet, withdraw three of the differently colored papers, refer to them one by one, and return them to the wallet, which he then closed, snapped, and continued to hold in his left hand.

The several acts provided Pincher with his second opportunity that day; and he took it—and something else with it—as he had done on the previous occasion.

He made two quick motions with his hands; he restored the mirror to his pocket with one, and secured *his own replica of Thompson's wallet* with the other.

Then he uttered a sharp exclamation as if of recognition of somebody passing in the street outside, and started backward. He tripped on the edge of the rug; he tried to catch himself and failed; he fell; he sprawled directly across Thompson's knees, knocking the wallet to the floor beneath him; he sprang again to his feet instantly and with surprising agility; he bowed low before Thompson and the girl with hastily uttered apologies, extending a black leather wallet toward the former as he did so.

"Awfully sorry," he said rapidly. "Frightfully clumsy for me to do that. Beg ten thousand pardons. Saw a chap I know passing. Your property, I think. Knocked it outa your hand; what? No harm done, I hope. Awfully sor—".

Pincher sped away toward the street door and past it; he came to a halt just

outside of it, counted ten slowly, and passed around through the revolving doors again. Just inside of them he stopped, then he grinned broadly, once more went outside, and hurried around the corner toward the café door.

He had stepped back into the lounge in time to discover Thompson in the act of depositing the substituted black leather wallet inside of his waistcoat, which he buttoned tightly over it.

Entering the café, he went swiftly to the table where Scranton, Jenkins, and Cooper were seated; they were, in fact, about to rise and depart.

He paused, facing them, as they got upon their feet. Nobody noticed them. Nobody does notice such things in a café after eleven o'clock at night.

"Here is the black leather wallet, Scranton," he said, passing the article into the operative's hand, and shielding the act with his own body as he did so. "Thompson will find out, inside of half an hour, that it was purposely swiped from him, because of the papers inside of it. I had to ring in a duplicate on him. You'd better have him pinched right away if you want him; otherwise he's likely to make a getaway—him and his bunch. So-long. I'm going to the desk to pay my bill, and duck."

He wheeled and was gone before any of his listeners could say a word or ask a question.

Pincher hurried to the cashier's window, called for his bill, paid it, turned around to "beat it for the elevator," as he would have expressed his intention—and came up standing with a gasping catch of his breath.

He was face to face with the lady of the *Illustrated News*—and that lady was Anita Delorme!

Pincher went hot and cold all in an instant. His heart seemed to stop beating and then to try to jump out of his mouth. He knew that he turned pale, then flushed, and turned white again. He tried to speak, and couldn't.

Miss Delorme could, and did.

"I saw how you have kept your promise, Mr. Maxwell," she said. Her voice was cold, metallic, hard as flint, uncompromising. Her eyes were stormy with contemptuous anger and disappointment. Her lips curled with scorn. "You are still Pincher, in spite of your given word," she added.

He did not answer her; he could not have spoken a word to have saved his life.

"I saw you at work with your mirror," she went on coldly, as if with deliberate intent to crush him utterly. "I saw the counterfeit wallet in your hand before you turned, and fell, and stole the gentleman's wallet, and substituted the counterfeit for it when you pretended to return it to him."

She waited again, but still Pincher could not speak.

"He does not know of his loss yet," she went on in the same even tone. "I shall wait five minutes, and then I shall go to him and tell him what I saw. You had better go. You have five minutes—no more—in which to make your escape."

Miss Delorme lifted her chin haughtily, swung around, and left him.

Pincher did not move.

He was overwhelmed; struck dumb; paralyzed, with a sort of cataleptic paralysis that would not permit him to move a muscle of his body.

Even his mind refused to work. He could not think; he was dazed; he felt as if he were dead, and wished that it were true.

Oddly, he thought little about the threat that Miss Delorme had made. He was conscious only that he had seen her again, face to face, and that she had caught him in the act of plying his old trade.

So he stood very still, just as she had left him, a solitary, motionless human figure on the floor, ten feet away from the hotel desk at the cashier's window—and the minutes passed.

CHAPTER V.

HOW PINCHER MET THE EMERGENCY.

ANITA DELORME was true to her word. She crossed to a chair against a pillar and seated herself upon it, watching the big clock at the end of the room; and not once while she waited for the five minutes to pass did she turn her eyes toward the man who stood like a

graven image exactly where she had left him, nor would he have been aware of it if she had looked toward him, for neither did he shift his gaze to her direction. He just stared at the floor unseeingly.

When the five minutes were up, Miss Delorme left her chair and crossed swiftly toward Thompson, just as he and his companion rose from their chairs, ready to part. Indeed, Thompson had taken Miss Youthful's hand and was bowing over it when Miss Delorme interrupted him.

"Pardon me, sir," she said, speaking rapidly, but with entire calmness and decision, "I came to tell you that you have lost your wallet; that a counterfeit was substituted for it. I was seated there"—she indicated the chair with a quick gesture —"when a man stumbled across your knees and committed the theft. I saw it."

She turned swiftly away and was gone before Thompson entirely comprehended what she had said to him.

He tore open his waistcoat, cursing gutturally in a foreign tongue. He snatched the substituted wallet from the inside pocket. He held it for an instant before his eyes and grinned wolfishly.

"Fool! Dolt! Ass that I am!" he ground out in English between his teeth. "What an imbecile I was not to look closer when this was put into my hand. A glance would have told me that it was not mine. But I was talking to you, Rina—and I was annoyed, disturbed. And this! *This!* A mere glance would have told me that it was not mine, if I had not been so occupied with— *Hah!*"

While he talked, endeavoring to find excuse for his own carelessness, his fierce eyes searched the big room, and his glances finally rested upon the solitary and motionless figure of Pincher, who stood still with bowed head where Anita Delorme had left him.

Thompson darted forward, fierce-eyed, furious.

His eyes, long trained to instant recognition of features and figures, spotted Pincher at once remembered him as the apparently half-drunken man who had entered the café earlier in the evening, as the one who had stumbled against the leg of his chair, and as the same one who had fallen across his knees in the lounge and stolen his wallet.

He seized Pincher by the arm, jerked him around, and cried out:

"Thief! Pickpocket! I've got you! Give me my wallet!" Then, addressing anybody who could hear him: "Call an officer! Somebody summon an officer! I'll hold the thief!"

In much less time than it takes to tell it the two were in the center of an excited throng—and it was surprising how many persons were actually within the lounge at the time, where, a moment before, it had appeared but sparsely filled.

Somehow the excitement got past the doors to the café, and men came from it, upon the scene, in twos and threes and half-dozens; also, still others entered from the street by the revolving doors—three others, in fact, for Cooper and Jenkins and Billy Scranton had been waiting just outside for the reappearance of Pincher with his satchel.

And over at the far end of the big room, where a short flight of stairs led to the mezzanine floor, midway of the steps, watching the scene with bated breath, was Anita Delorme.

She was bending slightly forward, gripping the balustrade. With her other hand she held a small ivory fan so that it shielded her features below her eyes.

The fierce grip of Thompson's fingers upon Pincher's arm, and the resultant jerk that whirled him around to face his accuser, had the effect of a cold shower upon his benumbed sensibilities.

It brought him face to face with the crisis of the moment.

Pincher was instantly his old self again, master of all his faculties. He became once more the same Pincher who had so long a time successfully defied the combined efforts and composite wit of the central office.

He returned calmly the furious gaze of the man who had seized him; he spoke with equal calmness when he said:

"Let go of my arm. I'll not try to get away—and neither will you, if I can stop you."

Pincher yanked his arm free from Thompson's detaining grasp and stood facing him, very close to him, staring as fiercely into Thompson's eyes as Thompson stared into his own. The circle around them narrowed as those in the rear pressed others forward to obtain a nearer and better view.

The two were at the center of a pushing, excited throng of men and women who milled around them so closely that they were pushed and pulled and jostled this way and that, swaying with the crowd. And Pincher's nimble and dexterous fingers were busy every instant while the confusion lasted.

There can be no condition quite as acceptable and agreeable to an expert pickpocket as a pushing, milling, jostling, struggling crowd of mixed men and women. It affords him the precise opportunities he craves. Under such conditions people do not feel the softly tentative touches of expert digits that wander over their persons, searching, searching, searching—and finding. Their heads are in the air; their eyes are lifted, seeking other glances to meet their own. We must remind you again of the fact that Pincher was an adept at the craft.

Not more than two minutes passed—possibly it was less time than that—before Jim Craig, the house detective, shouldered his way through the crowd to the center of it. Also, he saw and recognized both Cooper and Jenkins at the outer rim of it as he passed, and called upon them to follow and assist; and he was very glad that two of the central office staff were present to aid him.

But those two minutes or less were sufficient for Pincher—for the Pincher who had become alert with the biting grasp upon his arm and the cry of thief in his ears; for the Pincher who, in that instant, became once again the hunted, with every quality of wit that he had once possessed to defy the hunters restored to him.

With the entrance to the center of the throng of Craig and Cooper and Jenkins, all of whom lost no time in exhibiting their shields, the crowd fell back. A cleared space was left in the middle of it—a space that was occupied by the accused, the accuser, and the three detectives. Scranton had thought best to remain at the outer rim of the excitement.

"Now, what's doin' here?" Craig demanded bruskly.

Thompson had entirely recovered his equipoise; he answered calmly, deliberately:

"I charge that man"—he pointed his finger at Pincher—"with stealing my wallet. He's a pickpocket, a common thief. No doubt he has been doing all the stealing that has been going on in this hotel the last few days."

"Huh!" said Craig. "What have *you* got to say about it?" he demanded roughly of Pincher.

Pincher shrugged his shoulders, lifted his brows, smiled, made a gesture with his hands, palms upward, and replied with a masterly assumption of indifference:

"I deny the charge, of course. The gentleman"—he gave just a touch of emphasis to the word—"is evidently greatly excited; or"—Pincher smiled again—"he ought to be working on the stage. I would suggest, since there are three detectives present, that we both be taken into the manager's private office and searched."

As he finished speaking he caught Cooper's eye for just an instant.

"I object—" Thompson began.

Cooper interrupted him.

"Come on, you!" he exclaimed in Thompson's ear, seizing him, jerking him violently, and leading him, willy-nilly, toward the door to the manager's office. "Bring that other guy, Jenkins," he called back over his shoulder.

"Wait! Wait a moment!" the voice of a woman called to them from across the room.

Cooper did not recognize Anita Delorme's voice; he did not turn his head to discover who had called out to stop them; but he did know that he wanted no interference of any character, from anybody, just then.

"Craig," he ordered the house detective, "don't let anybody butt in on this business. Keep everybody outside—everybody. If any person here has got anything to offer about this affair, we'll hear 'em later." And he led the now protesting Thompson—who, truth to tell, had his own good reasons for

objecting to the search of his clothing and pockets—swiftly away.

Pincher, who was immediately behind them, in the grasp of Jenkins—who pressed his arm reassuringly—did recognize the voice that called out to them to wait, and he wondered—oh, how he did wonder!—if anything could ever happen now to convince Miss Delorme of the truth about the incident that she had witnessed.

So, the four—Cooper, Thompson, Jenkins, and Pincher—entered the private office, and the door of it was closed and locked after them; also, the manager had preceded them and was waiting.

Outside, Billy Scranton had also heard the cry to wait.

Instead of following the crowd that had surged forward in the wake of the four, he turned back and hastened to meet Miss Delorme, who was running to intercept the detectives and their prisoners.

He stepped directly in her path so that she could not pass him.

"One moment, please," he said, when she would have brushed him aside. "I am also an officer. I was with the two who have taken those men to the manager's office." He pulled out the strap of his suspender from behind his waistcoat and showed her his badge. Then, releasing it, he added: "I am, as you see, a government officer. My name is Scranton. Did you have some information to offer in connection with this affair?"

"Indeed I did—and have!" she replied vehemently. "I saw—"

"Wait, please. Let us go over by the window and sit down. I assume that you will have no objection to telling me about it quietly, have you—now that I have sufficiently identified myself?"

"No," Miss Delorme replied, and went with Scranton to the same pair of chairs upon one of which she had been seated when Pincher did his great act.

"I know that man—the one who was charged with theft," she explained quietly, as soon as they were seated. "I know him to be a self-confessed pickpocket who is, or was once, called Pincher. His right name is Boniface Maxwell. I have been told—but, no; that is not exactly true. I had reason to believe that he had reformed—gone straight, as he expressed it to me once. He promised me that he would reform, and I believed him. But—to-night—a little while ago—I saw—"

"Wait again, please," Scranton interrupted.

"Yes?" she answered.

"Are you Miss Anita Delorme?"

"Why, yes. But—how did you know that?"

"Miss Delorme, I want you to believe me when I tell you in all earnestness that Pincher *has* reformed—that he *has* gone straight—that he has, literally and completely, kept faith with you. I *know* it."

"But," she gasped, wide-eyed, "I saw him take that wallet. No, no; please don't interrupt. I must tell you."

"Go ahead, then. I will have something to tell you afterward."

"First," she said, "I saw him crossing the room toward me. I was seated here, in this same chair. I recognized him at once. My impulse was to speak to him, but—I do not know why—I did not. I concealed my own face from him instead. Perhaps I did it because I discovered something furtive in the manner of his approach and in the way he was regarding the gentleman and lady—the man whose wallet he stole—who were occupying the chairs at the opposite side of the window.

"He came and stood there, in the slight embrasure of the window. I half turned in my chair to watch him. His back was partly toward me, because he was watching the man he presently robbed. Then I saw that he used a small mirror, to watch his prey the better. Then he moves very quickly, but nevertheless I plainly saw what I now describe—then, as with one motion, he returned the mirror to his pocket and brought forth in its place a black wallet which looked very much like the one that the other man was holding in his hand. Then—"

"Then"—Scranton was smiling as he interrupted her—"he stumbled and fell over the other man, knocked the wallet out of his hand, substituted his own for it when he got up, apologizing—and so forth. Is that it, Miss Delorme?"

"Yes; precisely."

"Now, Miss Delorme, I want you to listen to me. I am going to let you into a government secret—just a little way. That man whom Pincher robbed—and he did rob him—is a naturalized American citizen of German birth. Subsequently he applied to the courts for permission to change his name, which was Krebs—and there was, before he came to this country, a V-o-n in front of it—to Thompson.

"The department I serve has been on his trail ever since diplomatic relations were severed between our country and Germany. Since war was actually declared, our operatives have been pretty hot after him. That man is, without any doubt whatever, a member of the coterie which we class under the term *enemies within*. More than that, even, we believe that he is the real leader of all of that ilk. Do you realize the importance—the vital importance—of what I am telling you, Miss Delorme?"

"Yes, yes."

"Now—do you remember Detective-Lieutenant A. J. Cooper? You made his acquaintance at the same time you met Pincher, I think."

"Yes; I remember Mr. Cooper very well indeed."

"Good. It was Cooper who suggested to me that Pincher might be able to accomplish the thing that I had been unable to do—get possession of that black leather wallet of Thompson's which he carries always on his person, and which he has guarded with exceeding care.

"It contains, we believe, the exact information we want, concerning the activities of those same enemies within—their names, addresses, proofs about the fires they have set, and the explosions they have caused.

"So—do you understand now?

"I engaged Pincher to assist me. I offered him pay, which he declined. He offered to perform the required service gladly for his country, and without recompense. Therefore, Miss Delorme, you have not been disappointed in your good deed—nor in the man. Your idol has not been shattered.

"Boniface Maxwell is not a thief; he is as straight and honest and upright as they make 'em! He was working under my orders when he secured possession of that black leather wallet. He was working for our dear old Uncle Sam."

Anita looked at Scranton with tears in her eyes, without speaking; but her lips moved, and he could see that they framed the words, "Thank God!"

After a moment she did speak. She said, with emotion:

"Oh, I am glad, *glad*, *glad*, that you stopped me when I would have forced my way into the presence of those men and told all that I saw. Where—"

She stopped. A second commotion, not so pronounced as the first one, had broken out at the opposite side of the room near the desk, where the greater part of the crowd that had originally gathered had been standing about, discussing the affair.

Several of them had become suddenly aware of missing property—watches, purses, contents of wrist-bags, a necklace, a brooch, and so forth.

The victims rushed in a mass toward the door of the manager's office; but, just before they reached it, it opened. Cooper stepped outside, closing it after him, and confronted them. He held a roughly wrapped newspaper parcel in his hands.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I have several articles here which I will name, and restore to the proper owners when described. But before I do that I wish to inform all of you that the young man who was charged with thieving is exonerated. No wallet of any description was found in his possession.

"The property which I am about to restore to its various owners we found—Mr. Jenkins and I—in the pockets of the other man, the man who charged Mr. Maxwell with stealing his wallet. He has been taken out of the hotel by the back entrance, and is now on his way to police headquarters. Now, if you please—"

Billy Scranton was chuckling softly.

Anita Delorme regarded him with unconcealed amazement.

"Will you please tell me what it all means?" she asked faintly.

"Yes," he replied, "I will tell you. It

means about the slickest thing that has ever happened in the annals of inspired detective work."

"What *do* you mean, Mr. Scranton?"

"I mean that our good friend Boniface not only turned the tables on his accuser by helping himself to those watches and bank-rolls and things, and stowing them away inside of Thompson's clothes while that crowd was milling around them—it means not only *that*, Miss Delorme, but a far greater thing."

"Please tell me."

"It means that he—oh, I've got to call him Pincher—has provided a reason for putting Thompson under arrest without the necessity for the government to appear in the matter at all. It means that traitor Thompson—for, being a citizen, he is that—goes to headquarters with only a local charge against him.

"It means time and opportunity for us to round up the others, his accomplices, in splendid shape. Miss Delorme, that Pincher of ours is a great man—a very great one!—and unless I miss my guess, he'll be a greater one some day."

"I—I must see him," she said in a low tone.

"I will send him to you," Scranton replied, and left her.

CHAPTER VI.

LAZARUS AND THE LADY.

PINCHER crossed the lounge toward her slowly. He was strangely uncomfortable. It was genuine diffidence that he felt, although he was not aware of it, never having been a victim of anything like it before.

Miss Delorme rose to meet him, extending her hand, which hesitatingly he took—and instantly dropped.

"Will you forgive me, Mr. Maxwell?" she asked softly but with shining eyes—all ashine with unshed tears they were.

"Forgive you!" he gulped. "My God! What do you want to say that for?"

"I'm afraid that I spoke very harshly to you—before I—understood; before I knew the truth."

"Did you?"

"Yes."

"If you did, I didn't know it. I—I hope that you are quite well, Miss Delorme."

"Oh, quite, thank you." She smiled brightly, a trifle confusedly. Pincher was very difficult. She did not know that he worshiped her as if she were deity; that in his conception of humanity she occupied a pedestal high above all other earthly beings. She had no idea that he had made a goddess of her. "I am very glad indeed to see you again," she added.

"Thank you," he said, and wiped his brow with his handkerchief.

"Are you living in the city now?" she asked him.

"Yes," he replied. Then, with marked hesitancy: "Are—you?"

"Yes," she answered. Then she found her card-case and gave him one of her cards, which he held between a thumb and finger without looking at it. "Will you come and see me some Thursday afternoon?" she added.

"I?" he exclaimed, startled. Then, unmindful of the ungraciousness of his words, he added: "Oh, no; certainly not. But I'm mighty glad to—to know where you live. You see, I think about—Say, Cooper would like awfully well to see you again, Miss Delorme!"

"Really?" she said. "You may tell him that I would be glad to meet him again, at any time. And now"—she extended her hand again—"I see my mother in the doorway, beckoning, and I must go. Our car is waiting. Will you give me your card or tell me your address? It might happen that I should wish to know how to find you, you know."

"Might it?" He shook his head. "Just in care of Lieutenant Cooper, police headquarters, will reach me."

"Good night, Mr. Maxwell—won't you shake hands? Otherwise I will think that you do not entirely forgive me for my harshness."

He took her hand.

"Miss Delorme?"

"Yes?"

"Did you ever wonder how Lazarus

must have felt when he found out that he had been raised from the dead? How he felt toward the Christ who had brought him back to life?"

"Why—no; I don't think that I ever thought about it—in just that way," she half faltered, somewhat dismayed by his sudden transition to intense earnestness.

"Well, I have," he told her. "I have thought a lot about it—and I know exactly how he felt. He felt just the same way that I feel—now—about you."

"Why—why— Good night, Mr. Maxwell."

"Good night, Miss Delorme."

Pincher did not watch her go from him. He was staring through the window, seeing nothing—nothing but the memory of Anita Delorme's eyes and voice and presence near him, and her hand-clasp.

Cooper's voice roused him from his reverie—he did not know how long afterward.

"Come along, old chap," he said.

Concerning the resultant consequences of Pincher's expert work in the service of Billy Scranton it is necessary merely to refer you to the columns of the daily papers of the latter part of the month of September, 1917.

We all know how the government officials got busy very suddenly about that time, rounding up, arresting, interning, and indicting hundreds of our enemies within.

It is all a matter of record—but what is not of record is the great fact that the successes of those efforts were largely, almost entirely, due to Pincher, the reformed pickpocket, who had gone straight because of the influence of a certain Miss Anita Delorme.

The contents of the black leather wallet, and of Colton's bill-fold, the translation of the cipher writings found in the papers, the letters, and the watch, the addresses in the book taken from Colton, the two women, and the memoranda that Pincher purloined from the wrist-bag of the younger one—in fact, all that happened after Pincher's work for Scranton concerning our enemies within, was done—belongs, as Mr. Kipling would say, to another story; and that story has already been told in the newspapers.

"Cooper," Pincher remarked when they were parting for the night, "I saw Miss Delorme."

"I know," Cooper replied. "Billy told me about it."

"She said that she'd be glad to see you—some time."

"Good. Thank you."

"And— Good night, Cooper."

"Good night, Boniface."

They shook hands in silence and parted.

(The end.)

DREAM—AND DARE

BY DIXIE WILLSON

A BLUEBIRD'S song! A glad red rose!
A breath of thistledown that blows!
A fresh sea breeze! A first star out!
The girl I used to dream about—

But, ah—a tender quiet smile—
A strong, true heart—and all the while
A gentle comfort after strife—
The girl I dared to make—my wife!

After His Own Heart

by Ben Ames Williams

Author of "Once Aboard the Whaler," "The Devil's Violin," "Three in a Thousand," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

TOM DUNCAN, a young man of great energy and a highly developed but somewhat irresponsible sense of humor, obtained a job with the Flant Detective Agency, and was immediately sent out to get the photograph of the daughter of Judah B. Corpus, a prominent millionaire. The wife of this girl's chauffeur, Flant explained, wanted to get a divorce. The agency had managed to snap the chauffeur joy-riding with a woman, and the wife, quite without foundation, insisted it was his employer. They wanted to get a picture of the girl to prove to the wife she was wrong.

Pretending to be a reporter, Tom went to the millionaire's home, but was immediately ordered thrown out by the peppery magnate. A fight with the butler and other servants followed. Tom managed to escape and dashed up-stairs where, in a room on the second floor, he encountered a pretty girl he took to be the heiress's maid. She aided him to escape the house, and also gave him a picture purporting to be that of her mistress. On reaching the agency, however, Flant went up in the air, declaring the picture the wrong one, but at that moment the police who had been pursuing broke in and arrested Tom.

The next morning, much to Tom's surprise, John T. Gulworthy, the millionaire's personal attorney, appeared in court and got him off, at the same time slipping him a message to report at his office. This message Tom ignored being suspicious, but that night at his boarding-house he got another unsigned note offering him employment and liberal pay. If he accepted he was to write the single word "Yes" on the back of the letter and mail it at once to John X. Smith, General Delivery. Without hesitation he did so.

The following day came another letter of complicated instructions, pursuing which Tom found himself a prisoner in a magnificent room attended by a valet, and denied no luxury but his liberty—and the satisfaction of his curiosity.

After several attempts to escape, which failed badly, Tom was conducted to a room where sat Mr. Gulworthy, and the object of all the mystery was explained to him. Surgery, the lawyer explained, had made vast strides; Dr. Sleen, was the most eminent surgeon in America as well as Judah B. Corpus's physician; Corpus was suffering from a serious disease of the heart. Mr. Gulworthy hesitated and eyed Tom. Tom grinned inanely.

"Go on," he urged. "Go on! Say it!"

"Mr. Duncan," said Gulworthy, "I am empowered by Mr. Corpus to offer you the sum of one million dollars for your heart."

CHAPTER VIII.

A MILLION BID; NO TAKERS.

TOM gulped. Then he fumbled frantically under his coat to see if his heart was still there. He could not feel it beat; he tried his wrist. There was no pulse that his clumsy fingers could discover. He pressed his hand to his throat, in something like a panic, and the blood there beat reassuringly against his fingers. It gave him some measure of resolution. He eyed Mr. Gulworthy sternly.

"You say—say—s-say you'll give me a million dollars for my heart?" he repeated.

Gulworthy nodded. "Exactly."

"Well," Tom gulped out, "w-well, I w-won't take it."

Gulworthy looked pained. "Now, if it's a question of money—"

"It is," Tom declared. "It is. My—my heart's worth more than that to me."

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for January 4.

"Say two millions?"

Tom shook his head stubbornly.

"Five?"

"N-no."

"How much, then?"

Tom came to his feet, storming. "I won't sell!" he cried. "I won't. I don't want the money. What good would it be to me? You can't spend money in a coffin."

Gulworthy shook his head, deprecatingly. "My dear young man," he protested. "There is no danger. You would, of course, receive Mr. Corpus's heart in exchange."

"I don't want it!"

"Your healthy blood would soon restore it to normal health—according to Dr. Sleen."

"Oh! Is that so? Well, what about those dogs?"

"They came through the operation beautifully."

"Where are they? I want to see them! I want to talk to them about it."

Gulworthy sighed. "Unfortunately," he explained, "they are dead."

Tom laughed insanely. "Sure. I told you so."

"But the—er—pardon the jest—the change of heart had nothing to do with it."

"Oh, no. I suppose not. I suppose they died of old age."

"No, the black one died of indigestion, and the white one died of loneliness. It missed its black companion, you see."

Tom waved his hands over his head. "Sure. Sure! Well, I'm satisfied with my heart, and Judah B. Corpus will have to make the best of his."

"Sit down and talk it over," Gulworthy begged.

"There's nothing to talk over."

"Well, sit down, anyway?"

"No chance. I'm going home."

Goliath stepped in front of him; he put his hands firmly on Tom's shoulders.

"Ya-as, you sit down," he suggested.

Tom sat down. He sat down so hard it jarred his back teeth loose. Gulworthy smiled. "You had better stand behind his chair, Archibald," he said, gently.

"Ya-as," Archibald amiably agreed.

Tom leaned across the table. "Say," he snapped, confidence returning, "you can't get away with this. Don't you know that?"

Gulworthy tipped back in his chair. "Why not, Mr. Duncan? You will consent?"

"Not a chance."

"Well—suppose you don't?"

"You can't get away with it," Tom insisted. "Some one will be after me in twenty-four hours."

"Who?"

"The police."

Gulworthy smiled.

"My landlady will set them after me. I owe her money."

The attorney gently shook his head. "We have covered our tracks, Mr. Duncan. One of my men went to her, paid what you owe her, said you would be back in a month according to your present plans, but that if you did not return, she was to know you had decided to stay in—Chicago, I think it was. He paid your rent a month in advance."

"He's the one that got my trunk?" Tom asked.

"Yes—watched you drop it out of the window, and took the opportunity to remove it. We kept our eye on you, you understand?"

Tom stared at him. "But—why me? Why did you have to pick on me?"

Gulworthy smiled. "Your enormous physical strength, your energy—as displayed when you called at the Corpus home—attracted our attention. The operation on Mr. Corpus had already been considered. We were wondering where to find a fit subject. Dr. Sleen heard of your exploit. He exclaimed: 'There's the man. Get him.' And I took my steps."

"Got me out of jail, trailed me—"

"Exactly. You lost my men in the park; but when you returned home, I was at once informed, and sent you the first letter—offering the position."

"What made you think I would accept?"

"We were prepared to insist. But I felt sure of you. I had investigated your—er—circumstances. I have a report of your

whole past in my office. I know you have no relatives, no friends in these parts of the world. You see, Mr. Duncan, you are quite helpless."

Tom shook his head. "You've made a mistake, though. I—my heart is rotten. Overstrain in athletics—"

Gulworthy lifted a mild hand. "Dr. Sleen has examined you. He is satisfied. He says you are practically perfect."

"Tell him I'm much obliged."

Gulworthy bowed. "Thank you—I will."

Tom frowned. "Say—you don't honestly mean to tell me that I can have my heart cut out and still live, do you? Old Corpus—it will kill him, anyway."

The attorney leaned forward. "As a matter of fact," he explained, "we do not think it will be necessary to exchange the actual hearts. Dr. Sleen's diagnosis seems to show only an affection of the large artery near Mr. Corpus's heart. We only propose to exchange your artery for his. He will then be sound again; and you, with proper care of your health, will soon be as well as ever." He paused an instant. "I only mentioned the heart so that we could feel free to use your—your organ if it were necessary."

"Old Corpus must be crazy."

"Mr. Corpus is a believer in surgery. He has great confidence in Dr. Sleen. He is a strong-willed man; and he says he would rather take the risk and die right away than live as he is and be prepared to drop off without warning."

"He has got more nerve than I have."

"He is a brave man."

Tom considered. Then: "But look here. You're not in earnest. Suppose Corpus dies under the knife—that's all right, no doubt. But if I die—you've got a murder on your hands."

Mr. Gulworthy loked pained. "We have considered that—er—possibility," he confessed. "If you die, your body will be found in your room, a dagger in the breast, and a suicide note on the dresser."

"I won't write the note."

"We have a very capable—and discreet—forger in my office. And the coroner who would be called in is a friend of mine."

Tom felt cold; and he shivered. But after a moment he persisted: "Well, suppose the thing goes through. You'll have to keep me prisoner. If you didn't, I would tell the whole thing."

Gulworthy smiled. "If you told, you would not be believed. The police would arrest you as insane; and in twenty-four hours you would be in an institution—where you would not receive the treatment necessary to preserve and restore your present health. No—you will be silent, Mr. Duncan."

Tom loosened his collar and grinned. "It's close in here."

Gulworthy smiled. "A little. Open the window, Archibald."

Goliath lumbered across the room and swung wide the window. And Tom's heart leaped. For through the window he saw the top of a tree, not ten feet from the sill; and beyond there was the open sea, freedom, liberty. He gathered his feet under him.

"How about this million?" he asked. "When do I get that?"

"At once. I have a certified check in my pocket."

"You'll give it to me now?"

Gulworthy reached inside his coat, drew out a wallet, and from its folds produced the slip of paper. The check was drawn to "Bearer;" and it was certified; and it bore the signature of Judah B. Corpus himself. He handed this to Tom. "That is as good as cash, as good as gold," he explaned.

"How do I know you won't take this away from me?"

"Our faith. If you keep your share of the bargain, we will keep ours."

"But this is no good to me if I—well—"

"Is there not some one to whom you would like to bequeath it; in case—"

Tom considered. He folded the check and thrust it in his pocket. "Yes," he said. "There is. I'll have to draw a will."

Gulworthy smiled. "I came prepared," he said, and from a drawer of the table produced a sheet of foolscap. "I will draw it up for you—without charge, Mr. Duncan. Archibald and Vince and I will witness it." He spread it on the table. "Just give me the terms, the persons to whom you wish the money to go."

Tom thought of Sally Pim. He started to give her name, started to say: "Everything to her!" And then he checked himself. Any name would do. He grinned. "Make it to Mrs. Gall, my landlady," he directed. "Everything!"

Gulworthy looked surprised. "Mrs. Gall?"

"Yes."

"I—I did not gather that you were so friendly."

"Oh, she's the best friend I've got."

"But—"

"Say, can't I do what I want with my own money?"

The attorney apologized. "Of course, of course. I beg your pardon. I merely wished to advise—"

"Write!" Tom snapped.

Gulworthy wrote. Tom watched him, watched Goliath, watched the open window, and the treetop outside. The tree was an evergreen. Tom hoped it was strong.

Gulworthy finished. He rose. "Now," he said, "I will call Vince, and we will witness your signature."

Tom stood up. "Do so," he said, curtly.

Vince appeared. Gulworthy explained briefly, and Tom leaned over the table and set his name to the paper.

Gulworthy signed next; he handed the pen to Vince. Vince wrote. "Now, Archibald," said the attorney, and turned to Goliath. The giant gripped the pen in his great fingers, snagged his tongue between his teeth, and stooped to the task.

When he stooped, Tom gave a single leap from floor to table. He bowled over Gulworthy as he leaped, knocked Vince headlong, and reached the window with Archibald's bellow filling the room behind him. An instant he poised upon the sill; then, with Goliath clutching at his heels, he jumped.

He jumped straight out, toward the friendly tree; and he was carried by the momentum of his dash across the room fairly into the topmost branches of the evergreen. Without waiting to consider his position, he half-slid, half-fell down through the branches to the ground. He landed with a jar that jolted the breath from his body, picked himself up, looked around, saw no one, and began to run, straight away from the house, through a garden full of shrubs.

At the end of a hundred yards, he burst out of this garden and emerged upon a sandy beach. Behind him, the pursuit was emerging from the house. Before him was the sea, no land in sight.

He turned to his left and sprinted along the beach. After a minute, his pursuers appeared behind him. Tom ran on.

The beach curved; and he perceived that he was rounding the house; and a moment later he turned a point and stopped and groaned.

He was on an island. Water lay on every side of it. From the point he could see land, dimly, perhaps fifteen miles away. He threw up his hands, looked back. Goliath was not fifty yards away.

"I can't swim it," Tom grinned. "But there's no harm in trying." He whipped off his coat, kicked away his low shoes, ran into the water to his waist, and struck out at top speed.

Tom was a good swimmer; but before he had gone fifty yards, he saw the thing was hopeless. Archibald had plunged in after him; he was overhauling Tom hand over hand. A hundred yards from shore, he was reaching for Tom's heels.

Tom dived. He hoped to come up under Goliath; disable him. But the giant also dived. They met under water; rose to the surface in a grapple. And on the surface, Goliath ripped loose one hand and drove his fist into Tom's chin.

Tom slept.

When he awoke, he was in his bed in the steel-barred room again; and Gulworthy and Dr. Sleen were bending over him. He remembered instantly, sat up, fighting them off. The two men stepped back, and Dr. Sleen smiled grimly, and Gulworthy smiled amiably.

"Ah, sir," said the attorney, "you are yourself again. Your indiscretion, sir, is forgotten."

"You let my heart alone!" Tom commanded.

Gulworthy lifted a deprecating hand. "I regret—we must proceed. But you will not suffer. Your reward will be the same as

though you had consented. You see—we are kind."

"Oh, yes," Tom grinned. "Yes, you're a kindly crew."

"Now," said Gulworthy. "Now you are sensible, sir."

CHAPTER IX.

IN QUEST OF SALLY.

IN the intoxication of his desperate efforts to escape from the island, Tom had been able to forget for a moment the horror that lay behind Gulworthy's words. His leap into the tree, his race along the beach, his swim—these had driven everything else from his thoughts up to the moment when Archibald's fist administered an impromptu anesthesia and made it an easy task for the giant to turn Tom on his back and drag him through the water toward the shore.

The blow had been no gentle one; and atop it, Tom had swallowed more water than was good for him, while being towed ashore. He was unconscious for more than fifteen minutes; and he woke stiff and sore in every muscle. His jaw ached; he thought at first it was broken; and his throat was raw, and his stomach was sick. The sight of Gulworthy and Sleen, standing over him, added a desperate terror to these other ills; and his first outcry voiced this terror baldly.

"You let my heart alone!" he commanded.

Gulworthy's apology heartened Tom a little. He managed a grin; but when, after another word or two, Dr. Sleen stepped calmly toward him, Tom whisked out of the bed on the other side and interposed the bed as an obstacle between him and the doctor.

"Nothing doing!" he insisted. "You touch me and I'll brain you with a bed post!"

Dr. Sleen's broad mouth twisted faintly. "Ah, excellent!" he commented. "I am delighted to see that your strength is returning."

"You bet your life it's returning. If you don't believe it—start something."

The attorney interposed placatingly: "You have nothing to fear, Mr. Duncan—"

"Nothing to fear!" Tom cried. "Nothing to fear! If you're so sure of that, let this big gink cut your heart out!"

Gulworthy smiled. "Unfortunately," he explained, "I have—er—weakened my heart by alcoholic excesses. It is—unsuitable for such a purpose."

"Well, so is mine unsuitable," Tom declared. "It'll never be the same again after this day. If old Corpus had it, he'd fade in a minute." He banged his hand on his breast. "It's bursting my ribs out right now, it's jumping so. Say, it would shake him to pieces, like a destroyer's engines in a barge."

Dr. Sleen rubbed his hands gently. "You are laboring under a misapprehension, Mr. Duncan," he argued. "I feel sure it will be unnecessary to disturb your heart. Only a little bit of the artery."

Tom turned on him. "You're a big, strong chap. Let me do the operating, and you furnish the heart."

Dr. Sleen smiled. "I am the only man in the world competent to perform this operation, Mr. Duncan. The technique is—delicate. Delicate in the extreme."

"I'll bet it is," Tom agreed. "But you're not going to get your knife into me. Not to-day."

The physician laughed in a soft and unpleasant fashion. "To be sure," he agreed. "We had no such intention."

Tom stared at him.

"You must get into condition first," the doctor continued. "You are in no shape to undergo such an operation. Not now."

Tom stared; and then he grinned. "Oh!" he exclaimed. "I have to get into condition, do I? You interest me! Let's hear the details."

The doctor nodded. "You remember, I examined you the other day," he reminded Tom.

"Oh, yes, I remember."

"I found certain slight ailments."

Tom nodded cheerfully. "Yes, that's right, doc. I'm a sick man."

Dr. Sleen shook his head ponderously. "No, indeed, young man," he objected. "You are far from it. You are an extraordinarily healthy specimen. But the operation is a severe ordeal; and to prepare for

it, you must undergo special treatment." He became animated, enthusiastic; and this enthusiasm in the big, cold man had a ghoulish fascination for Tom. "Why, young man, the dogs—I believe Gulworthy told you about the dogs—"

"Oh, yes, Gulworthy told me."

"Those dogs were under my personal care and treatment for two years before I operated on them."

"You going to keep me two years under treatment before you operate?" There was hope in Tom's eyes.

Dr. Sleen shook his head. "Two weeks will do for you, I feel sure. You see, Mr. Corpus's condition is so critical that we cannot delay."

"I can't get in shape in two weeks. I feel it in my bones."

The physician nodded. "I have the same fear," he admitted. "But that is the chance we must take."

"You surely are taking chances," Tom agreed. "Well, go on. Let's hear the worst."

"It will be necessary," the surgeon explained, "to enrich your blood. You will inevitably lose much blood, of course; and we propose to transfuse some from your veins to those of Mr. Corpus before the operation. You must be prepared for that by proper diet."

Tom grabbed a coverlet from the bed and drew it tightly around him. He felt cold.

"We shall feed you certain things which I will specify," the doctor continued. "Hearty food." He smiled. "Er—heart food, if I may be pardoned the jest."

"Oh, you may, you may," Tom assured him.

The doctor chuckled ponderously. "And we shall give you some mild, open-air exercise," he continued. "Sleep, proper food, proper exercise. Why, young man!" He wagged an enthusiastic finger. "Young man, in two weeks you'll be able to spare two inches of artery and never know you've lost it."

Tom nodded vigorously. "Yes, that part's right," he agreed. "I'll never know it's gone."

Dr. Sleen beamed. "Come, come," he urged. "Don't be down-hearted. Remember, Mr. Corpus's risk is even greater than yours."

Tom shook his head. "Not a bit. He's betting a million dollars and a month of life against twenty years. I'm betting forty or fifty years of life against a million. I'm giving him—well, say, I wouldn't sell a month of my life for a milion—I'm giving him about five hundred to one on this thing—and you can tell him I said so."

"I will," Dr. Sleen declared. "No doubt he will even the scale by increasing your—er—honorarium."

Tom grinned. "Thanks, doc," he exclaimed.

The doctor nodded. "Now, you just follow instructions, Mr. Duncan; eat what's given you; and I'll guarantee that you've got a good one-to-four chance of pulling through all right."

"One-to-f-four?" Tom slumped against the wall. "One-to-"

But Dr. Sleen and Attorney Gulworthy had taken their departure.

When Tom was left alone with Vince—the valet appeared the instant the door closed behind Dr. Sleen—he climbed back into bed without a word, pulled the coverlets over his head, and tried to sleep.

He felt that he needed it.

But sleep would not come. Tom had too much to think about.

Until to-day he had been befuddled by the mysteries that surrounded him; but now the mystery was torn away. He wished it would return. He had been uncomfortable before he knew Gulworthy's project; now he was—

"Where ignorance is bliss," Tom told himself, "'tis folly— Oh, I'm a fool, all right. Tom, you're dished—"

He pulled the sheets down from his head and looked around the room. There were two weeks before him. Time for many things to happen. Escape! Rescue! Anything! But the question was, what? Where anything might happen, nothing would. That was Tom's discouraged conviction.

He cast back into his past in the vain hope of discovering some old acquaintance who would trail him, seek him out, save him. But his bosses had all fired him, and

sworn it was a good riddance; and he had never stayed long enough in one job to make friends.

"I wish I'd committed burglary," he groaned. "Then the police might hunt me up and arrest me." He stretched his arms longingly. "Oh, you beautiful jail, I wish I was back in you!"

No friends; no enemies. No one to rescue—

And then he remembered Sally Pim. And he sat up in bed with the shock of that memory.

She was his friend; she had sworn it. Only a girl; but Tom knew she was more than a mere girl. Now, she— If she could only—

His brain was working at last. It had been paralyzed for the last two hours. He had been unable to think. But now his thoughts began to gather momentum— His eyes lighted—

Sally worked in the Corpus house on Riverside Drive. It was for the sake of old Judah B. Corpus that he, Thomas Duncan, was about to be vivisected. If Sally knew, she would save him. And the only problem was to let Sally know.

She would not miss him until next Thursday night, when he would fail to keep his appointment with her. Then, quite naturally, she would be angry with him, probably sulk—

Tom shook his head. She would not sulk. She would know something had happened to him. And she would undertake to—do whatever could be done. But could she do anything?

If he could manage to let her know where he was. He frowned, thinking hard. And then he looked across the room to where Vince was making a great pretense of industry, and he grinned at the little man, and then called: "Vince!"

The valet turned. "Yes, sir."

Tom settled comfortably down in bed. "Vince, I suppose you know what's going to happen?"

Vince nodded. "Oh, yes, sir."

"You heard Mr. Gulworthy explain to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"At first I was inclined to be upset, Vince; but Dr. Sleen invites confidence, don't you think?"

Vince tried to approve this sentiment. "Oh, yes, sir—I should say so, sir," he applauded.

"I think so," Tom declared. "I believe this is a good chance for me to make a lot of money, Vince."

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"I was nervous, at first. But Dr. Sleen is a great surgeon. Isn't he?"

"So I have heard, sir."

Tom nodded. Then he laughed. "Say, Vince," he exclaimed. "I went up to Mr. Corpus's house, in town, one day. There's a butler there as big as Archibald."

Vince smiled faintly. "Yes, sir. Archibald's brother, sir."

"He's not as husky as Archibald, though."

"No, sir," Vince assented. "Archibald keeps himself—er—in condition, sir. Montmorency—that's the butler, sir—Montmorency is a soft liver. Flabby, sir."

Tom pursed his lips. "That's unfortunate, Vince. Very sad, what?"

"Yes, sir."

"Archibald must feel this family dereliction keenly."

"Yes, sir. He and Montmorency are no longer friends, sir."

"Too bad! Too bad!"

"Yes, sir."

Tom fell silent, watching Vince as the valet continued his efforts to appear busy. He was considering his next move; and at last he began.

"The only reason I don't like this, Vince, is that it means I have to break an appointment with a—young lady, Vince."

Vince looked sympathetic.

"I hate to do that, Vince."

"Of course, sir." He hesitated. "They —they do take such things unkindly, at times, sir."

"I'm afraid she'll never forgive me, Vince."

The valet was showing a surprising degree of interest. He came toward the bed. "I —sympathize with you, sir."

"Have you ever had any experience with —er—young ladies, Vince?"

"Oh, yes, sir." Vince smiled faintly,

confidently. "I may say, sir—a very great deal."

Tom wagged a finger at the valet. "Ah-h-h, Vince."

Vince blushed. "Yes, sir."

Tom became serious. "Then you can sympathize with me, Vince."

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"I ought to let her know I can't come, Vince."

Vince beamed. "Now if I might suggest, sir—I must obey my orders, of course; but I have a tender heart for young lovers, sir."

Tom leaned toward him. "Ah, Vince, I have not appreciated you as you deserved."

"I am not a hard man, sir. Not by nature."

"I believe you."

"Thank you, sir."

Tom leaned toward the valet. "Vince, do you think there would be any chance of my sending a note to the young lady—explaining—telling her I could not keep our appointment?"

"There could not be any—any truthful explanation, sir."

"Of course not. I appreciate that, Vince. But—" he winked at the valet. "Any explanation would do, Vince."

"No doubt, sir."

"Would you help me—help me explain, Vince?"

"I could not go against my orders, sir. But, I may say, I have some discretion, some latitude—"

"Exactly. And Vince, you know I am to be well paid for what I do here. I will be able to reward you, afterward—"

"It is sufficient reward for me to know I have smoothed the—er—path of romance, sir. I have a romantic nature, Mr. Duncan."

"I believe you, Vince. Just the same, I would not allow you to go unrewarded. You understand that." He held up a warning hand. "Now do not protest. I will have my way, Vince."

"Very well, sir."

Tom bounded out of bed. "I'll just write a note, now, Vince; and you can see that it is mailed."

Vince rubbed his hands. "Certainly, sir. But—I beg your pardon—I must read the note, sir."

Tom looked at him reproachfully. "Vince!"

Vince blushed; but he stuck to his guns. "I could not allow you to send out any message that I did not see, sir."

Tom grinned. "I believe you've an appetite for—such messages, Vince."

Vince blushed again. Tom laughed. "Very well, Vince. You shall see it."

He stepped to the desk, sat down, drew paper from the rack and a pen from the drawer, and prepared to write. He dared not to hesitate for fear of arousing Vince's suspicions; yet his message must tell more than it seemed to tell. He thought for an instant; then wrote swiftly. When he had finished, he turned and handed the note to Vince. Vince read it, smilingly.

DEAR SALLY:

This is an apology. I canot meet you as I promised. I have received an offer of a position, and it is an offer that I cannot resist. You can guess how overpowering are the arguments that keep me from you.

Give my regards to our common enemy. It is such evil-looking creatures as he—if there is another such man in the world—that keep us apart.

Ah, I have so many things I could wish to say to you, my dear! But I cannot!

Think of me. Read this letter over and over. But do not sleep with it beneath your pillow. You will have to read between these lines all I would like to say to you.

Your *devoted,*

TOM DUNCAN.

The valet read this letter; and when he had finished, he looked at Tom with a faint doubt in his eyes. "What do you mean, sir, by this reference to your 'common enemy'?"

Tom laughed. "Oh, that's a man at home. She and I come from the same town. We always talk of this man as a bugaboo, and blame our bad luck on him. That's one of our jokes."

Vince smiled. "I see, sir. That is the way of young people, sir. I understand." He handed the letter to Tom. "A very proper epistle, sir. I should be glad to forward it."

Tom gripped his hand. "You're a brick. I'll address it." He took an envelope,

folded the paper, slipped it inside, sealed the envelope, and then wrote swiftly on the outside:

Miss Sally Pim,
14 — Riverside Drive,
New York, New York.

He blotted this address, and handed the letter to Vince. And his heart stood still while Vince read the address.

Vince read the address; and he looked at Tom with staring eyes. "Why—that's Mr. Corpus's home," he stammered.

Tom nodded. "Yes. The young lady is a servant there. You may know her, Vince."

Vince shook his head. "I haven't been working at the house there for some months, sir. I never heard of her." His voice was doubtful.

"You won't give us away, will you, Vince?"

Vince smile. "Oh, no, sir." He looked at the envelope. "'Miss Sally Pim,'" he read aloud, thoughtfully; and then his cheeks turned pale. "Sally Pim? Sarah Pim?" he cried, and backed away from Tom. "Oh! Oh! My God, sir!"

He jammed the envelope into his pocket, turned, opened the door and fled.

CHAPTER X.

THE STRASSBURG GOOSE.

TOM'S period of training began quietly. Vince, who had fled with Tom's letter, returned to the room an hour later. His face was impassive; he had recovered his composure. Tom asked briskly:

"Well, Vince?"

"Yes, sir," Vince stammered.

"Did you mail that letter?"

"Y-yes, sir."

Tom leaped at the little man and caught him by the shoulders. "You're lying, Vince. You gave it to Gulworthy."

Vince shook his head vehemently; and when Tom released him and he could speak, he said earnestly: "I assure you, sir, the letter was mailed."

"Did you mail it?"

"I sent it to the mail, sir."

"Sent it? By whom?"

Vince hesitated. "By—by Archibald, sir."

Tom stared blankly. "Archibald? Has he gone to mail it?"

"Yes, sir."

"He has, has he!" he ejaculated. "Then here's where I decamp, Vince."

Vince shook his head. "That is quite impossible, sir."

"Why is it?"

"Archibald took the motor-boat—the only boat on the island."

"Are Sleen and Gulworthy still here?"

"No, sir. He took them ashore."

"Then I'll swim."

"It is sixteen miles to land, sir."

Tom threw up his hands. "Anyway," he vowed, "I'm going to be hard to find when they get back. Is there any one on the island but you and me, Vince?"

"No, sir."

"Good!" He turned to the door; but Vince caught his arm.

"Please, sir," the valet begged. "You will only make trouble for me, sir. I've done you a good turn."

Tom laughed. "That's right, Vince. But I can't help it. I'm going to get out of here, Vince."

Vince sighed. "Will you not believe me when I say you cannot escape?"

"I believe nothing. I'm going to try and see." He whirled to the door again.

Said Vince, behind him, in a new tone: "Stop!" Tom stopped, turned—

The little valet held an enormous automatic pistol leveled at Tom's belt. "You'll have to sit down, sir. Give me your word to sit still, or I must tie you up."

Tom threw back his head and laughed. "Why Vince, you couldn't hit a barn with that thing."

Vince looked sidewise around the room. On the further wall hung a mirror, with a three-branched candlestick set in each side of it. The automatic bellowed; Tom dodged. Silence fell again; and Vince said quietly: "You see, sir, I have shot the wick off the outside candle on each side of the mirror."

Tom looked; he strode across the room and peered at the candles. Vince had

proved himself. The wick of each, with a pinch of tallow from the candle-points, had been shot clean away. Tom grinned and held up his hands. "I surrender," he said.

"Very good, sir," said Vince; and the pistol miraculously disappeared inside his coat. Tom sat down in the nearest chair.

"Would you really shoot a man, Vince?" he demanded.

"If you were to escape before Beauregard's return," said Vince steadily, "Mr. Gulworthy would send me to the electric chair within the month."

Tom stared at the little man. "You mean—you are a murderer, Vince?"

"Unfortunately, yes, sir."

"Why Vince, I'm ashamed of you. A man of your tender heart."

"I had a -a rendezvous with a young lady," Vince explained. "It was a very tender moment, sir. We loved each other dearly. I held her in my arms. She was —somewhat taller than I, sir; and I was forced to climb upon a park bench in order to embrace her—properly, sir. A man surprised us at that moment; and I killed him when he laughed."

The grin disappeared magically from Tom's countenance. He was gravity itself. He rose and held out his hand. "You did right, Vince," he declared. "I respect you."

Vince touched a knuckle to his eye. "I am-- a very sentimental man, sir," he apologized. "I cannot bear to have my affections ridiculed."

They gripped hands like brothers. Then Vince said smoothly, "I will serve your dinner now, sir."

The dinner was delicious. Tom said as much. Vince nodded. "Ah, yes, sir," he agreed. "Dr. Sleen's orders, sir."

Tom lost his appetite. He pushed back his chair. "Vince," he protested. "You should have more delicacy—than to remind me—"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Vince.

"Granted." Tom assured him.

When the repast was concluded and the traces removed, Vince said: "You are to take a walk with me in the garden, now, sir."

Tom looked at him with an eager light in his eyes; and Vince saw and explained carefully: "You will not attempt to escape, sir. I should be obliged to—" He did not finish the threat. Tom studied him uneasily.

"Do you always carry that cannon, Vince?"

"Not when Archibald is here, sir. It would not be safe. I am a very hot-tempered man; and Archibald sometimes provokes me."

"I see," Tom grinned. Well, I'll be good, Vince."

They walked sedately in the gardens for an hour. Tom, though he was careful to preserve a discreet decorum, used his eyes. At the end of the hour, he knew his surroundings.

The house in which he was imprisoned was a palatial structure of the "cottage" type familiar along the shore. It was three stories high; and it must contain, he judged, thirty or forty rooms. The island on which it stood was about a quarter of a mile long, and half as wide. It was well wooded, with a sandy beach on the seaward side, and a beach of pebbles on the side toward the distant land. Besides the house itself, the island held a dairy barn, now unused; a greenhouse, with many broken panes; and a boat-house. Vince explained that the place had not been in use for two or three years. Mr. Corpus preferred to be nearer his business. This was too inaccessible.

The boat-house was empty. Archibald had taken the power-boat to convey Dr. Sleen and Gulworthy to land. Not so much as a canoe remained. The island was a prison. Tom and Vince walked clear around it, and Tom searched the waters on every side; but there was no craft within miles of the place.

They returned to the house at last; returned to Tom's prison. Vince left him for a little while; and when he came back, Archibald was with him. The giant stopped in the doorway and looked at Tom with a curiously intent and not unfriendly scrutiny. Tom asked:

"Well, Goliath? Have a pleasant voyage?"

"Ya-as," said Archibald seriously.

"That's nice. Did you—"

He caught a glance from Vince; a glance full of warning; and he heeded it and fell silent. Archibald remained in the doorway, stolidly watching him. Vince served dinner. Tom dined. Goliath still remained at his post. Tom called to Vince: "Let's try casino again?" And Vince pleasantly agreed. Tom looked toward the giant. "Join us, Goliath?"

"Ya-as," said Archibald calmly, and he brought a chair, and sat down with them at the table.

At ten o'clock Vince put away the cards. "You are to go to bed now, sir," he announced.

"Oh, am I?"

"Yes, sir."

Tom hesitated; then he grinned. "All right, Vince," he assented. "You're the doctor."

Half an hour later, he was dreamlessly asleep.

On such gentle lines as these passed three days, and then another, and after that a fifth. With two weeks ahead of him before the day set by Dr. Sleen, Tom was inclined to confident hope. Besides, he pinned some measure of faith to his letter to Sally. She would interpret it, he felt sure. "An offer I cannot resist!" would set her thinking. "Our common enemy" she would recognize as the Corpus butler whom Tom had assaulted; and Tom hoped she would know of Archibald and the likeness between Archibald and Montmorency. If she did, she would guess that Archibald was contributing to his distress. He had written: "I have so many things I could wish to say to you, my dear!" Vince had supposed this referred to stifled endearments; but Sally, Tom felt sure, would understand—her first shocked astonishment subsiding—that some one was to censor his letter. Finally he had bade her read the letter, read between the lines, and not to sleep upon it. And he had signed: "Your Devoted," trusting that Sally would remember the adjective had a second and an appalling significance.

All this was hope, but little else. Sally might be merely offended, might cast the letter aside. Or—Tom did not fully trust Vince—she might never have received it. Or she might fail to interpret it. Or she might be unable to find him.

Nevertheless, he hoped; and the days past swiftly.

The fourth day was marked by a visit from Dr. Sleen, who told Tom—to Tom's disappointment—that he was progressing finely. The fifth was marred by an incident.

Tom heard hammering, scraping, the sounds of workmen. He asked Vince: "What's that noise?"

"They're preparing the operating room, building one complete, sir," said Vince frankly; and Tom shuddered.

That night, Tom had a bad dream. He dreamed that he saw Archibald running, with Sally Pim in his great arms; and he woke trembling and perspiring, and could sleep no more that night. Before morning, he was oppressed by dread; and when, after his breakfast, Archibald escorted him down to the garden for his morning exercise, Tom was ready for a desperate stroke.

From the lower end of the garden, it was possible to look shoreward over the water. When he and Goliath reached that spot this morning, Tom looked and saw something that crystallized his desperation into determination. What he saw was a motorboat, coming toward the island; and he saw that it was driven by a girl. The boat and the girl were full half a mile away, but Tom was instantly sure as sure that the girl was Sally Pim.

He watched for an instant. The motorboat was headed toward the other end of the island, where the boat-house lay. Tom looked at Archibald. Goliath was painfully lighting his pipe in the teeth of the sea breeze. And Tom acted.

There was no weapon within his reach. Yet he knew he could not escape a conscious, active Archibald. He doubted his ability to stun the big man with his fists.

But it had to be done. He stepped toward Archibald, between the giant and the distant motorboat, and said pleasantly, stirring the ground at their feet with his toe: "There's a queer bug."

Archibald bent obligingly to look; and Tom hit him under the ear with all his strength. Archibald clucked and fell down on his face. He was not completely unconscious, however; for at once he began to paw the ground like a swimmer.

Tom did not stop to diagnose the case. He turned and ran through the garden at top speed. The house lay at his left; the greenhouse at his right. He was forced to pass between them; and when he sought to do so, two men ran out of the greenhouse to intercept him. Tom perceived that Archibald was not his only guard.

The men were squarely in the path. Tom broke through a hedge and darted around their flank. They took up the pursuit, edging to the right; and in a moment he found himself cornered in a niche between the house and the walled kitchen garden. The wall was ten feet high; and the men were coming up behind him.

Tom turned to face them. They were charging blindly, hands outstretched to seize him, heads down like bulls. And Tom grinned, and poised himself, and waited.

At the moment when the foremost man was almost upon him, Tom leaped. He leaped upward and forward; and he set his right foot on the charging man's shoulder. The man's momentum and Tom's own kick helped him twist in the air and fling himself upward to catch the coping of the wall. In another minute he had thrown himself across the wall and dropped on the other side.

The garden was overgrown with weeds. Tom plowed through them, passed through the gate in the further wall, and raced down the slope toward the boat-house. As he ran out on the slip, the pursuers were not thirty yards behind him. The motorboat—it was Sally, as he had been sure from the beginning—was sliding toward the slip with power shut off. Tom waved wildly, shouted: "Sheer off!" And as the bow of the boat swung past the slip, he leaped for it, caught it with his hands, fell into the water with an enormous disturbance, and climbed aboard. The engine was already giving full power; and they darted away from the island before Tom had dragged himself out of the water.

He had climbed in at the waist of the boat; and Sally at the wheel was just in front of him. She turned and looked back at him and laughed happily. He caught her hand. "You got my letter?"

She nodded. "H-m!"

"You brick!"

She nodded again. "H-m!"

"You understood it?"

"I was shocked at first. Surprised! A little angry!"

"But then you understood?"

She pointed back toward the island. "See!"

He looked and saw the larger motorboat that was kept there, swing out from the boat-house and turn to pursue them. Vince was at the wheel; and there were two other men in the boat. Archibald was not there, and Tom grinned with satisfaction at that. "We'll leave them flat," he laughed. "Come on, let's go!"

The girl shook her head. "They can go three to our two in that. We can't get away."

Tom watched the other craft; and after a moment he saw that, as the girl had said, it was overhauling them. He turned to her quickly. "You're a brick, just the same. Now I'll jump out and let them get me, and you go and bring an army after them."

She caught his arm. "No! I can—What are they trying to do to you?"

He started to tell her, then laughed. "They won't," he promised. "Now—I'm going to jump. Look out!"

And before she could restrain him, he had leaped into the water. Ten seconds later, the big power-boat slid alongside, and one of the men in her leaned over the side and dragged Tom aboard. Tom shook himself like a dog.

"Well," he grinned. "You've got me. Let's go home!"

They paid no attention to him. They drove on in pursuit of the smaller boat. Tom leaped to where Vince stood at the wheel, caught the valet's arm. "Here, Vince. Let her go," he whispered. "Vince—that's Sally Pim."

Vince looked at him, pain in his eyes. "Yes, sir," he agreed. "I'm sorry, sir."

Tom tore his hands from the wheel.

"But Vince, you don't want her. I'll go back."

Vince looked over Tom's shoulder. "Hold him," he said gently; and before Tom could turn, he was caught by the elbows, and dragged back and down into the bottom of the boat, where he squirmed helplessly for a moment, and then lay still. No use in wasting effort.

After a moment, they slowed; and he heard Vince call: "Will you please take this line, miss? I will tow to the island."

The girl answered briskly. "I'll do nothing of the kind."

Tom heard Vince sigh. "Then I will be forced to compel you, miss. My orders."

There was a moment's pause; then: "Oh very well!" And after a little delay, they got under way again, the smaller craft in tow.

Tom called suddenly: "Don't be downhearted, Sally!"

One of the men forced a handkerchief into his mouth; but that did not prevent his hearing the girl's reply. "It's all right, Tom!"

They reached the slip; and Tom, gagged, helpless, was marched ashore and up to his room. He managed to turn once, and look back, and thus he saw the girl standing on the slip, one of the men at her elbow.

She waved her hand to him encouragingly.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRASSBURG GOOSE—(CONTINUED.)

THE coming of Sally shattered for good and all the composure with which Tom had regarded the passing days. Until she came, he had hoped she would rescue him; until she came, he had only himself to worry about; and until she came he had been content to leave his fate to the gods of good fortune.

But now the situation was very different. And Tom, storming about his room that day under the saturnine eye of the gigantic Archibald, cursed his luck and tore his hair and tried to find some comfort in the situation—without the slightest success.

This last attempt at escape had rendered his imprisonment more rigorous. Archibald was no longer so blandly confident; he had learned to fear Tom, and this fear took the form of a sterner vigilance and a readiness to use the harshest measures. When Tom, at the apex of one of his bursts of indignant desperation, threw himself at the door, Archibald caught him by his shoulders and sent him spinning across the room with a vehemence that racked Tom to his heels.

"You be good, now, ya-as," he warned menacingly; and Tom picked himself up, and glared at Goliath, and then grinned.

"All right," he assented. "I guess I will."

Vince, too, was changed. When he had escorted Tom to the steel-barred room, he whipped out his great pistol and leveled it at the young man's belt, and his mild little countenance twisted itself into a grimace of anger.

"You were very unwise, sir," he said harshly. "Your letter said more than it seemed to say. You have betrayed me, put me in danger of severe punishment; and you have brought the young lady to share your own imprisonment. You—"

Tom tried to interrupt. "Oh, I say—" But Vince cut him off.

"Be still," he snapped. "I say you have made trouble for me, for her, and for yourself. No real gentleman, sir, would have dragged into his own peril a young lady for whom he entertained any real affection. I am minded to destroy you, sir; and it will not require any great provocation to lead me to do just that. Do you understand?"

"Quite," said Tom steadily. "But Vince, I assure you—"

"I do not care for your assurances, sir. You took advantage of my gentle heart to betray me; now you shall deal with the harder side of my nature."

"The murdering side," Tom jeered.

Vince flamed at him. "Yes, sir. The murdering side. So have a care, sir."

Tom frowned, looked to right and left, and then grinned. "Vince, I'm sorry," he said contritely. "I've been rash—impetuous. But I've reformed, Vince."

"Let it be so, sir. Let your actions prove it."

"I propose to."

Vince slipped the pistol inside his coat. "Very well, sir," he said, outwardly the valet once more. Tom stepped toward him.

"I say, Vince," he begged. Will anything happen to the young lady?"

"She will suffer no harm, sir."

"But you brought her back here?"

"Those were my orders. Anyone who approached the island was to be detained here."

"That's almost as bad as murder, Vince. Kidnaping."

"Exactly, sir. And you forced it on me. Please remember that."

"But—can't you let her go, Vince?"

"In due time, sir."

"Oh, come on—"

"I have my orders."

Tom hesitated. "Well, look here. Take word to her from me, will you?"

"No, sir."

"Come, Vince. You know how it is. You've a tender—"

Vince raised his hands furiously. "You have tricked me once; you will trick me no more."

Tom shrugged his shoulders. "All right."

"Exactly. Now—is there anything you wish, sir?"

The day passed; the evening; the night. And that night, for the first time since his adventure had begun, Tom did not sleep so soundly as was his habit. He was considering, planning. Vince had assured him the girl would be unharmed. He believed Vince had told the truth. Nevertheless, he had brought her into this. It was his task to get her out.

But he himself was helpless. He could do nothing. And in a few days—a week—he would be— He shuddered.

He cudgeled his brain to find some device by which he could gain his liberty; but none occurred to him. He must wait for an opportunity to present itself, must be ready to take advantage of it. He remembered Vince's weapon. Now if he could get hold of that—

His heart leaped. There was the chance. He would watch, catch Vince off guard, seize the weapon.

On this resolution, he slept. With the pistol in his hands, he could move the world. He set his teeth in determination. He was ready for anything.

At breakfast, he began to study Vince's movements. When Vince leaned over the table to serve him, Tom saw the holster hanging inside the valet's coat, under his arm. The pistol butt protruded. It was within reach of his hand. He caught a single glimpse of it; but before he could act, Vince had moved, crossed the room. The chance was gone.

Tom finished his breakfast and waited, watchful. Vince went about his duties. The morning dragged on. After an hour or so, Vince said precisely:

"It is time for your exercise, sir."

Tom leaped to his feet. "All right. Lead me to it, Vince."

The little man turned to the door. Archibald, Tom knew, would be waiting in the hall outside. He took two swift steps, threw his left arm around Vince's neck from behind, jerked the little man back against his breast, and with his right hand reached for the pistol.

Vince's fingers were there before his, but Tom jerked the weapon from the valet's grip and pressed it to the little man's ear. His heart was pounding. "Now, open the door," he commanded.

Vince hesitated; then he obeyed. Tom jumped into the hall. He still held Vince like a shield before him. Archibald saw them as they emerged from the door, and stared for an instant, stupidly. Vince gasped, half strangled by Tom's grip; but he managed to call:

"Get him, Archibald."

Goliath took a step toward them. Tom lifted the pistol. "Get out of the way," he snapped.

Goliath grinned and leaped. Tom pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened. Archibald overwhelmed him, and a moment later he was flat on his back, Goliath's knee on his chest, and Vince was recovering the pistol—and smiling.

"It is not loaded, sir," he explained briefly. "I never keep it loaded when Archibald is about. You had your trouble for your pains, sir."

Tom, half crushed by Archibald's great knee, managed to laugh at his own misfortune. Vince said quietly: "Let him up, Archibald," and Tom climbed to his feet. "Now, sir," Vince invited. "We will go for our stroll."

While they walked sedately in the garden, Archibald always near, Tom watched zealously for any trace of Sally. But he found none. By the time they returned to his room, he was considering a new expedient.

Barring any chance to escape, his only hope lay in delaying the operation which Dr. Sleen so calmly planned. And he saw a chance of that. The food and exercise which were being administered to him in such careful doses; these were contrived to put him in proper condition for the ordeal. If he could evade the treatment—

His meals were served on a gate-legged table which Vince set for him. At lunch time that day, Tom was writing at the desk. He was writing poetry, as he had explained to Vince; and he had shown Vince the verses. "Only for my own pleasure, Vince," he assured the valet. "I am a natural born poet."

Vince looked doubtful. "The—er—the specimens give no proof of that, in my opinion, sir."

"Maybe not," Tom agreed. "But some of my stuff is good. Anyway, Vince, serve my dinner over here near the desk. In case I have an inspiration while I'm eating."

Vince obeyed. Tom, with a platter of chops before him, scribbled away on his pad before beginning to eat; and Vince watched him for a moment and then took his stand behind Tom's chair. Tom looked up at him with annoyance. "Vince, you make me nervous," he protested. "Do you have to stay in the room while I eat?"

Vince looked abashed. "Why—not unless you require me, sir. Of course, Archibald and I will be on watch, sir," he added warningly. Tom grinned at him.

"Sure," he assented. "This is no trick, Vince. You do bother me, really. You spoil my appetite."

Vince turned and walked to the door, his shoulders full of indignation. The door opened—and closed behind him. Tom watched, made sure of this, looked carefully around the room to see whether he was watched.

There was no sign of a peep-hole anywhere. He lifted a chop from the platter to his plate; he helped himself to potatoes; he poured out a cup of coffee.

For a moment, he regarded this repast regretfully; then he stiffened himself, and leaned down and drew out a lower drawer of the desk. It was empty. He had made sure of this. Then he cut the meat from the bone of the chop, and dropped the meat, the potatoes, and two slices of bread, into the drawer. After which he waited to see what would happen.

Nothing happened; and Tom, gaining confidence, treated two more chops in similar fashion. To the store of viands in the drawer he added more potatoes, more bread, two pats of butter. Then he closed the drawer and studied the table. The coffee remained.

"I can't pour that anywhere!" he regretted; then changed his mind. With the pot in one hand, the cup in another, he crossed to the bath-room. When he returned, the pot was half empty, the cup entirely so.

A last regret seized him. He opened the door and looked hungrily at the store of viands in the drawer. Then he grinned resolutely and shut the drawer.

"If a sufiragist can do it—I can," he assured himself; and he tapped the bell. When Vince apeared, Tom was wiping his mouth unctuously with a napkin. "What have you got for dessert, Vince?" he demanded. "Those chops were excellent."

Vince, clearing away the dishes, observed the three stripped bones on Tom's plate and smiled. "I see you enjoyed them, sir," he agreed. "Now, a custard?"

Tom protested. "Oh no, Vince. Something solid."

"A bit of pie, sir?"

"Excellent, Vince."

It came; it joined the remainder of the repast. And Tom lighted a cigarette and tried to imagine he had lunched.

That afternoon, he tightened his belt. Tom was a hearty eater; and he felt sure the flesh must be visibly dropping from his bones already. He was so hungry that he

felt he could eat Vince with relish and enjoy the repast.

Nevertheless, his resolution was strong. That night, a steak and the accessories joined the store of cold victuals in the lower desk drawer; and Vince, apparently, suspected nothing. They played casino in the evening, but Tom's heart was not in his game. He could not keep his eyes off the desk. He dismissed Vince at last, and went early to bed.

He dropped into a light sleep almost at once; but in his sleep he dreamed that he was chasing a roast turkey up a steep hill, and that at the top of the hill the turkey spread its wings and flew. He thought he leaped after this turkey, leaped into the air, and began to fall; and he woke to find himself on his hands and knees before the desk, the treasure drawer within his reach.

A dim night light was burning in the room. He could see the drawer. The house was still. No one was stirring. Tom cautiously drew the drawer open. He peered in.

The steak was still there; the chops; everything! They were cold; but they were indescribably tempting. The rich fragrance of them swept up to Tom's face. He reached out one hand—picked up the steak gingerly—

His strength returned; he dropped it, closed the drawer, turned resolutely to his bed, climbed in.

Some of the richness of the steak had clung to his fingers. He sucked all of them tenderly, and at last dropped off to sleep.

When Tom woke in the morning, he could smell that steak. At first it made him desire it; then he clapped himself on the chest. "Brace up, brace up," he urged himself. "Show your courage, Tom."

And he lighted a cigarette, so that the smoke might obscure the other fragrance and deceive Vince's sensitive nostrils. The device succeeded; for Vince, apparently, did not suspect.

Tom's ham and eggs went the way of the other good things. Vince seemed to accept the order that banished him at meal time without a qualm. In mid-morning, he took Tom for the usual grave stroll through the gardens. Luncheon was consigned to an identical perdition. Tom by this time was suffering; he felt gaunt; he was surprised that Vince did not discover his condition.

He remembered having read an article by a man who had fasted forty days. This man asserted that after the first three days, there was no discomfort. Tom calculated swiftly. "Day and a half gone," he told himself. "Now if I can stick it out that much longer—"

But that afternoon, Dr. Sleen came to make one of his regular examinations; and he had scarce looked at Tom before he turned indignantly to Vince.

"Vince," he said sharply, "you have not given this man the prescribed diet."

Vince looked startled. "Beg pardon, sir. He's had just what you ordered, sir."

"Nonsense," the doctor barked. "The man's half starved. Aren't you, Duncan?"

Tom swallowed hard. "Why, no, indeed, sir," he swore, and tried to look happy and well fed. "I've had the best of everything, Dr. Sleen."

The doctor growled; then he grunted; then he felt Tom's pulse and looked at his tongue; and then he whirled on Vince. "This man has not eaten a bite for at least twenty-four hours," he snapped. "Don't lie to me."

"B-but I served him, sir."

"Did you see him eat it?"

"N-no, sir. He sent me from the room."

The doctor's eyes lighted up. "Aha!" he fairly exulted. And he pointed a stern finger at Tom. "What did you do with that food, young man?"

"Ate it," said Tom stubbornly.

Dr. Sleen whirled to Vince. "Search the room, Vince. Be quick! And order some broth, at once!"

Vince slipped out to send the order, returned and looked under the bed, in the bed, under the mattress, atop the canopy; he went to the dresser and examined each drawer; he looked into the hall; and so at last turned to the desk and pulled out drawer after drawer. And in the end, aghast, hands upraised—

"My God, sir! Here it is!" he cried.

Dr. Sleen bent to look; and he turned

to Tom and shook his head reprovingly. "Bad, bad young man!" he warned.

Tom tried to leap to his feet, but his legs were shaky. He staggered to his feet and shook his finger in the doctor's face. "I won't eat!" he vowed. "I'll starve. My heart's no good, anyway."

The doctor smiled. The broth arrived, a steaming odorous cup. Dr. Sleen turned to Vince. "Call Archibald," he directed.

Goliath was summoned. The doctor pointed to Tom. "Lay him on the bed," he directed; and Tom's feeble struggles did not even delay Goliath's obedience.

"Hold him there," the doctor said gently; and he took the cup of broth and came and stood beside Tom and asked: "Will you drink?"

"No."

The doctor set the cup on a stand beside the bed; he brought from his bag a glass funnel; he took Tom's jaw between finger and thumb and pressed. Tom tried to set his muscles, but the pain forced them to yield. His mouth opened; the funnel slipped in. The doctor, with one hand, held this in place and pinched Tom's nostrils together. Then he slowly poured the broth down the funnel.

Tom swallowed it. He had to; and after the first taste, he wanted to. He suddenly realized that he was desperately hungry. With an energy he did not know he possessed, he flung Goliath's restraining hands away, knocked the funnel out of his mouth, snatched the cup from the doctor's hands, and drained it. Then he leaped out of bed.

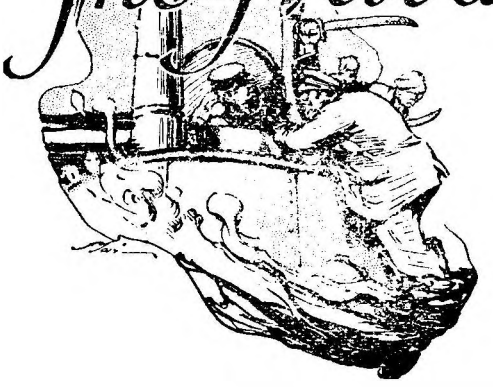
"All right, all right!" he cried, surrendering. "Bring on your steak!"

Half an hour later, he had recovered all the ground lost in the last day and a half, and was still going strong. And Dr. Sleen watched him with a cannibalistic eye.

But he could not spoil Tom's appetite.

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.

The Privateersman



by Henry Leverage

THE gaff-topsail schooner Ranger, with sails furled and her deck littered with dunnage, lay snug against the sea end of the long wharf at Rockport.

The Ranger, so christened that very day by Captain Penobscot Jones, was a Grand Banks trawler which had seen much service. Her hold and planks reeked of codfish. Her brown canvas, patched in many places, had been the butt of every port from Gloucester to Halifax.

Captain Penobscot Jones was a fine figure of a man, in the early seventies. He had sailed the seven seas as boy and mate since the days of skysail yards and clean-cut Yankee clippers which flung the Stars and Stripes to the winds of the world.

He had laid the Ranger up over the first

three red years of the great war with the intention of retiring from the ranks of those who go down to sea in ships. He had rounded out an energetic life. He had toiled and sweated and lived his threescore and ten—God fearing and rated a fair man.

Now had come the call, which to him was like the tang of briny deeps and the sagas Norsemen chanted as they launched their long galleys and went berserker into the blood-flecked foam of conflict.

This call which came to Captain Jones was not a sudden thing. He had nursed it. He had reefed over the points. He had sheered clear of all temptation until the Hun to the number of five million vandals had knocked on the gate to Calais with mailed fists.

Captain Penobscot Jones was a direct descendant of John Paul Jones, of Revolutionary fame. The admiral ancestor had helped make the world safe for democracy. He had left a great boarding-cutlas and a gold snuff-box to the Jones family of Rockport. Captain Jones valued these two heirlooms higher than he did the Ranger. They represented freedom of the sea and all which that implied.

"By Decatur an' Bainbridge!" he declared to Ike Crutcher, mate of the Ranger. "By Jacob and Paul Jones, I'm not goin' to stand for th' Hun seizin' th' Channel ports! I'm goin' to slip cables an' go to sea! I'm expectin' to lay broadside th' first German ship—be she submarine or frigate—an' board her. By pistol, dirk, and lanyard—I am!"

The mate of the Ranger, who had assisted in the christening that day, and who was waiting for the outburst, shifted a huge cud of tobacco from starboard to port side of his mouth, took his bearings in the smoky interior of the Ship's Tavern at Rockport, then declared with salty vigor:

"I'm with you, cap'n! That ain't no use slackin' sheets in this fight. Th' Ranger's fit an' trim. She's stored. She's as neat a schooner as ever closed an' gripped with th' enemy. I'm figgerin' she's a bit neater."

"She's that! You spoke like a man, then, Ike!"

Captain Penobscot Jones banged the table with a horny fist. He hoisted signal for more ale. He leaned back in his chair and studied the ancient rafters of the taproom. They were carved teak, like an under deck seen from the hold. He stroked his yellow-and-white beard which spiked out from a strong chin. He clamped his teeth together. He leaned across the table and laid his hand upon Ike Crutcher's shoulder.

"Spoken like a man," he repeated. "Th' kids say we're too old to fight—you an' me. That harbor-patrol launch with th' small-bore ensign ain't no way to clean th' seas. What's needed is seamanship an' experience—particularly experience. I minds—"

"You mean that apprentice boy with th' gold lace?" asked Ike Crutcher, breaking in on Captain Jones's narration. "That swab?"

"He wuz tellin' me he's going overseas to swat th' submarines. He oughta be at home gettin' swatted with a switch. I ain't got no use for correspondent-school navigators—nohow. Lay me anywhere on th' deep an' I'll find a course. I minds—"

"Speakin' of th' ensign," injected Ike Crutcher. "Speakin' of them in general, it's about time we take a hand, cap! I'm willin'. We'll go out with th' tide. Thar's th' crew all aboard. Thar's th' stores. She's well stored—she is. All we needs is a bow-chaser, an' two long Toms mounted aft. We can get 'em—right over at Concord Commons. Ain't you noticed th' guns thar?"

"Used to prime an' load them on Fourth of July!" chuckled Captain Jones. "They're middlin' good weepins. They'll outfit th' Ranger. Nobody'll miss 'em. What if they do? Ain't we going to start a little private *letter of marque?* Can't we descend upon th' Hun? Too old, eh? We'll show 'em what breed of men made this country! By Ethan Allen, we will!"

"Spoken like a man," said Ike, twining his broken fingers about a tankard. "Fair spoken! Shiver my planks if I don't think you said a fair thing."

Captain Jones crossed his legs and beamed down upon his first and only mate. Ike was warming up over the exploit. Ike

was a short man with a great breadth of shoulders. His face was carved like a figurehead. His teeth were missing save two which did not meet. He carried a spare set in the pocket of his pea-jacket.

"Naturally," said Captain Jones with caution. "Naturally, Ike, we must proceed by tellin' nobody. It wouldn't do to let word out where we're a goin'. We'll just give it—we're goin' to th' Banks. There's th' dories aboard an' th' salt an' seven of a crew already. You stir your stump, Ike, an' sign on some more—tonight. Get Slim and Red and Ginger Jake—they'll be over at Concord Commons. Tell 'em to help you with th' long Toms. Tell 'em anythin' you want to tell 'em. We'll pay coaster wage—beside th' prize money!"

"How about th' guns? That's piracy—almost!"

"By James, no, 'tisn't! It's just borrowin' 'em for th' period of th' war! Commandeering, th' navigation sharps call it!"

"Common—what?"

"Cannon law—by Perry! We're actin' within our rights! Heave up another ale an' stir your stump! Wiggle your wooden leg an' lay over to th' Commons. Bring Slim an' th' rest. They'll board th' Kaiser's yacht an' make th' crew walk th' plank! I know 'em! Tell Perth Gully, on your way over, I want him. He'll do as bosun. He hates th' Hun pirates!"

"Perth is married to that widow," reminded Ike, tapping his jury leg with vigor.

"He'll come th' sooner! This ain't no time to be gettin' spliced. Ain't the Hun near Calais? Ain't the sea-robbers launchin' their ships to invade England? We're needed, Ike."

Ike Crutcher upended the tankard of ale, rose to his feet, and tossed down three pieces of silver.

"All hale an' hearty, cap!" he declared. "I'll set right out. Expect th' cannons along about three bells in th' mornin' watch. I'll roust out Slim an' Red an' th' others—includin' Perth. It's plowin' time, but it ain't no time for plowin'—it ain't!"

Captain Jones watched Ike stump out through the doorway of the Ship's Tavern and set a course through the night toward the road which led to Concord Commons, two miles away and inland.

"Th' old pirate!" he chuckled as he stroked his pointed beard. "He's scuttled many a ship in his day. Like as not he didn't lose that starboard flipper to a shark. Seems to me it was in China he lost it. There's more pirates on that coast than sharks."

Having delivered himself of this sage and true reflection, Captain Jones rose, paid his tab, and strode across the planks and down toward the sea-front. He paused as he reached the head of the dock. A shed was on his right hand. In this shed, he knew, powder and dynamite were stored. He eyed the big padlock with slitted expression.

"I guess it can be done with neatness and despatch," he concluded. "It's no place to keep a magazine. Th' lazaretto of th' Ranger 'pears to me to be a heap sight better. Th' Hun ain't a comin' over here!"

This last conclusion put energy into Captain Jones's movements over the hours he waited for Ike to return. He rapped smartly upon the fo'c's'le deck of the Ranger. He repeated the tapping with a belaying-pin. He thudded the booby-hatch with his heel. Again he rapped with the belaying-pin. This time he was rewarded by a stirring below. Muffled oaths, interpolated with sounds of curses and tremendous yawns, floated upward.

"Stir your stumps!" rasped Captain Jones. "Up, lubbers, an' be quick about it! All hands on deck! You ain't on no yacht—you ain't!"

A tow-head lifted above the hatch-coaming. A pair of gluey eyes glanced up sheepishly. Other heads appeared. The crew of the Ranger stood on deck and in the grip of Captain Jones's eye.

"Miggles," he counted on his ancient fingers; "Miggles an' Burke an' Sam—that's three. George an' Gringo Joe an'—Hiram's boy—Fred—that's six—good men an' true. Where's th' other? Where's Peterson?"

"Gone courtin', cap'n," said the sextet in chorus. "Peter's up at th' Fork a visitin' with Nelly Mayberry."

"He is, eh? I'll visit him! Lay aft, you, an' clean up this deck dunnage. Stow it in th' main hold. Get hatches on an' batten 'em down. Loosen sail an' stand ready for a short party—a regular cuttin' an' slashin' expedition. We're goin' to show 'em we ain't too old to fight. Th' swabs!"

"Who said that, cap'n?" asked Gringo Joe, who served as cook, but who bunked with the fo'c's'le crowd. "Who's been saying that, skipper? They ain't a lad here more than twenty-five, suh!"

Captain Penobscot Jones took the cook's statement as a direct compliment. He clapped his huge hand on the darky's back and thrust him toward the waist of the schooner.

"Stir your fire," he ordered. "Get th' pot a boilin' an' serve out some of that Java I brought from th' Sunda Straits. There ain't nothin' better than that to pry your eyes open. That, an' a brass belayin'-pin!" he added sternly.

"Goin' out?" asked the cook from the corner of the galley-house.

"We're goin' privateerin' like my great-great-uncle did!" said Captain Jones with decision. "We're going to show these shore swabs an' pilotfishes what a man's sea means. Ike's gettin' th' twelve-pounders down to the coast. There's powder at th' head of th' dock. We got cutlases an' boardin' pikes—aplenty!"

"Lord a massa," said the cook. "This 'ere's th' ship I've been lookin' for, cap'n."

Captain Jones strode aft and mounted to the low quarter-deck. Here was a wheel, a deck-light and a companion leading down into a stuffy cabin which was shared by Ike and himself. He leaned against the well-shored main-boom and watched the sleepy crew at work in the waist. He turned now and then, spat to leeward over the rail, then studied the white road which led down through the village of Rockport like a streak of foam in a deep-green sea.

"'Bout time he was heavin' in sight," declared Captain Jones. "Ike's usually prompt. Maybe he's run foul of th' constables. A seaman ain't got no right with them shore slackers. Like as not they've rounded his bows an' fired a solid shot. Jus' like 'em!"

The captain's suspicions were unfounded. Ike, at the head of a party of ten, came into view at the top of the hill. Behind Ike strained and groaned three pair of sturdy farm-horses hitched to the cannon from Concord Commons. The brassy gleam of the pieces caught Captain Jones's eyes. They lighted up with a battle glaze. He spat to the deck, this time, hitched up his trousers, and climbed over the rail and onto the dock.

The night was made lurid with the labor which followed the arrival of the cannon. They were brought aboard the Ranger by a watch-tackle. They were lashed to the deck in case of a blow. The hatches were battened. The first of the morning's mist came rolling in from the sea. It wound about the two masts of the schooner. It wreathed the taut shrouds and standing rigging. It hid the landing party that pried open the powder-house door and returned with six kegs of black powder. It cleared in time to see the Ranger's foresail raised and her tapered jib-boom turned out through the harbor's mouth on the first leg of the passage for the North Sea.

Captain Jones saw to it that the jib, flying-jib, and jib-topsail were set. He assisted with the mainsail till the scallops were out of the leech, then he sprang aft and set a course three points into an on-shore wind.

"Keep 'er full an' by!" he bellowed into the ear of Perth Gully, who had left his wife and was now leaning over the spokes of the ancient wheel. "Full an' by, an' by Decatur, we'll clear th' point on this tack!"

"Full an' by," repeated Perth as Ike stumped up and squinted at the binnacle.

"Yon's th' swatter," injected Ike, drawing his face away from the compass and glancing over the Ranger's tossing bow. "Thar she is—just inside th' point. Like as not, cap'n, she'll stop us an' ask us whar we're a goin'."

"I like to see th' swab try it," said Captain Jones, striding to the weather rail and shading his eyes.

He came back to the wheel and Perth. "Slacken sheets and ease off a point," he ordered. "Th' wind's veerin' more to th'

north'ard. I think we can outrun that launch. What's that on her bow?"

"Three-pounder," said Ike.

"An' we carry twelve-pounders an' a long eighteen," chuckled Captain Jones. "By James Beaucannan, that small-bore cadet won't stop us! We'll drop off a half-point more an' outrun him. We're loggin' ten now. I've seen th' Ranger do thirteen, wing an' wing."

"Middlin' sea outside," said Perth, coming up with the spokes to ease the first of the rollers at the bar. "She's middlin', cap. Thar's th' swatter roundin' an' hoistin' signals from her toothpick masts. What's she signalin'?"

"Stand by or take the consequences, sure as not," said Captain Jones. "They always do that. It looks man-o'-war like."

Ike worked up the deck to windward and grasped the dead-eyes. He lifted himself into the shrouds, reached and secured the topmast backstay, and stood swaying far outboard.

The fast schooner, four points off the wind, and with every sail drawing save the fore-gaff topsail and main-gaff topsail, shot past the cutter as if it were anchored. They caught an arrangement of three flags flapping at the signal-halyards, over a low pilot-house. They saw a youthful ensign turn pale at the insult. Marines to the number of two sprang out of an after hatch and hurried forward to the gun in the bow. A frantic search followed for the key to the ammunition-locker. When this was found, and the engine of the cutter sparked up, Captain Jones and his fleet-running Ranger had rounded the point, swung before the wind, and had walked directly out to sea, with a white foam curling astern like the lip of a laugh.

"By the Bonhomme Richard!" declared Captain Jones. "By John Paul himself, I'd teach these whippersnappers a lesson if I was in charge of port. He's tryin' to cut through cross-seas with a dory—that's what he's doin'. Watch him plunge. There she goes under—gun an' all. It's a man's sea—this is! Cast an eye over th' riggin', Ike. She ain't been extended for three years. Maybe somethin' sort o' rotted an' might carry away."

Ike dropped down from the weather rail and stumped forward. He descended the poop steps and joined the crew in the waist. His voice carried far as he drove the green hands to their duties. He aided at times. Order came out of the deck litter. New and stronger lashings were bent on the three cannon which had started to work loose. Noontime found the Ranger out of sight of land or cutter.

A steadying wind over the Ranger's port quarter allowed Captain Jones to set his topsails and otherwise get the advantage of every square yard of canvas aboard. The schooner drove on through a running sea which was tinged by the green of shoals and lesser depths.

This green turned shade by shade into a fathomless blue. The wind veered to the westward. A nipping cold came with the wind. It was off the Grand Banks and mingled with familiar odors.

Captain Jones breathed, for the first time in three years, the wine of his calling. He broadened. He squared his high shoulders. He trod the small quarter-deck with Viking stride. His teeth clamped upon the tobacco like the closing of a hatch. Drops dripped down the long, white spike of his beard.

"By pistol, dirk, or lanyard," he told Ike, "we're goin' to show th' shore swabs we ain't too old to fight!"

"An' that pink-faced ensign?" added Ike.

"An' him, too! We're of th' blood that made a democracy! We're Perry's boys, an' damn well proud of it! Out with axes an' saws, Ike, an' cut ports through the rails. We're gettin' in perilous seas from now on. We want our broadsides of twelve-pounders. Lash that long eighteen close to th' heel of th' foremast. Clear away the ring of that anchor an' get th' windlass aft. Fair sight, I say, an' damn be th' Kaiser!"

Ike scratched his head. He pivoted on his stump and glanced at the tall skipper.

"I minds th' time," he said, "when we ran foul of a German bark in Macassar. Squarehead mate leans over th' rail an' says, says he: 'Watch how you're headin', you Yankee pig!' We watched—old Bill Hook was our cap'n—an' we bein' on the

starboard tack, which was lawful, we carries away most of his braces an' th' best part of his top-hamper, which naturally went by th' board. Them squareheads hogged the sea—now they can't launch a dingey on any ocean."

"They're goin' under ocean—aplenty!" declared Captain Jones, as he laid a heavy hand on Ike's shoulder. "Them U-boats are our game. I'm glad you brought some of that old chain-shot with you. Round shot's all right for a fair fight—yard to yard—but chains an' cutlases an' boardin'-pikes for th' Hun. Like as not we'll raise them aplenty accordin' to th' shippin' news. I calculate them to be as thick as killer whales in Baffin Sea."

"How about th' prize money?" asked Ike Crutcher.

"We'll keep th' first we capture till we get a buyer. There's th' broadside of England to sell one in. There's th' States—at a pinch. I'd like to lead one in to Rockport an' see them shore slackers' eyes a poppin' like cuttlefishes! Do you think they'll know where th' guns went? Them Concord Commons swabs will follow th' wake right down th' road an' onto th' dock. Like as not they'll see th' Ranger's gone out, an' spike th' thing together."

"Then thar's th' swatter with th' pink-faced ensign what set after us. Th' one we didn't see th' signals on, cap'n. He's bound to follow us for an answer as to why we done it."

"By Perry, he will!" exclaimed Captain Jones. "By John Paul of th' Bonhomme Richard, he'll have the whole navy a lookin' for us! Suppose you get forrard, Ike, an' cover up those guns till we reach clear sailin'. Put tarpaulins over them. Leave th' ports an' that windlass go till to-morrow. We oughtn't take no chances till we're clear th' land breeze. I'd like to see 'em bring us back by to-morrow noon. Might as well look for a collar-button on a carpet, then."

"That's my idee exactly," said Ike, as he stumped forward.

Through the afternoon haze and into the night the tight little schooner drove under the splendid seamanship of Captain Jones, whose ancient limbs had loosened and whose eyes grew bright with youth. He held all sail on to the Ranger despite the fact that the wind had freshened to a half-gale. He studied the taffrail-log with concern. Midnight and morning found the schooner logging the same speed within a quarter-knot. It was eleven and a half—almost. Smart sailing for old men!

"Three days of this," Ike Crutcher commented, "an' we'll be well out in th' Western Ocean. You're headin' a bit south of th' regular lanes, ain't you, cap'n?"

"Way to th' south'ard! I'm goin' to shoot th' sun an' then we'll know. You can't get a soundin' here!"

The mate chewed on this statement as he stumped to windward and leaned over the canted rail. The water was very deep and very blue. The running waves slapped at times over the waist and soused the deck about the galley-house.

"Time to cut th' ports an' place th' twelve-pounders," concluded Ike. "I'll get Perth to help. We ought to be ready for the perils of th' deep. Likewise, I think so."

While Ike and Perth and the watch on deck ripped at the rails and bored the deck to receive the eye-bolts for the cannons, Captain Jones climbed down into the cabin, unlocked his green-brass quadrant and a slate, then climbed back with a young man's energy. He had his rate of correction. He found his latitude by a meridian observation. He figured his position three times and took the average. The Ranger had held the speed of a twelve-day boat. She would have shamed many tramp steamers. It was only a question of the northwestern half-gale holding and they would raise an Ireland landfall before the green crew had found sea-legs.

A lessening of the northwester allowed deckroom for drills in cutlas practise which were given by Ike Crutcher despite the handicap of his jury leg. The crew were put through cut and parry, thrust and guard. They were whipped into swordsmen by main strength from the mate, and polished off by Captain Jones's biting tongue, which had assumed an authoritative tone.

His appearance upon the quarter-deck of the Ranger, garbed in great sea-boots of an ancient pattern, and wearing a weighty

cutlas at his side, brought home the realization of the war to the crew. They gathered in the waist and received their instructions which might have answered for the year 1812.

"Fellow seamen," he began, with a glowing eye sweeping their eager faces, "seamen all! We're met hale and hearty to drive th' Hun from th' sea. We'll put up boardin', nettin', an' battle-lanterns. We'll load th' twelve-pounders with chain-shot an' the bow-gun with ball. We'll close on th' enemy an' they are ours!"

A hearty cheer greeted this last. It was like Captain Jones at his best.

"They are ours!" he resumed, with his white beard draped over the quarter-deck's rail. "By pistol, dirk, or lanyard, we'll help drive th' vandals from th' sea! We'll make it safe for democracy! We'll clean th' sharks from th' ocean! By Paul Jones's sword—we will!"

The ancient mariner drew forth his great boarding-cutlas and flourished it aloft. Its hilt was rusty. Its edge showed signs of recent sharpening. A dull jewel shone on the crosspiece.

"John Paul carried this sword on th' Bonhomme Richard. He took it with him to th' Serapis!" declared Captain Jones. "He presented it to my great-uncle. It's been in the family for over one hundred years! Will you follow it for glory—boys?"

"We will!" they answered sincerely.

"Some say," continued Captain Jones, "some, they say, I'm too old to fight—that Ike, here, is too old. I'll leave it to you! A man an' a sailor is never too old to beard th' Hun an' bring 'em to brook! They've done worse than pirates. They've pillaged ships an' committed barratry, murder, an' crimes what Kidd wouldn't of thought of! We're God-fearin'! We're right!"

"Well spoken!" shouted up Ike Crutcher. "Fair spoken, cap. Man to man—I'd say!"

"Take your quarters!" ordered Captain Jones. "Watch on deck, go below. Watch below, take stations fore an' aft. A jug of good rum—brought from Vera Cruz—an' ten plugs of Virginia tobacco for th' first man who raises a submarine. Keep your eyes peeled. One of you lay aloft in th' for'mast an' stay there! That's th' orders," he added to Ike Crutcher as the watches went forward, dividing at the cook's galley.

Ike stamped up the weather poop-steps and took a turn about the quarter-deck before he rolled down to the binnacle where the captain stood with both legs braced and the long cutlas touching the planks.

"I figger," said Ike, shifting a chew, "I calculate that's just what I would have told 'em. They're willin'. They're all New England boys—except Gringo Joe—who's been turnin' th' grindstone an' sharpenin' th' weepins till you could shave with 'em. They're hale an' hearty, that crew, to a man. No ship ever had finer!"

"Sorta comfortable feelin'," said Captain Jones as he glanced along the bulging canvas and allowed his eyes to light upon the polished brass of the bow-chaser. "Sorta feel we're a headin' full-sail into somethin' what 'll prove we're not too old to fight!"

"That's th' way I feel, cap'n," said Ike Crutcher, "only more so. You took th' words out of my sails."

Captain Jones grew serious. He turned his tall back, which was as straight as a pike-staff, and strode aft to the taffrail. There he stood throughout the hours of the watch. He fathomed the sea with new-born interest. Now and then he clapped an ancient pair of glasses to his eyes. These he returned to the pocket of his pea-jacket with a final resolve.

"Here or hereabouts," he said to himself. "Them gulls ain't actin' natural. They've been 'gallied.' They're strange birds, too."

"Gallied" was a whaling term brought down from the arctic. It meant bothered or rendered suspicious by an interruption. Captain Jones had searched the sea for the source of the trouble. Outside of a hard-rimmed horizon and wheeling birds there wasn't much to fasten his glasses upon. Sea-gulls had been part of Captain Jones's life.

He had seen them under all conditions of sea and weather. They had followed the full-score of ships he had commanded.

They had been there in the early days of clippers and the hundred-day Horn passages. As with the color of the sea off the Grand Banks, or the silt brought up alongside the Atlantic coast by sounding-lead, gulls were an open book to Captain Jones. They acted a certain way under certain conditions. The birds astern of the fast-driving Ranger had sighted food and a source for more somewhere beneath the surface. They had gathered for a feast.

"A whale or a U-boat!" declared Captain Jones as he strode across the rocking deck and clapped Ike Crutcher a smashing blow on the shoulder. "Wind west half-north, with an ocean of seaway. Gulls don't watch th' surface of the deep without a natural reason. They rise! These ain't risin'. They're hankerin' after somethin'! There's somethin' here or hereabouts."

"So I was thinkin', cap'n," said Ike Crutcher. "They're workin' to starbo'rd an' to lee'ard. Somethin' under th' sea. That somethin' is carryin' th' mail. It's a fast sub or a bowhead whale."

"Lay forrard an' load guns!" commanded Captain Jones. "Out cutlases an' pikes! All hands on deck an' at stations! We're goin' to run off, an' follow th' gulls."

Ike stamped to the weather poop-steps, descended to the waist of the schooner, and shot orders like a sea pirate. He assisted in ramming home the charges and the round shot in the ancient cannon. He saw to it that more shot were piled at the breech. He ordered a sailor below for the third and fourth keg of powder, which was broken open and placed on the main hatch.

The schooner, under the skilful guidance of Captain Jones, ran off her course and before the wind with a bone at her bow and a foamy wake astern. She neared the wheeling gulls. They rose and called each to the other. Some circled the straining masts of the Ranger, others soared over a certain spot which showed white water and kept moving down the wind at the speed of the schooner.

"Train th' bow-gun on that!" ordered Captain Jones. "Stand by to fire! Put th' wheel up!" he added to Perth at his side. "Let her off an' keep in th' wake of the serpent."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Stand by!" shouted the thoroughly alert skipper. "Stand by, sheets. There she rises—a sub! Two points off th' port bow. See her, there! You may fire, Mr. Crutcher, when you're ready!"

Boom! went the brass bow-gun of the Ranger. The round shot went over a rising dome of gray steel upon the top of which was a double-barreled periscope. The shot kept skipping from wave to wave as Captain Jones swung the schooner and bore down upon the astonished sub.

"Hold it there!" he barked crisply. "Right there, Perth! We'll cut her down and roll her over!"

The commander of the U-boat had received the surprise of his life. A full-sailed schooner with unknown menace—a mystery ship whose bow-gun smoked was not to be taken lightly. England had many queer ships in those seas. He took one glance through the periscope, shouted orders, and breathed freely as the air hissed and drove the water from the submergence-tanks.

The sub went down like a great whale sounding. It kept going down until thirty fathoms were reached. Then the commander circled cautiously, with intent and malice. Three of his crew awaited under the hatchway which would open to a wet bow-gun made of bronze. One carried a four-inch shell. Other shells were in racks beneath the closed hatch.

The Ranger, well-handled, came up into the wind and poised with all canvas fluttering. Captain Jones had risen to supreme heights. He expected a second view of the sub. He calculated upon seamanship and experience to outmaneuver the U-boat. He shot his orders with close-bitten lips. They brought heart to the green crew and Ike Crutcher, who had loaded the bow-gun for a second shot.

"Democracy expects every man to do his duty!" declared the skipper, waving his cutlas. "We must act first and cheer afterward. Mr. Crutcher, have you loaded with chain-shot?"

Ike glanced at the sea, which was strangely bare. He stooped and breathed on his glowing match-staff.

"Double-shotted!" he called from forward.

Captain Jones sprang up into the weather shrouds and glared along the flapping canvas till his eyes fastened upon a bore of water which was rising ahead of the bow of the schooner. It was not more than five cable-lengths away.

"Hard up!" he bellowed to Perth at the wheel. "Put her hard up! All th' way up!"

The Ranger swung off as there emerged from out of the green surface, over the starboard bow, a wicked-looking snout, and then a wet gun, to the breech of which climbed a squad of dungaree-clad marines of the Kaiser's service.

They laced a close-set shrapnel shell into the schooner's straining rigging. They repeated before Ike could touch off the bow-gun. The chain-shot, well-aimed by a hasty squint, crashed against the conning-tower of the sub. It wound about the periscope and then glanced to leeward, where it fell into the sea. The port gun of the schooner spoke with a heavy report. The solid shot missed the sloping after deck of the sub. It skipped lightly across the waves.

"By Ethan Allen!" shouted Captain Jones. "By th' Continental Congress, I'll have th' blood of that snake!"

The snake, however, had the advantage of super-weapons which could be fired ten times each minute. The gun-crew of the sub recovered from their surprise and started lowering their range. The foretopmast of the schooner, with its fore-gaff topsail and jib-topsail, came crashing about Ike Crutcher's ears. He backed from the wreckage as a two-second-set shrapnel burst in the waist of the schooner and splintered the galley-house.

"Steady!" trumpeted the doughty skipper in the weather shrouds. "Steady, an' stand by to board her!"

The Ranger knifed down upon the long, snaky back of the super-sub. The range lessened. The German crew at the wet gun hesitated at the exhibition of masterly seamanship from the white-bearded captain in the weather shrouds of the schooner. They fired with swift-set fuse. It was too short a distance to burst on the Ranger's deck. It passed through the mainmast backstay and the shrouds, just missing Captain Jones.

"Stand by! Up cutlas an' at 'em! All clear forrard!" He shot over the deck like three flaps of a giant sail.

It was then that the German commander loosed a lesser-caliber torpedo with a hundred-kilogram bursting charge. It flashed beneath the intervening sea like a white shark. It struck, even before the line of bubbles had formed, the after run of the schooner. It exploded with the rendering crack of doom. The poop, the fife-rail, and the mainmast of the Ranger lifted in a mushroom of lurid light and acrid smoke. The air filled with splinters, buckets, hatches, deck-lights, and the uprooted planks of the schooner.

A blackness followed this explosion, through which Captain Jones struggled and groped, and down into which he felt himself being engulfed despite his manful efforts.

Still clutching the great cutlas which Paul Jones had carried, Captain Jones came to the surface and spouted like a walrus breaking from a vast depth. He rolled over, thrust out his left arm, and began to swim in the direction of a floating chicken-coop.

A stout voice hailed him with a series of attracting shouts. He treaded water and turned. He saw with bloodshot eyes a dory floating in the center of the wreckage which marked the last of the schooner Ranger. Into this dory Ike Crutcher and five of the crew had climbed. Perth was coming alongside with a great overhand stroke. Hope again seized the captain's brain. All was not lost.

Swirled in the after-suction and resolute to the point of any desperate enterprise, Captain Penobscot Jones struck out for the overfilled dory, and reached it even before Ike clutched Perth.

"By James!" he sputtered fiercely. "By John Paul Jones, I'll not give up th' fight! See anythin' of that sub, Ike?"

Ike blinked. He screwed his hard face into a harder knot. He burned the sea with his glance as he swept the near surface,

then reached for a great dirk which was still in his belt.

"Yon she is!" he said suddenly, as he pointed the dirk over the wreckage. "Thar's her periscope! Th' serpent!"

Captain Jones reached upward, seized the thwart of the dory, and lifted himself half out of the sea. His eyes blazed. A sheath of crimson fell over them. His jaw clamped and lifted his wet beard.

"Row! Damn you, row!" he ordered. "Get over there before they come up! We'll show 'em—th' Hun snakes! By Paul Jones—we will!"

"There's Gringo Joe," said Ike. "He's swimmin' this way, cap'n."

"I'll get him! We'll need all the help we can get!"

The dory, laden to the thwarts, and propelled by oar and paddle and hand, crossed the sea between the rollers and approached the rising flush deck of the submarine which was emerging to make an observation.

Captain Jones reached and clutched the cook of the Ranger by the collar of his brine-soaked coat.

"Come along!" he declared with cutting wrath. "Come we'll finish this! We haven't yet begun th' fight!"

The commander of the U-boat was acting in the manner of submarine skippers the red seas over. He had instructions to record all details of the warfare so that the tonnage sunk could be reported to Wilhelmshaven and Admiral Capelle, of the Junker party.

He had most certainly struck the schooner with a well-placed torpedo of the latest and most economical construction. The thud under water had denoted a success of the first magnitude. He trimmed his ballast-tanks, circled, and then set the hydroplanes for emerging some little distance from the wreckage. This was all according to practise which had brought the best results.

It was for this reason, and no other, that the German commander received the surprise of his life. He had not sunk a peaceful trawler in the performance of its fishing duties. He had not launched two hundred kilograms of wood-pulp explosive at a sheep. It had struck a lion, or rather a den of lions.

The lifting of the conning-tower hatch, after the handles released the asbestos packing which was used in place of rubber, allowed the commander to thrust his head and considerable of his body above the metallic rim. He turned with a broad smile in order to determine the extent of the damage. He stiffened like a Prussian who had received an order to take Ypres.

A dory, small and crowded, cleared the last of the wreckage and grated its flat bottom some distance up the flush deck of the sub. From out of this dory wild men sprang with lurid oaths and ancient weapons. The leader of this boarding party, without benefit of preamble, reached upward and wound a long, cablelike arm about the German's neck. A huge cutlas was drawn backward, the commander's head was released for a moment, then it almost parted from the shoulders in one swinging cleaver-blow which would have severed the life from almost any Hun.

"After me, men!" roared Captain Jones, as he swung a leg over the conning-tower's edge. "After me, an' we'll swab up 'tween decks. There ain't a goin' to be no quarter, either. By Paul Jones—there ain't!"

Sodden, blood-stained, and lion-roaring—the Yankee captain dropped down through the tower's gloom, thrust and parried with short strokes, then carved his way to the gratings before the wheel and object-glass of the periscope.

Here he rallied the crew, who had followed close at his heels. They charged aft and among a full score astonished Germans. Sabers, dirks, and cutlases flashed. A broken oar swished through the steel-lined gangway. The Huns backed and covered their faces with their hands, crying, "*Kamerad!*"

Others in dark angles spat fire from reeking tubes at the doughty captain. He waded through the mist of powder-smoke and mopped up, with his great, bull voice roaring and his cutlas jabbing—short-armed and deadly.

He went down, only to rebound with double vigor. He drew back his white sleeves, rolled his cuffs up over his elbows,

and started forward as Perth, with the oar, announced all was clear in the engine and battery compartments.

Beneath the fore hatch, which should have opened to the air and the wet deck-gun, Captain Jones saw forms crouching and attempting to escape by that channel. He charged them with berserker bullying. He shrilled in the triumph of his hour. He struck. He swung back his corded and bloody arm, and struck again. The fight was all out of the Germans. They had no count as to the number of men who had boarded the submarine. Its weak link, the rift in its armor, was blindness.

"By th' Drake an' th' Serapis!" roared Captain Jones, planting a foot on a prone marine and glaring upward at the closed hatch. "By the Continental Congress, we've mopped up! Good thing, somebody stayed on deck an' held th' hatch. They'd of flanked us if somebody hadn't!"

The "somebody" proved to be Ike Crutcher, who had jammed his jury leg between the gun and the hatch in such a manner it could not be opened from beneath.

He staggered upward and freed himself as Captain Jones climbed out through the conning-tower and dropped to the wave-lapped deck of the submarine.

"I held her!" blurted Ike, mopping his brow. "By crickety, I held her down! Th' snakes!"

"Right you are!" declared the tall Yankee. "Good work, too! Five of them are dead—th' rest are under th' deck aft, where Perth is sittin' with a pistol he borrowed. They won't move much, either!"

Ike blinked and swept the sea with widening eyes. He paused in one position and tapped a rivet with the tip of his jury stump.

"Yon comes a swatter or a sea-serpent," he said, "headin' this way, cap'n."

"It's th' small-bore ensign what's followed us from Rockport!" declared the Yankee, working his beard up and down. "It's him—by Jones!"

"Seems we ought to hoist a flag," suggested Ike. "They're standin' by that three-pounder!"

The flag which Captain Penobscot Jones pulled out from under his blood-stained shirt was ancient and torn. He lashed it to the periscope of the sub with tender concern. He dropped down to the deck and swung toward the cautious swatter which had reached the wreckage of the schooner Ranger.

"Too old to fight?" he said to Ike. "We've shown 'em! A man ain't done till he says he is. He ain't beat till he admits it! There's a whole lot of gospel in that—by ginger!"

Ike Crutcher, mate of the torpedoed schooner Ranger, did not answer.

He screwed his eyes to gimlets and studied the Pine-Tree Flag which fluttered at the periscope of the submarine. It came to him with majestic thought that the spirit of Admiral John Paul Jones had helped them snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

CHEERIO

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

NEVER look sad,
Always seem glad,
No matter if you have
Got troubles, my lad.
The world needs your smile,
So laugh all the while,
For a merry heart carries us
Many a mile.

The Crimson Alibi

by Octavus Roy Cohen.

Author of "The Morning After," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

THE morning after old Joshua Quincy was found murdered in his study, Roger Fanshaw, a shady character who had never been actually "caught with the goods," called on Detective Carroll, and told him he had gone to Quincy's house the night before, intending to kill him, but had found Quincy dead, with a dagger in his heart.

Fanshaw, because of his peculiar past relations with Quincy, knew that he would be suspected unless the crime could be fastened on some one else. There were several others who might have killed Quincy; who had adequate motives, and any of whom might be convicted on circumstantial evidence. This was what Fanshaw hoped would happen, as soon as possible, for his own safety. He urged Carroll to take the case in his behalf.

During this interview Carroll received a telephone message from the chief of police, asking him to take the case for the police department, and he accepted the commission.

Young Andrew Quincy, the murdered man's nephew, who had lived with his uncle since his orphaned boyhood, and with whom he had had frequent and violent quarrels, had been very drunk on the night of the murder, and the two had quarreled with even more than usual violence. At the end of the quarrel Andrew had left the house in a rage, and the old man's dead body had been found in the study shortly after. After he had spent the night down-town, drinking himself into a state of insensibility, Andrew had been arrested by the police, charged with the murder of his uncle. Carroll called on him in his cell at headquarters, and was favorably impressed by the straightforward manner in which the young man told his story.

There were others who *might* have killed old Quincy—several of them. One was Dorrington, the Quincy butler. He, too, had had a violent quarrel with the old man just before the time when the murder must have occurred. There had been another man—if Dorrington's story were true—on the premises that night with evil intent. Dorrington claimed to have seen him in the darkness, making his way from the grounds with an evident effort to avoid being seen. He could have had no lawful business there at that hour. Who was he and why was he there? If Carroll could find the answer to that question, he might lay hands on the murderer.

The case was further complicated by the unexplained presence of still another man. This other man had spent several hours of that night in the room of Helen Garrison, the maid in the Quincy house, and had undoubtedly been there at the moment when the murder had been committed. His presence had been betrayed to Mrs. Burrage, Quincy's housekeeper, by the smell of a cigar which he had smoked while he was in Helen's room. Helen, however, vehemently denied that there had been a man in her room; and finally, driven to bay by the questioning of Carroll and Mrs. Burrage, she finally announced that *she* had murdered Joshua Quincy! But, of course, Ellen had lied, as Carroll well knew. She was shielding some one else.

CHAPTER XVI.

CARROLL RETURNS A CALL.

THE detective stiffened. Then he smiled. He knew the girl was not telling the truth. And more. He knew that her confession implicated her lover. It was almost an admission that he had killed Joshua Quincy. In no other way could her eagerness to assume, even temporarily, the guilt of murder be accounted for.

He tried to soothe her, but the girl was on the verge of hysteria and not to be quieted. She tossed on the bed, bright-eyed with feverish excitement. She begged him

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for December 28.

to arrest her. Over and over again she told him that it was she who had killed Joshua Quincy, and with every repetition of the self-accusation, David Carroll became more convinced that she had not, for he knew that, aside from every other consideration, she had not the physical strength to have driven the dagger into the body as it had been driven.

He knew that the blow which had killed Quincy had been the desperate thrust of a strong man—a thrust such as a panic-stricken Larry Conover, a furious Dorrington, or a drunken Andrew Quincy might have delivered. But for a slip of a girl like Ellen, he knew that it would have been a physical impossibility.

He told her frankly that he did not believe her. He urged her to regain control of her nerves. He warned her that she was damning Larry Conover, with her protestations of guilt. And he did not question her as to Larry's present whereabouts. He knew that it would be useless and would excite her to a degree of caution which might be hard to cope with.

So he left her with Mrs. Burrage, and adjourned, with Sullivan and Leverage, to the library down-stairs. There, he put to the others, the question:

"Did Ellen kill Quincy?"

The answer was a chorused "No."

The girl's valiant lie had fooled none of them. Carroll spoke quietly:

"The fact remains that we've got to lay hands on Larry Conover. She knows where he is—which is the reason I didn't excite her suspicions by asking her any questions on that point. She's just overwrought enough to think that we believe he has made his getaway. That man is in Berkeley City, and I want to be the first to question him. And the girl knows where he is."

"Exactly," said Sullivan. "Usually it's 'Find the woman.' Now we've got the woman, and it's—'Find the man.'"

"Just so. I want you, Sullivan, to stick around. To you is entrusted the job of keeping an eye on that girl. She is to know that you are watching her. Get that? It will make her cautious. If she tries to telephone, walk in on her so she can't."

"You wouldn't prefer, chief, that I eavesdrop and make a note of the number she calls?"

"No. She'll blurt the thing over the telephone, and he'll clear out before you can get to him. What I'm driving at is the certainty that she will communicate with Larry in some way. She will try to telephone, perhaps to send a note—although I doubt that. Failing in that she will go to him. You must be very discreet when she starts to go to him, Sullivan. You must act—and act well. You must trail her, but let her think that she has given you the slip so that she will get to wherever he is, believing that you have been lost on the way. Understand?"

"I get you, chief! And then—"

"Get in touch with me at my apartment, at headquarters or here. Find me somewhere. I'll leave my locations with the desk-sergeant at headquarters. You can get it from him at any minute. But whatever you do, don't let Larry Conover slip through your fingers."

Jim Sullivan smiled a thin-lipped smile.

"Small chance, chief. I've more than a little bit of a hunch that Larry's our man!"

"I'm with you on that," echoed Leverage. "How about you, chief?"

"I'm inclined that way. But the job is—to *find* him."

"And, thank goodness," said Leverage, "it isn't my job!"

"Meanwhile"—Carroll rose—"you, Eric, trot in the other room and let Rafferty and the bunch know that Jim Sullivan is in charge here, and that the orders regarding keeping people out of that room continue as they have been. They're to remain on the job. They can work three shifts, if they like, but I don't want to send a new detail out. And what about the coroner?"

"The inquest, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I knew you wouldn't want him poking around mussing up your evidence, so I asked him when was the latest time he could have it. He agreed on to-morow at noon. Couldn't allow any more time than that, he said. Can you wind the case up by then?"

Carroll shook his head.

"I don't know. It depends largely upon

whether we catch Larry Conover. Even if we didn't do it, we've got to find out what he knows about it."

"If he didn't do it? Holy cats, chief, how much evidence do you want!"

"Something more than circumstantial," said Carroll briefly. "Run along, Eric!"

In five minutes Leverage was back to report that he had attended to his commissions. Carroll bade Sullivan good-by, and took Leverage with him in his car. They swung down Highland Road at a fair speed.

Day had merged gradually into night. The big arc-lamps at the corners sputtered fitfully; the older children romped on the deep front lawns. Shirt-sleeved businessmen, relaxing after the day's labors downtown, sprinkled their grass-plots with long hose. Lights glowed softly within doors. Again, Carroll was almost oppressed with a sense of the peacefulness of it all—such a contrast with the atmosphere of sordidness in which he had been working all day.

They came closer and closer to the heart of the city, where the white way glowed from great bulbs on the iron posts which lined both sides of the principal streets. And at length he parked his car before Carmody's chop-house.

The head-waiter radiated intense curiosity as he bowed them to the private dining-room which Carroll requested. That dignitary knew that Carroll and Leverage were working on the Quincy case, for that fact was the one new morsel extended to a morbidly interested public by the evening dailies.

As for the rest of the news-accounts, they were nothing more nor less than an expert padding out of the meager details the morning papers had given. The rewrite men had had more time to consult their glossaries of adjectives, and their stories were therefore a bit more lurid; but as for new facts, there were next to none.

The city was agog. The very silence of the police was pregnant with significance. And the fact that David Carroll had been called in and given charge of the case, promised definite results instead of the not unusual sliding over of a case, sans capture of the criminal, until a wearied public forgot it.

Over a planked steak, of exquisite brownness and juicy thickness, Carroll fired a request at his square-jawed *vis-à-vis*.

"Tell me briefly what you know of Andrew Quincy's movements after leaving his uncle's house until he was arrested."

Leverage answered with his customary picturesqueness of speech. "Went downtown on the trolley—boozed up. Went into three saloons—Mahlon's, Pete's place, and Perry's. In Perry's, he ran into some of his old gang, who hailed him with delight: lost sheep returned to the fold; you know that stuff. What he had neglected in the way of getting lit up proper they attended to. He sang all the popular songs and embraced everybody. Didn't mention his home, so far as I can discover.

"He kept on trying to popularize prohibition until he was seventeen sheets in the wind! Then he imagined the bar was a berth on a liner and tried to turn in. Kind friends took him to the Stratford and dumped him in bed. He was too far gone to know when he hit the hay.

"I got down there with Tim McManus about three o'clock this morning. The clerk said Andrew's pals had left orders that he wasn't to be disturbed until he sent out for ice-water 'S. O. S.' in the morning.

"I disturbed him, but he slept through his ride to the station. When he came to, early this morning, he wanted to know where he was and what was the matter. We wised him up that he was in hock for killing his uncle, and he shut up like a clam. You were the first one he'd talk to. Didn't even want Thaddeus Standish, his uncle's lawyer, to see him."

"Did he have any baggage with him—suit-case or anything?"

"Not when I got there."

"Did you happen to think of checking up on his clothes at the house?"

"Yes—later. It doesn't appear that he took anything except the soup-and-fish he was wearing."

"Good! It proves one or two things: either that he lied about being driven from the house for good by his uncle—in which event he would have taken his clothes with him—or else about being sober enough to remember everything that happened."

"You think the kid croaked his uncle?"

"It is more than possible. But I don't think that he was sober when he did it—*if* he did it. But we must not overlook the fact that he had motive enough to start with and booze enough to finish the job!"

"True—but what about Larry Conover?"

"We'll know more about him when Sullivan reports. It's a dead certainty that the girl will try to tip him off to-night. That's the way I look at it, anyway."

"Me, too. And you think Jim can't be dropped?"

"By that girl? Not much. He's one of the best trailers I know. He was built for it—does it by instinct. And now tell me this, Eric—has anything else about this case struck you as peculiar—that is, have you noticed anything at all which seems to indicate that any one except Conover, Andrew Quincy, Ellen Garrison, or Dorrington might have been mixed up in it?"

Leverage's eyebrows arched with surprise.

"No! Why?"

"Just wanted to know," was Carroll's Delphic answer.

"Listen, chief!" Leverage leaned across the table. "You've got a hot trail I'm not wise to! What is it?"

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't think it—I *know* it! I've worked with you long enough to tell."

"I'd rather not explain now, Eric. But I'll ease your mind this much—the trail which I've struck was not struck through any skill of mine. I'm not that kind of a detective. If you're afraid that you have overlooked anything, you can rest assured that you haven't. What I know about this case that you don't know came to me first-hand and hot-off-the-bat by the person most interested. I just wanted to know if you'd run into any signs of it—that's all."

"You're talking in bunches, chief!" wailed Leverage, shaking his head sadly. "You make me feel as though I'd overlooked a couple of warm bets."

"You've done nothing of the kind. But anything you run into that you can't account for—come to me with it, will you?"

"I will. On the level, chief, you beat me!"

Carroll smiled in his warm, friendly fashion.

"Get the idea out of your head once and for all, Leverage, that I've sleuthed around and discovered something you've missed. I haven't. I don't believe any detective in the world could be a more thorough investigator than you are. I just happened to get a little tip to start off with, which you are better off not knowing. Trust me for the truth of that, old friend. I'll tell you more about it later on."

"You win!" sighed Leverage. "You hold all the aces."

Twenty minutes later they finished their meal, and Carroll telephoned Sullivan at the Quincy home in Belleview to learn that Ellen was still in bed.

"You can get me during the next hour at Main 1732," said Carroll, "and after that I'll leave my number with the desk-sergeant at headquarters."

He joined Eric Leverage at the curb. The seethe of the business day was ended. A few late workers hustled for their cars; the early evening diners sought the several pretentious restaurants which Berkeley City boasted. Flickering electric signs decorated the metropolitan sky.

"Where to now?" asked Leverage.

"I'm going to do a little work on my own hook—personal retainer," smiled Carroll. "I'd like you to mosey up to headquarters and play pinochle until ten o'clock. If you haven't heard from me by then, turn in, and I'll rout you out about seven in the morning. But don't leave headquarters, unless something very urgent in connection with the Quincy case breaks—and not then without telephoning me. You got the number I gave Sullivan, didn't you?"

"Main 1732?"

"Yes."

Leverage was well disciplined. With a pleasant "Good night!" he turned on his heel and strode down the street. Carroll watched him go with an affectionate smile on his lips. He liked Leverage—liked his care-free manner which masked a keen mind and a world of efficiency; liked the man's honesty and steadiness of purpose. He was a good man to work with—one who, above all, was pleasant in the face of the

exercise of authority which, in Carroll's capacity, was necessary.

Carroll entered his car, pressed his foot on the starter-button and let in his gears as the rythmic purr of the motor answered. He backed slowly into the traffic maze and guided his machine carefully down the street to Hemingway Avenue, where he swung northward.

The section of the city into which he drove was a relic of past grandeur: a section which had once been the best residential district of Berkeley City when it had been in the thirty thousand population class.

Now the wealthier class had sought the quiet of suburbs and hills, and their palatial homes of the early days had been turned into boarding-houses. He whirled into Eighth Street—the boarding-house section of the city: a section of houses decaying but still retaining more than a hint of their original elegance—roomy places, all, and still homy in appearance.

He drove slowly, scanning the numbers on the front-door transoms. Children romped in the streets. Once he narrowly missed running down a hoydenish young girl intent on the recovery of a bounding rubber ball which rolled under his wheels. He stopped his car and warned her to be more careful; then gave her a dime to buy candy with, and went on. He heard her shriek with delight and gather her two special friends under her wing as she darted for the corner candy-shop.

He brought his car to a halt just beyond the corner of Berkeley Street, once the pride of the city. The house before which he parked bore the gold numbers 127 on its front door. Three ladies of uncertain age sat on the veranda doing fancy work in the light of a veranda lamp. He made his way up the front walk, and raised his hat to a kindly faced, elderly woman, who rose from her chair to greet him.

"Mrs. Burton?"

"Yes, sir."

"I would like to see you alone for a moment."

"Certainly." She led the way through a front hall into a red-carpeted, rather musty parlor, the chandelier of which gave evidence to the affluence of its original owner. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Does a Mr. Roger Fanshaw board here, madam?" he questioned in his most courtly and winning manner. She had been friendly at first—she melted completely now.

"Yes, sir."

"Is he in?"

"No, sir. But he'll be back in a few moments—so he told me."

Carroll affected disappointment.

"That's too bad. I'm a friend of his. I wonder"—ingratiatingly—"if it would be all right for me to wait in his room."

Mrs. Burton smiled.

"Of course, sir, that will be all right, if you are a friend of Mr. Fanshaw—"

She led the way through the musty hallway, past a pair of closed doors which Carroll correctly guessed to be the dining-room, and into a large, airy, first-floor room at the extreme rear of the house—probably a "back parlor" in the days when those institutions were in vogue. The detective gazed about with obvious approval.

"Dandy nice room Fanshaw has!"

Mrs. Burton beamed with pride. "It is a nice room, sir, if I do say it. And Mr. Fanshaw deserves it."

"He's been with you a long time, hasn't he?"

"More than three years—and he pays his board in advance every month." Her manner said plainly that she had thus conferred the ultimate of praise.

"By the way," asked Carroll casually, "how does he seem to be feeling now? He tells me he was ill last night."

"He was that, sir. I had to call the doctor for him—violent indigestion. I was afraid for a while that he was going to be taken down with appendicitis. I had a sister-in-law who was taken that way one night, and before morning they had to take her to the hospital in an ambulance—us never dreaming that she was really very sick, and—"

And so she rattled on through the illness of the unfortunate lady, omitting no clinical detail and winding up triumphantly with:

"And that was why I was so worried over Mr. Fanshaw. Why, I lay awake until

after two o'clock this morning, and I could hear him groaning all that time—"

"Do you mean," questioned Carroll, who knew that between nine thirty and twelve thirty Fanshaw had been out of the house, "that all during that time you could hear him groaning?"

"Yes, sir," she answered firmly, "I didn't close my eyes, and there wasn't a minute that I couldn't hear him pitching and tossing about on his bed!"

And though Carroll did not speak his thoughts, he marveled at Fanshaw's knowledge of boarding-house-landlady psychology which had builded so perfect an *alibi* on nothing.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO OF A KIND.

THE well-meaning, if excessively garrulous, Mrs. Burton eventually departed, leaving Carroll in sole possession of Fanshaw's room. And once the door had closed behind her, the detective got busy.

He worked swiftly and efficiently. Straight to the clothes-press he went and examined carefully every pocket in every suit hanging there—without result. Bureau and chiffonier drawers were pulled open, fingered through and closed again. The trunk was tried, found locked, and left untouched. Then Carroll inspected the room.

It was unlike its thousands of sister-rooms in the boarding-house zone of the city in every particular. A high-ceilinged room of vast area, adjoining a bath-room distinctive chiefly for the antiquity of its plumbing. It was separated from the room next to it by high, golden-oak folding-doors, which were locked.

That room, Carroll correctly hazarded, was Mrs. Burton's, and next to that the dining-room. At the rear were two windows overlooking a small and neatly kept back-yard with its entanglements of clothes-lines hung crisscross from six posts.

To the rear of the clothes-drying area was a tiny garden and flower-plot, and the yard was hedged in by a low fence which opened into an alley at the rear—the alley itself bisecting the block between Eighth and Seventh Streets, and being used chiefly by delivery wagons.

The detective leaned slightly from one of the windows and saw, barely three feet below the ledge, the roof of the shed which jutted out over the kitchen vestibule. From the edge of the shed-roof was only a slight drop, and he realized that Fanshaw's re-entrance to the house the previous night could have been easily and noiselessly effected by climbing first on the fence, then on the shed, and from there over the window-ledge.

He left the window and seated himself in a big easy chair, lighting a cigar as he settled himself to await Fanshaw's return. His forehead was corrugated with thought. His processes of eclectic reasoning were puzzling him—there were certain loose ends in the situation that stubbornly refused to join.

He heard a heavy, hurried step in the hall and the door was flung open. Fanshaw stood framed in the doorway, blinking violently in the glaring light from the ceiling-bulb, the drooping lid of his left eye quivering anxiously. Then he recognized his visitor, drew a deep breath, and came forward with hand outstretched.

"I'm glad to see you—really!"

As Carroll shook the man's hand he was conscious again of a feeling of repugnance, yet, at the same time, an instinctive liking. After an absence from Fanshaw of thirteen work-filled hours, the effect of the man's exotic personality on the detective was the same as it had been on the occasion of their peculiar first meeting.

Fanshaw settled his bulk into a chair opposite that occupied by Carroll and rubbed the palms of his hands expectantly. The drooping eyelid danced rapidly up and down for a few seconds, then grew still, shading the eye and giving to the otherwise genial face a somewhat sinister cast.

"How goes it, Carroll? Any progress?"

Carroll nodded. "A good deal."

"You've landed your man?" Fanshaw leaned forward with ill-concealed eagerness. Carroll puffed slowly on his cigar and shook his head.

"No-o!"

The other's jaw dropped in disappointment.

"Too bad!"

"You see," said Carroll deliberately, "I've found three men, any one of whom might have killed Joshua Quincy, and I'm a bit up a tree about which one to pick."

"I see—"

"So I came to you for a little information."

"Who are your three suspects?" asked Fanshaw bluntly, but Carroll shook his head.

"Sorry I cannot tell you, Fanshaw. You can understand that, I suppose. We haven't even said a definite word to the press. Of course you already know that Andrew Quincy, nephew of the dead man, is one of them. You must have seen that much in the papers."

"Yes, I knew he had been arrested." He paused and then went on: "What is it you wish to ask me?"

"Just want to check up on a few points of your story so as to get the movements of my other characters straightened out in my mind. In the first place, where did you say you were hiding between the time you arrived at the Quincy grounds and the time you started for the house?"

"In the shadow of a clump of lilac-bushes about fifteen feet inside the grounds and perhaps ten feet to the right of the main walk leading from the Highland Road entrance to the veranda. You may have noticed—"

"I know the bushes you mean. How long did you hide there?"

"From about ten o'clock, until nearly eleven thirty; maybe a few minutes later."

"And you said, as I remember it, that you noticed Andrew Quincy in the den—that you saw him cross the den twice. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"You entered the house through the library, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Of course there was no light in the library?"

"No. The light was burning in the den and in the reception-hall."

"You couldn't have seen any one in the library from where you were hiding, could you?"

"No—not in the library; that was dark. But I could see into the den very plainly. The light there was very bright."

"Did Andrew seem to be acting suspiciously?"

"He seemed to be—angry, if that is what you mean."

"And when he left the house?"

"He went from the den through the hall—"

"You saw him open the door leading from the den to the hall?"

"Yes—and then he appeared in the reception-hall and took his hat and cane from the rack. He staggered when he walked down the front walk and turned down Highland Road toward the street-car line."

"Drunk, eh?"

"I should guess so."

"And after that?"

"I went first to the right and then to the left of the house to be sure that there was no one up elsewhere."

"You kept your eyes on the den all that time? No one could have entered there without your seeing him through the window?"

"No."

"You are quite sure?"

"Yes."

"And then you entered through the library window, went to the door leading from the library to the den, and saw Joshua Quincy dead in his chair with the knife sticking in him?"

Fanshaw fidgeted: "Yes, sir."

"And you got out?"

"Yes."

"Where were you when you thought some one had discovered you?"

"In the shadow of some bushes, about fifteen feet nearer to the house than my original hiding-place."

"Where was the man whom you thought saw you?"

"He appeared to come from around the south end of the house."

"You feel sure he saw you?"

"Positive. He walked straight toward me. But he evidently imagined that I had

made my getaway, and evidently went back into the house."

Carroll nodded with satisfaction. Fanshaw's story in that particular tallied so perfectly with Dorrington's that the butler, in the detective's mind, stood almost cleared of complicity—almost, but not quite. As a matter of fact, Carroll knew that Fanshaw's fear of detection was justified in that Dorrington had really seen him.

"You were afraid he had recognized you?" pursued the detective.

"Afraid—yes."

"But not certain?"

"I did not think that he had, and had I carried out my original intention of killing Joshua Quincy, I would have run my chances. But in the face of the discovery that some one else had killed him, I grew a bit panicky. There was the possibility that whoever it was in the garden had recognized me, and I didn't exactly hanker to be hanged for a crime some one else had committed, however willing I may have been to do it myself.

"When I walked away from there I was conscious of only one thought: I wanted the real murderer caught, and I was terrified over the fact that I had left some trace—some tiny bit of evidence—that would probably lead to my arrest, and in that event, as a matter of course, to my *conviction*. Can't you understand that, Carroll?"

"Perfectly. Let's see if I've got this straight: You didn't enter Quincy's study at all—just stood in the doorway, saw that he was dead, and then got out?"

"That's all, sir"—Fanshaw smiled wryly—"and I was considerably more frightened getting out than I would have been had I really killed him. Funny twist to a man's mind, isn't it—that he should be frightened at the prospect of arrest for a crime he was *willing* to commit and didn't have a chance to?"

"Normal psychology," vouchsafed Carroll. "A simple mental phenomenon."

The detective rose and reached for his hat. A glance at his watch showed five minutes past nine o'clock.

"One more question, Carroll: Have you mentioned my name to any one in connection with this case?"

Carroll arched his eyebrows.

"Certainly not."

"Thanks."

A minute later Carroll was on the curb, having stopped to bid his most courtly adieus to Mrs. Burton. His car leaped toward Harkness Street and swung down that broad thoroughfare toward Edgemere, a fashionable suburb. But at the end of a dozen blocks which were negotiated at a good twenty-five-mile-an-hour speed, Carroll parked his car before a drug-store, entered and made his way to the telephone booth. He thumbed through the directory and found the number he sought:

Thaddeus Standish—Edgemere 8107.

He called his number and a deep basso boomed over the wires in answer.

"This is David Carroll, Mr. Standish. You know who I am?"

"Certainly, sir; certainly."

"I'd like to run out to your home immediately in connection with the Quincy case. It is very important."

"Come right ahead, sir; come right ahead. I shall be glad to see you, sir."

Carroll then telephoned Delaney, the night desk-sergeant at headquarters, learned that there had been no call from Jim Sullivan for him; wondered at it; told Delaney that for the next hour he could be reached at Edgemere 8107, and after that at his own apartment. Then he started his car, pressed brazenly on the accelerator and sped swiftly over a winding boulevard toward Edgemere, the exclusive suburb in which the Standish home was located.

Thaddeus Standish, portly, fifty, ponderously polite and acutely conscious of his preeminence in the legal field of Berkeley City, conducted Carroll into his library; his deep voice booming through the huge mansion in which he lived. He was in strange physical contrast to Carroll; fully twice his size, and oozing cordiality, where the detective's manner—to Standish at least—was exceedingly reserved.

Over light wine—which Carroll did not touch—and from behind a cloud of smoke from a black cigar of rare fragrance which Standish had forced upon him, Carroll fired his question:

"What do you know about Mr. Quincy's connections with Roger Fanshaw?"

"Eh?" The wind went suddenly from Standish's sails.

"I know that they have had dealings together—dealings which were none too savory.

"What you tell me now will not be used without your permission, unless absolutely necessary."

"My client, sir," rumbled Standish ponderously, "entered into many business transactions against my advice. I have never in my legal career, engineered a deal which would not stand the acid test of public investigation, sir."

"I understand all that, Mr. Standish," said Carroll somewhat shortly. "I will be more specific. Just when did Joshua Quincy plan to have Roger Fanshaw arrested for forgery?"

Standish was stunned by the detective's knowledge, and Carroll did not trouble himself to explain where he had received it. The lawyer mumbled an answer:

"Monday, Mr. Carroll; he planned to arrest him on next Monday."

"And he had the evidence—the forged check at his home last night?"

It was then that Standish surprised Carroll. He shook his head positively.

"No, indeed, sir. It is in my large safe-deposit box, at the Berkeley City National. Mr. Quincy *had* had it at his home, sir, but he gave it to me yesterday."

"Ah!" Carroll was really surprised. "Then you are certain that it was not at Mr. Quincy's home last night?"

"Positive. I had it in my hands this very afternoon, sir."

"You are not going to have Fanshaw arrested on your own hook?"

"Certainly not. I could never convict him. You see, at the time, Mr. Quincy did not register a formal protest against the check, and to my knowledge, I am the only person who knows of the forgery, except yourself, of course. And Mr. Quincy being dead—I could not convict Fanshaw. Mr. Quincy's personal testimony would be needed to prove the signature illegitimate. And that, sir, is, of course, an impossibility."

"What kind of a man is Fanshaw?"

"A contemptible hound, sir: unscrupulous and without conscience."

"And yet Mr. Joshua Quincy was allied with him in several deals—knowing his character?"

"I know nothing of any such deals, sir—in an official capacity."

Carroll's lips curled back in a sneer. He placed his cigar on an ash-tray and rose.

"Two of a kind!" he said pointedly.

Standish rose heavily to his feet. Then he realized that he could construe Carroll's remark two ways—as meaning Quincy and Fanshaw, or as meaning Quincy and himself. He elected the former; but his face was very red and his dignity exceedingly ruffled.

"You detectives, sir—" he started angrily, but Carroll cut him short.

"Good night, Mr. Standish."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE THIRD DEGREE.

TIRED after a day of exhausting mental strain, David Carroll reached his apartment, to find evidence of the faithful Freda's handiwork in a plate of thin-sliced, delicately prepared sandwiches and a scrawled note, reading:

MR. CARROLL:

Dere Sir: In the ise box you will find yore vishy and some good fresh milk.

He smiled as he made his way to the kitchen and extracted from the ice-chest the vichy-siphon and the bottle of creamy milk. He was not hungry, but he knew how sensitively Freda was constituted, and he would have done something a deal more troublesome than eat the tasty sandwiches to please her.

And after all, they tasted good when followed by his innocuous and favorite drink of vichy and milk. Good little Freda—always thinking of his creature comforts, and destined some day to make a strong-armed stevedore of Scandinavian extraction an excellent wife.

Carroll stepped under a warm shower and then turned the spray colder. His skin

glowed pinkly and he shuddered with the delicious feel of it. Then he walked to his room and turned in between fresh, clean sheets to a night of untroubled slumber, his mind forcibly rid of the Quincy case for nine glorious hours.

His morning shower found him ready for a new day; keen-eyed, alert, his mind nimble to cope with new developments. He ate with a relish the breakfast of coffee, poached eggs, fried ham and grapefruit, and then left word with Freda that any one who called him could get in touch with him through headquarters.

He telephoned Jim Sullivan and learned that Ellen had not left her bed during the night except to go twice to the telephone. Both times, said Sullivan, she had him watching her, and had returned to her room without calling a number. He said that she seemed to have recovered from her touch of hysteria, but seemed a bit ill from the effects of the grilling through which she had been put the previous night.

Carroll gave him orders to continue as he had been doing and to snatch what sleep he could during the day. Then he entered his car and drove to headquarters, where he found Eric Leverage waiting for him in the assembly-room, his manner radiating impatience.

"Good morning, chief; anything new?"

"Not a thing. How about your end of it?"

"Nothing doing. I stuck around as you ordered. None of the men report sight of Conover."

"And Jim Sullivan tells me that Ellen left her room twice to telephone; saw him; didn't do it, and made no attempt to leave the house."

"She will, sooner or later," said Leverage positively, "and then it will be strictly up to Jim."

"He'll make good. I know him."

"I'm hoping so. Larry Conover's our man."

"I hope you're right, Leverage."

"You doubt it?"

"I'll doubt it until I know it. What about Andrew Quincy?"

"He's just as unhappy as he was yesterday. Which reminds me that that girl of his is due here in a little while. She said you had promised to let her see him whenever she wanted to, and I told her you'd drop in just about this time. I say! speaking of angels—" as the orderly leaped to his feet and opened the big front door to admit Judith Darrell.

She was garbed very simply in a blue coat suit and a chic little white turban hat. She smiled frankly as she extended her hand to Carroll and requested permission to see Andrew. He led her back to the cell. Andrew, dressed now in a simple gray sack-suit which had been brought to him from his home, rose to his feet, his eyes dancing with happiness at sight of the girl. He turned eagerly to the detective.

"Anything new, Mr. Carroll? They won't tell me a blessed thing."

"Orders, Mr. Quincy. I can't tell you much myself. There's a good deal that's new, though."

"What?"

"Afraid I cannot tell you now. I'd like to ask you a few questions, though." He paused and glanced inquisitively at Judith. She started for the door, but Andrew restrained her.

"You can ask me before Judith, Mr. Carroll. She knows all about me: all that I have done of which I am ashamed, and the little I may have done of which I am proud."

"What I want to know briefly is this," said Carroll. "Why, after your uncle had ordered you from the house, didn't you take your suit-cases with you?"

Andrew flushed and fidgeted uncomfortably. Then he met Carroll's eyes unflinchingly:

"I suppose I was too beastly drunk," he answered bluntly.

"Do you clearly remember leaving the house?"

"I have a vague recollection, that's all."

"Did you see any one hiding in the garden?"

"No. Even if there had been any one there, I wasn't in a condition to look for him."

"And when you reached Berkeley City?"

"I finished up my tumble off the water-wagon. You see, Judith here had thrown

me over, and she usually means what she says and—oh, you know—"

"Don't!" the girl interposed quickly. "I didn't dream that it would—that you—I know I was wrong, Andrew; but from the way your uncle spoke, and the belief that I was sowing discord and robbing you of an inheritance—"

Andrew possessed himself of her little hand. His voice was very soft:

"There's a dear little thing, sweetheart. Neither of us dreamed where we'd be carried by this thing. Least of all, that within twelve hours I'd find myself arrested for a murder I did not commit."

Carroll's voice suddenly crackled compellingly through the narrow confines of the cell:

"Are you *sure* that you did not?"

"Am I sure?"

Andrew seemed at a loss for words. For the first time the full significance of Carroll's meaning impressed itself on his mind.

"Am—am—I sure?" he repeated vaguely, as if trying to thoroughly digest the question.

"Are you *sure* that you did not kill him?" flashed Carroll earnestly.

"Why—why—I couldn't say—I remember that I didn't—that is," confusedly, "I don't remember that I *did*."

Carroll nodded. It was patent to him that Andrew Quincy was trying to adhere strictly to the truth. There was no hint of evasion in his manner, merely a blind groping for those figments of memory which had been dazed by alcohol.

And there was what, to Carroll, was the most baffling feature of the case. All along he had more than suspected that Andrew had been sufficiently intoxicated during the final scene with his uncle to be hazy of recollection as to what had occurred. And when, piled atop of that, was the fact that he went down-town and drank himself into a stupor—the task proving that Andrew had not done the killing—provided, of course, that such was the case—seemed well-night impossible.

Judith extended a pleading hand.

"You—you surely don't really think that Andrew did—"

"I don't know, Miss Darrell. Had he been cold-sober, and the facts as they are, I would be inclined to swallow his story in its entirety. But when he admits that he doesn't know—"

The girl's shoulders drooped pathetically. Then her pretty little head went back proudly.

"*I* know that he didn't do it, Mr. Carroll. And to prove my confidence, I will marry him now, if he will have me."

Andrew turned away quickly that Carroll might not see the mist that clouded his eyes. He shook his head: "That's a trump," he choked, "but I couldn't, of course—"

Carroll walked to the door and turned before leaving to say:

"I'm going over the ground again, Mr. Quincy, and I hope that I shall be able to clear you. Of course, you understand that it is my sworn duty to find the man who did it, *whoever* he may be."

Andrew bowed his head.

"I understand, Mr. Carroll. It's white of you to want me to get off. If I did do it, though, I'll be man enough to face the music."

The cell-door swung back and closed behind the detective, but not before there came to his ears the sound of a little feminine cry and the deeper, throatier sob of a strong man in anguish. He caught a glimpse of Judith in the arms of the man she loved—and he felt a lump in his throat as he paced the corridor outside the cell-door.

It was there that Eric Leverage joined him. "That girl still in there with Andrew, chief?"

"Yes—why?"

"They're administering the third degree in yonder. I thought maybe you'd like to give it the once-over."

"Who have they got?"

"A yegg we've been after for a long time. McGuire landed him in the Half-Acre district a little while go. They've got the goods on him, and they're after his gang. You've heard of the Lewis gang, haven't you?"

"Rather."

"Well, the guy we've got is Lefty Lewis, *alias* Gentleman Lewis, *alias* Slim Lefty, *alias* a half-dozen other things. And the

chief has an idea that Mr. Slim Lefty has a yellow streak running down his back from the neck, and he's trying to make him squeal. It's right interesting to watch him."

"Can't say I'd be much interested," smiled Carroll. "Rather crude stuff."

"So is hanging crude stuff, but it's a good thing on occasion," commented Leverage sagely.

"If we could bust up the Lewis gang there'd be a big slump in Berkeley City's yegg business, and between you and me, chief, there's more than an even chance that he'll squeal and give us a criminal report that 'll make swell copy for the reporters."

"I hope so. By the way, no word from Jim Sullivan yet?"

"Not a word. And if it's all the same to you, I'll trot back in and hear what Mr. Lefty Lewis has to spill."

"Go ahead. I'll be sticking around headquarters for a while yet. I wish you joy of the show."

"Not necessary, chief. I like to see a crook squirm."

"Evidently. Run along now."

Carroll gazed quizzically after the broad-shouldered form of the professional, as that individual hurried away to the room where the notorious crook was being put through the fire-and-water process. Then he turned, as the door of Andrew's cell was swung back by the turnkey in response to a signal from Judith. The door was closed and locked, and the girl came straight to Carroll.

"That was nice of you, leaving us alone, Mr. Carroll. You have been wonderfully nice all through this."

"Thank you, Miss Darrell. I have never believed that one should drop his humanness because he happens to be in the business of tracking down crime. With myself, I'm inclined to believe it makes me softer toward the better phases of life."

"You're different!"

She laid her hand impulsively on his. "I ought to hate you, Mr. Carroll, and so should Andrew. But neither of us do. Here you are, trying your best to prove that he—he—killed his uncle—"

"No, indeed. I am merely trying to find out *who* did."

"But you believe it was Andrew?"

"It rests between Andrew and one other man."

"Where is the other man you suspect?"

Carroll shook his head.

"We're trying to find out now."

"You mean you haven't even got him?" she wailed helplessly. "You mean that Andrew and a man whose whereabouts you don't even know, are suspected of the crime?"

"Yes."

"Then what chance has Andrew of proving his innocence unless the other man is caught?"

"He won't have to prove his innocence until then, Miss Darrell. Not even before the coroner's jury. Between you and me, I have talked with the coroner, and when he holds his inquest this afternoon he will bring in a verdict of 'death from a weapon in the hand of a person unknown.'"

"And what will that avail Andrew?"

"It will give us more time to establish his true connection with his uncle's death. Let me be perfectly frank with you, Miss Darrell: So far as I am personally concerned, nothing would please me better than to be able to walk in there and set Andrew free, and go with him and with you to a justice of the peace. But the evidence against him at present is too damning. Even *you* must realize that, don't you?"

She nodded slowly:

"Ye-es."

"To speak plain English, Andrew was drunk at the time his uncle was killed. He sincerely believes that he did not do it. But he is honest enough to confess that he does not know that he did not! I have no right to be swayed in the matter by personal likes and dislikes. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Carroll. I understand, and I'm afraid I've been a bit unreasonable, but it means so much to me; more than you can possibly understand. And to Andrew—Sometimes, Mr. Carroll, I find myself thinking that if he is cleared of this charge, that it will have proved the best thing which could have happened to him. It has awakened all the decency in him, and, above all, it has forever frightened him away from liquor."

"I think so. And I hope that he will be cleared."

He escorted her to the front door and bade her good-by, promising to report any favorable developments which came to him. Then he returned to the assembly-room and buried himself in the columns of the morning newspaper.

For perhaps five minutes he had been reading, when the door of an anteroom burst violently open, and Eric Leverage breezed into the room, his face a study in mixed emotions and ill-concealed excitement. He sailed across to Carroll and buttonholed him firmly.

"C'mere, chief—quick!"

He led him across the lobby and into the vestibule, where they could not be overheard. He was fairly bubbling over with the tidings he had to impart.

"It worked!"

"The third degree?"

"Like six little green charms! Mr. Lefty Lewis snitched on his gang, gave us names and addresses; and then to cap it all, played up his State's evidence job right by telling us the full histories of all the jobs he's engineered in the last half-dozen years."

"Yes?"

"And, chief"—Leverage's voice dropped it quivered with excitement—"one of the first things Lefty confessed to having done was that burglary of the safe at Fairchild & Co., about four years ago—the crime for which Larry Conover was doing time!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A RENDEZVOUS IN THE "HALF-ACRE."

TEN minutes later David Carroll and Eric Leverage were seated in the former's roadster, driving slowly toward Belleview and the scene of the tragedy. Carroll had left word with the desk-sergeant that he could be found at the Quincy home in case of need.

For a long while, as Carroll threaded his way through the down-town traffic maze, and then depressed the accelerator a trifle as they struck the broad macadam boulevard leading to the fashionable suburb, neither spoke.

Carroll was busy with his thoughts, for his sympathies—heretofore strongly on the side of Andrew Quincy—had suddenly received a jolt and had veered toward Larry Conover.

Leverage's startling story of Lefty Lewis's confession had placed Conover in a new light. Before he had loomed up in Carroll's mind as a man duly convicted of a crime which he had probably committed, a desperate man—escaped from the penitentiary to prey upon society, a man stung to murder by desperation. Now all was changed. From a quarry to be relentlessly sought and summarily punished, he had changed to a victim of misguided persecution.

For Larry Conover was innocent! Innocent, at least of the crime for which he had been sent to the State penitentiary: the crime which had driven him to the murder of Joshua Quincy—provided that he had, indeed, killed the aged millionaire.

But the very establishing of his innocence of the other crime drew the hangman's noose more tightly around his neck, for it lent plausibility to Leverage's original theory of the crime—that Conover, knowing his innocence, had sought to soften Joshua Quincy that he might face the world freed from the stigma of crime; that Quincy had sourly refused and attempted to summon the police, and that Conover, frantic in the face of certain reincarceration, had seized the silver-handled dagger and stabbed desperately. A far more likely story, now that Carroll knew him to have been innocent.

And there was no longer the faintest shadow of doubt as to his innocence of the Fairchild & Co. robbery. Lewis had described it boastfully as one affair in a series of burglaries which had startled Berkeley City and had set up a howl by the populace against the apparent inefficiency of the police.

And now David Carroll sought Larry Conover to tell him in the one breath that he was innocent of the original crime—had been publicly proved so—and then, in the next, to charge him with murder, arrest him, and lead him, almost certainly, to the hangman's noose.

A vision of the drawn face of Ellen Garrison came to him as he drove toward Belle-

view: a girl robbed of her happiness by the implacable bitterness of the man who was now dead. The love which Ellen bore Larry was piteously powerful. She had eagerly assumed the burden of guilt for Quincy's murder—so eagerly as to stamp her confession a lie, and at the same time carry conviction that her lover was really guilty.

It was unjust—the system was wrong, mused Carroll cynically. A man hounded to the penitentiary, justifiably escaping that he might enjoy the liberty of which he should never have been deprived, goaded to a murder in the heat of passion—and now, freed of guilt in the first instance, destined to pay the maximum penalty for the consequences toward which the chain of circumstance had inexorably led.

Eric Leverage read his superior's thoughts and chimed in suddenly with:

"It *is* tough luck, ain't it, chief?"

"Rotten!" snapped Carroll. "If I had my way about it, and proved Larry Conover guilty, I'd consider that he'd already served his sentence, and let him go free. For if ever death was justly inflicted, it was upon Joshua Quincy, if Larry Conover killed him!"

"Which is the hell of it!" echoed Leverage. "He did!"

"I'm afraid so!"

"And if he didn't—Andrew Quincy did. Either way it turns out, a decent young fellow and a corking girl get it in the neck! Rotten stuff!"

"You eliminate Dorrington?"

"Absolutely. Maybe I'm a fool—but I never considered him for more than a minute—certainly not after Ellen Garrison admitted that he had told the truth about that light flashing on and off in the pantry."

"I'm rather inclined to agree with you. And the way I feel now—I'd hate to arrest either Andrew Quincy or Larry Conover."

The residences on both sides of the street were handsomer now, for they had passed into Belleview, and the car glided silently under the arching trees and between sentinel rows of poplars. Vegetable and fruit-venders bargained with thrifty housewives at the curb, and children celebrated their Saturday freedom from school with hilarious games.

A gang of boys on a vacant corner lot wrangled happily over a baseball game; and somewhere in the slums hid Larry Conover, fugitive from justice, while back at the jail Andrew Quincy racked his brain to the aching point in the effort to remember clearly whether or not he had killed his uncle.

Eventually the two detectives reached the Quincy home, basking peacefully in the warm spring sunlight. Ferguson greeted them in the reception-hall and reported that Rafferty and Collins were snatching some much-needed sleep. Nothing in the study had been disturbed, he told them, and they had allowed no one to enter.

He admitted that they had experienced considerable trouble with newspapermen, with their barbed verbal shafts cleverly conceived to draw an answer from unwilling lips; and he regretted to report that enterprising staff-photographers had succeeded in snapping views of the big house. But as for information—they had told nothing. "As a matter of fact," he added, "we don't know a bloomin' thing ourselves!"

Carroll, followed by Leverage, entered the death-chamber quietly and switched on the lights—the room had been left as it was found: the shade of its one window drawn tightly down—and electric illumination was necessary.

The sight within the room was far from pleasant. Even Leverage, hardened as he was to similar scenes, experienced a feeling of revulsion. The face of the dead man seemed to leer. One could not feel sorry that he was dead—save in the trail of sorrow his departure had blazed—a fitting end to a misanthropic existence.

Foot by foot, inch by inch, Carroll reinspected the room. The case had baffled him to a certain extent, and he wished to reassure himself that no material clue, however seemingly unimportant, had been overlooked. He poked into every corner, under book-shelves, into the bookcases themselves. He gave particular attention to the high-backed, Spanish leather chair, where the crime had been committed; he got down on his knees and examined the rug for the sometimes telltale footprints. What he found told him nothing.

He went to the safe and secured the cigar-humidor in which he had placed the silver-handled dagger which had brought Quincy to his death. Without lifting it from the porcelain-lined box he carried it under the glare of the ceiling light and gazed fixedly at it. Taking the tiny pair of pincers from his pocket, he caught the knife by the blade and turned it over.

For perhaps five minutes he gazed raptly at the knife. Then he closed and relocked the simple lock of the humidor and replaced it in the document-compartment of the safe. He left the room, walked to the veranda and leaned thoughtfully against the rail. Leverage followed him, but said nothing.

Carroll descended the veranda steps and walked to the clump of lilac bushes, in the shadows of which Fanshaw had hidden. He found the shrubs which had concealed him so effectually after Dorrington had seen the figure of a man in the garden.

Still, without a word, he circled the house and paused for a long time on the southern side, placing himself where Dorrington claimed to have been when he saw the flashing of the lights in the pantry, and later, the fleeing figure of a man darting toward the concealing growth at the rear—the west—of the grounds.

Presently he retraced his steps and seated himself on the veranda rail. Absently he bit the end from a cigar and lighted it. For a few minutes he smoked furiously, then tossed the cigar away impatiently and shook his head. It was then that Leverage spoke:

"Got your goat, chief?"

"Almost."

"Find anything in your moseying around in the study yonder?"

"Nothing. I found footprints, of course; plenty of 'em, but they told me nothing."

"They always tell me just as much."

"Well"—Carroll rose—"I think I'll chat with Jim a while and see what move Ellen Garrison has made."

The two men crossed the veranda and made their way through the reception-hall and up the front stairway. The two halls, one running north and south and the other at right-angles—and leading through the servant's quarters—were empty. The doors opening on the latter hall were all closed. There was no sign of Jim Sullivan.

Carroll walked to the door of Ellen Garrison's room and knocked. There was no answer.

He applied his ear to the door and was greeted with utter silence. He knocked again. Still there was no answer.

He placed a tentative hand on the knob. It yielded to his touch and the door swung back. He stepped into the room. It was empty!

A quick glance into the adjoining bath-room showed that the girl was not there. Somewhere in the house, probably, safely within sight of Jim Sullivan—

"Who are you hunting for, gentlemen?" They turned to find Mrs. Burrage in the doorway—her face sharply lined by her experiences of the past thirty-six hours; her garb ostentatiously black.

"Jim Sullivan—where is he?"

"He's gone," she answered simply. "Didn't you know that?"

"Gone! Where?"

"I don't know—really I don't!"

"When did he go?"

Her answer came very calmly:

"Just after Ellen left!"

"Just after— Holy sufferin' mackerel!" broke out Leverage, then cut off short at a warning glance from Carroll. It was the latter who spoke.

"Tell us what you know about it, Mrs. Burrage."

"I don't know anything about it. That is, nothing except how peculiar it was."

"Tell us that—please!"

"It was about two hours ago. I noticed that Mr. Sullivan laid down on the davenport in the reception-hall, and I don't blame him, because he's been up so much that he must have been terrible sleepy.

"After a while I noticed Ellen peeping at him over the banisters, and twice she went down-stairs and came back. He didn't move. Finally—although she didn't know I saw her—she slipped down the back stairs, crossed the grounds, and went over the back wall, and started walking very fast toward the Elm Street car-line.

"I thought right off maybe I'd better

wake Mr. Sullivan, but when I got downstairs he was gone, too."

"Where?"

"Why, I don't know."

"You didn't see him going after Ellen?"

"No, sir. I don't know where he went. I don't know anything about it."

"And this time," commented Leverage *sotto voce*, "she almost got it right!"

Ellen Garrison had disappeared, and a few moments later Sullivan, too, had gone. Good old Jim—he'd spotted her trick, of course, had simulated sleep and then trailed her.

Good stuff! Of course — and Carroll squirmed at the doubt of it—there was the bare possibility that Sullivan had failed to pick up her trail and that she had got to Larry Conover in time to warn him to a safe getaway. In that event, mused Carroll, he'd be glad, for Larry's sake — but sorry for the position in which Andrew would be left.

There was nothing to do but wait; and wait they did, nursing their impatience, swinging their heels over the railing of the massive veranda.

At eleven o'clock the telephone rang, and Carroll barked a "Hello!" into the transmitter almost before the clangor ceased. He breathed with relief as Sullivan's voice came to him over the instrument: subdued —a mere whisper:

"Chief?"

"Yes."

"This is Jim."

"Yes?"

"Can't talk loud. But I think I've got our man."

"Good! Where?"

"Carter's Hotel, down in the Half-Acre district. If you don't know it, Leverage does."

"I know it."

"She—know who I mean?"

"Ellen?"

"Yes. She slipped out a while ago and I spotted her. She nearly lost me twice. I followed her here and hung around outside, and learned from the clerk afterward that she asked for a man registered as Frank Carson. Get that name?"

"Yes—Frank Carson."

"Good! Said she was Mrs. Carson. Went up to his room, 318—a corner room on the third floor. No fire-escape outside. Can't get out except through the hall. I've got it watched. And I'm betting it's our man!"

"Of course it is. We'll come right down."

"Quick as you can make it. Park your car a block away."

"I will."

"Fine! And, say, chief—"

"Yes?"

"Take my advice and come heeled, for, unless I'm much mistaken, there's going to be some shooting-bee, and we're going to be right in it!"

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.

THE FLIGHT OF TIME

BY HERBERT HERON

I LOVED her once, but we were children then—
For I was twelve, and she was only ten.
We roamed the woods and raced along the sands,
Or played at being old, and held our hands
In tighter clasp with joy of being grown.
Oh, happy childhood! But the years have flown.
Then I was twelve, and she was ten. Ah me!
I'm forty now, and she is thirty-three!

Three Precious Words

by Herman Howard Matteson

KYE DAN, so-called from the abundance of rich, brown freckles upon face, hands and arms, spun the tiller-wheel of his power-boat and settled her into a course which carried her parallel to the island shore. From a locker, Kye searched for the stub of an indelible pencil, a sheet of crumpled and none too clean tablet paper, and set himself to compose a letter, using the top of the battery-box for a desk.

Every day for a whole week, when starting forth in the power-boat for his work, Dan had written a letter, with the same pencil, upon sheets from the same tablet. This daily practise in chirography notwithstanding, the inditing of the present composition appeared to be an enterprise of some pith and moment, for Kye Dan writhed distressedly over his labor, chewed the pencil, spat the fragments of wood through the open, starboard port, moistened his thumb and blurred out a word here and there.

During the entire time required for his power-boat to skirt the shore for a distance of two miles, he scratched on with the indelible pencil. He was nearing the point when, finally, he affixed the concluding words and signature, "yours forever, Kye Dan."

On the point nestled a little cabin covered with wild honeysuckle that some one had tamed. A girl, garbed in blue gingham dress stood on the side porch. Kye Dan thrust his freckled face nearer the port-hole, regarded the girl steadily. Obviously enough, she was staring at the power-boat, but by neither nod of head nor wave of hand did she betray the fact that the presence of the craft meant more or less to her than the passage of some nomad Siwash in his high-prowed canoe.

Kye Dan appeared disappointed and distressed. Every day for a week had he been disappointed and chagrined.

"All right, Bird," said Kye Dan half aloud, and nodding in the direction of the honeysuckle cottage, "all right. I just couldn't have did any way but what I did and still played square with my boss. All right, Bird. If ever I and you make up, you got to give me a signal. I'm on my course, you hain't."

Kye Dan drew his letter toward him, added the postscript. "I hereby tare this letter up."

"He did "tare" it up, into thirty fragments tiny and jagged, gathered the wad into a freckled hand, thrust the hand through the starboard port-hole, and fed the waters of the bay with the missive.

The girl continued to stare carelessly out over the bay and at the power-boat, but the instant that the Goduck disappeared around the promontory of rock below the cabin she sped to the beach, thrust her dory into the water and began rowing back and forth gathering up the fragments of Kye Dan's letter.

Thus, every day for a week had she salvaged the bits of Dan's screed, and with the same results. Kye Dan would write with an indelible pencil, and at the slightest touch of the salt chuck, his words became meaningless, purple splotches.

With the sodden fragments of paper in her hand, Bird seated herself upon the cabin-step. She stared down truculently at the shreds of paper. She was irrevocably offended at Kye Dan, she argued to herself, but she did wish that he had a bit more sand. If he wanted to write to her, and attempt to square himself, why didn't he write, then drop the letter on the rock at the point. At least, why didn't he write with a regular pencil that wouldn't smudge the paper so?

Drat him anyway! Tears of disappointment, of anger, showed in her eyes. More than once, when she had heard the Goduck approaching, she had made up her mind to swallow her pride, give Dan a wave and a glad *Klahowa*, as had been her wont. But no! Dan must make the first move. Not for worlds would she have had him know that she picked up daily the fragments of his letter.

Then came a sudden disconcerting thought. Perhaps this was no letter that Kye Dan wrote daily. Or, if letter, none intended for her.

There was Cohoes Gertie who waited table in the chuck-house where Kye Dan boarded. Nonsense. Dan would not scatter a letter to Gertie two miles from the chuck-house landing.

Anyway, what did she care if he did write to Cohoes Gertie? Still, this communication, she felt, concerned herself, for it was scattered daily upon the bay before her cabin door. At any rate, while it seemed sort of snoopy, she continued daily to gather up the torn fragments of paper.

Drat him anyway! If only he'd use a regular pencil that wouldn't smudge.

She tried drying some of the fragments in the oven, spread some upon the step in the sun. Still nothing but meaningless, purple splotches.

She flung the bits from her angrily. What did she care? Kye Dan was no longer her lover, nor even her friend, but was in league with the rest of them to beat her out of her rights.

She walked to the front window, her black eyes glinting ominously. Her angry gaze settled upon the point, and the sand-dunes beyond, in the edge of which began the row of pilings of the lead that ended in the heart, pot and spiller of the Ladyfinger salmon-trap.

No, the Ladyfinger trap did not belong to her, but the location upon which it stood, and had stood for years did. The location had been her father's before her, then her mother's, latterly her own. The White Star Cannery Company paid her fifteen hundred dollars a year for the fishing rights.

Fifteen hundred dollars a year—seven hundred and fifty every six months. Why, she was rich. The angry lines erased themselves from her dark, pretty face as she looked about the trig front room. On the floor was a rug, the wonder of Sinclair Island, with the figure of a big St. Bernard dog in the very center, and with a curly-headed child leaning against the beast asleep. There was a what-not in the corner of the room, with a lot of pretty shells "onto" it. Also there was a piano, the only one on Sinclair. Kye Dan called the piano a hurdy-gurdy and had frequently pounded upon it with a thick forefinger while he bellowed forth the chorus of a favorite tune of his, "Hell, No, Sister, I Can't Dance."

She was rich. Fifteen hundred dollars a year for no more work than was required to sign her name upon the back of a check twice a year. Rich! The village crier who kept the post-office told everybody that Bird often sent away twenty dollars a month to a mail-order house for "fixin's."

She was rich. That is, she had been rich. Now—

Hot tears of anger welled from her eyes. Fifteen hundred dollars a year was a mighty lot to a girl like Bird, but a pitiful sum to a company like the White Star that made as many or more thousands from the Ladyfinger. Still, as rich as was the White Star, it wanted more; the company was trying to rob her of her location, and Kye Dan, her own Kye Dan, diver for the Star, was in cahoots with them to beat her.

At least it certainly appeared so. Kye Dan counted the White Star before her, thought more of his ten-dollar-a-day job than he did of her. How she pitied, loathed him, and how neatly had he covered his real self. Now she knew him for what he was. They had made their *malich mahkook* (wedding bargain), but that was off, off forever.

Bird was no fool. She had sensed what was coming the very instant that an unctuous person who said he was lawyer for the White Star had landed from his fine speed boat and asked about her title. Did she have proper papers showing that she owned the Ladyfinger location?

Decidedly she did. She had the patent issued by the government to her father, conferring ownership of one hundred and sixty acres on the west end of Sinclair Island, of the San Juan group of Puget Sound.

That was all very well, had said the lawyer superiorly, but a fish-trap was driven in the water and not upon land. Did she own the tide-flats and the space beyond where the water deepened to eleven fathoms at low tide?

Promptly Bird exhibited the receipts showing that her father, then her mother, then herself had paid annually to the State of Washington one hundred dollars license fee for the Ladyfinger location. A single failure to pay the license fee would have thrown the site open to entry by another.

Bird, to be safe, had always paid the license months in advance of the date due. The unctuous person examined the receipts, departed in his fine speed-boat.

Within an hour thereafter had come Kye Dan.

Now the coming of Kye Dan was not an event sufficiently unusual to call for comment. Dan came every day, sometimes twice a day. It was not his coming, but the manner of his coming that made the day epochal.

Ordinarily, when the Goduck was within a hundred fathoms or so of her beach, Kye Dan would poke his broad, freckled face from the port-hole, and sing out a glad "*klahowa, tenas tillicum*" (greetings, little friend), to which Bird would reply, "*hiyu skookum*, Kye Dan; *klatawa kopa*" (I feel fine, freckled Dan; hurry on in).

But on this occasion Kye Dan had no loud word of greeting. Soberly, silently he landed and marched up the trail.

Bird stood upon the step studying him. Certainly this stiff gentleman could never be her Kye Dan, even though he had sailed up in the Goduck, and supported many brown freckles upon face and hands.

"Bird," Kye Dan had begun formally, "I just don't know where to cast for a mooring. A party that draws a company's pay should ought to play their game. At least, so I figger. Likewise, while I hain't in your pay, I'm beholden. We've said our *malich mahkook*. When I hove you my word, I hove a verbal hawser that hain't never been uncoiled before in ary port of the San Juans, a hawser sta'nch and true. Now I'm blowed on from east, and I'm blowed on from west, with nary light nor mark in sight. And my anchor-line is chafed to a thread."

Bird studied him suspiciously. "You mean—what you mean, Kye Dan? Spread your chart."

Kye Dan began to squirm uneasily. "Fact is, Bird, touching the matter of the Ladyfinger, you're broached to bad; they's a rat at your riggin'."

"Oh, so, Kye Dan! You mean I hain't got papers to the Ladyfinger? I'll tell you like I told a lub that sheered in here a hour back in a speed-boat, I have got papers, papers that's Bible strong. Lay to that. Don't come flyin' the black square at me none."

"I know," Dan expostulated, "you got papers, but—"

"But what?"

"The boss tells me to dive the spiller yesterday and plumb her. The Ladyfinger's down-haul is in over eleven fathoms of water, Bird."

"And you up and told the boss, Kye Dan, that my location plumbed over eleven fathoms?"

"Why, yes, Bird; that's what I'm drawin' pay for. That's what I'm for, to dive a trap when I'm told, repair web, plumb her for deep. You don't want to claim a' unlawful location, do you, Bird?"

"Unlawful grandmother! Look, Kye Dan! Maybe yesterday she was over eleven fathoms. You know the tide at the Ladyfinger. The silt comes and goes. Average. The Ladyfinger is legal if ary trap in Puget's legal. Why didn't you wait, plumb her again, then tell the boss the readin'?"

Kye Dan shook his head. He didn't know. He hadn't been told to wait; he'd been told to dive her and plumb her then, not next week.

Bird's black eyes flamed, and in a sudden access of rage at his stupidity, at his disloyalty and perfidy she burst upon him with bitter, scathing words. Dan walked from honeysuckle cottage, boarded the Goduck, and had never since set foot upon her beach.

Later in the day Bird had watched through her father's old sea-glasses as two men were dropping a lead from the Ladyfinger's watch-deck. She smiled. Occasionally, as she knew, the depth would drop to over eleven fathoms, but the next rush of tide would fill in the silt again, bringing the reading down to ten fathoms, or even nine. Her trap location was legal. The Supreme Court of the State had ruled that a trap site when averaging under eleven fathoms when plumbed thrice within a week was legal.

For three successive days men plumbed the spiller depth of the Ladyfinger. What had they found?

A fish-trap diver works always at the ebb or slack tide. To descend amid a mass of pilings, cordage, metal and cotton-webbing with the tide at flood was to go almost inevitably to one's death. The terrific surge of the rushing water would beat a man to pulp against the timbers should he loose his footing, and in a trap-diver's rubber and canvas outfit, with lead soles much lighter than those employed in deep-sea diving, the footing was always insecure.

So at slack tide a diver worked, repairing tears in the below-water webbing, freeing the mesh from entangled seaweed and drift. A tear once started will, if neglected, rip out thousands of dollars' worth of gear in ten minutes of floor.

At the time that Bird and Kye Dan had had their quarrel, slack tide was coming on in early morning. Each succeeding day, the tides occur approximately an hour later, in consequence of which Kye Dan was passing to his work well before noon when, first, curiosity had conquered anger, and she had put out to pick up the torn fragments of his letter.

The mystery of the torn letters perplexed her not a little, mildly amused her, in a measure had begun to placate her. A score of times she had made up her mind to wave to Dan, beckon him in, and make up. But she did not. She would make him make the first move.

Then her wrath was blown upon again. An agent of the White Star called upon her and bluntly informed her that the Ladyfinger location was illegal, and that she had better relinquish her filing or the company might find it necessary to prosecute her for accepting money for an untenable location.

"Look," said Bird shrewdly, "I can see into the binnacle far as any one. The Star is after my location. If it's illegal for me, it's illegal for them."

"I understand perfectly," had answered the agent suavely, "only the company would move the spiller back twenty-five feet to a legal depth. Anyway, you have, as you must admit, been obtaining money falsely. Every fish taken in an illegal trap carries the possibility of a fine. When you offered the location for lease, you guaranteed the legality of the location. Why, that very clause is written into the lease itself. If the company should decide to prosecute, can't you see that it would be better to compromise? The company is rich, influential. Really—"

Bird pointed dramatically to the door. "You think you can come surgin' in here and terrify me total? Your sail's flappin'. I got money in the bank, eight hundred dollars. Just let the White Star h'ist its war rag. I'll hire me a lawyer-shark, and I'll fight as long as the tide rattles them clam-shells along my beach. Lay to that."

The Goduck came chugging into view. Malevolently Bird stared after the sturdy craft as it came opposite the cabin.

"My lover, Kye Dan," she sneered, "my faithful, stick to the ship, Kye Dan."

Communing bitterly over the array against her, she watched the freckled hand scatter the paper fragments to the wind. With a disdainful toss of her head she turned to the cabin-door, came to a pause. A long time she stared after the diminishing figure of the Goduck. It popped from sight behind the promontory. She started toward the beach, turned back a second time, then shoved the dory into the water.

A fragment of paper, a little larger than the rest, caught her eye. It was a bit that had been doubled over, the lesser portion floating above the water like a tiny sail. Actually, like some fairy craft freighted with portentous news this fragment seemed to float straight toward her. She reached and gathered it in. The sail part, untouched by the salt chuck, bore the three perfectly legible words, "My Darling Bird."

That was all, "My Darling Bird."

A great surge of feeling passed over her. Bitterness, stubbornness in her heart were suddenly transmuted into an emotion tender and benign. All at once, as she read the words, the feeling of aloneness left her.

She sought for no other fragments of Dan's letter. It seemed as if she knew his message. "My Darling Bird" was quite sufficient; her nimble fancy could supply the remainder.

Then, woman-like, within half an hour she was angry at Kye Dan again, not viciously, blindly as before, but vexed. "Drat him! Such hocus-pocus, this letter writin', and scatterin' it for fish feed. If so be Kye Dan has word for me, why don't he come alongside like a man and h'ist his cargo?"

The following day, when she heard the Goduck coming, she took her place upon the side porch, resolved to wave to him, and give him a cheery call. The nearer came the craft, the fainter grew the resolution. Kye Dan's face was peering from the port. Ordinarily he scattered his torn epistle when exactly opposite the cabin. This day he waited, waited. At last the freckled fist reached and dropped the letter. Bird had neither waved nor called. She rowed out, and gathered the bits of wet paper, but nowhere could she find a single, decipherable word.

During the remainder of the day Bird walked the beach, climbed the trail to the cabin, back to the beach. Suddenly she recalled with a whimsical smile the belief of her Lummi Indian neighbors, that if one in perplexity will walk the beach for half a tide, listening raptly to the sea-sounds, a *tomanawous* will come and whisper the word that will solve the difficulty.

Bird walked, and listened, and a *tomanawous* came and whispered.

Within her cabin Bird seated herself to work out the details of the plan her *tomanawous* had brought. That day Kye Dan had passed to his work at four bells of the afternoon. With the tides an hour later daily, he would, by Saturday night, be going out between nine and ten in the evening, returning to the chuck-house wharf before daybreak in the morning. Darkness, she knew, never deters the trap-diver who works, for the greater part, with a waterproof, electric-flash lantern.

Bird, apparently, since the whisper of the *tomanawous,* had lost all interest in Kye Dan's scattered, torn missives. Instead of taking to her dory, on the day following the decision on her plans, she walked along the beach after the Goduck had passed, stared with amazement when she noted that Dan stopped not at all at the Ladyfinger, but went on across the bay to the Dolphin, a second trap operated by the White Star Company.

Nor on the next day did he go near the Ladyfinger, nor on the second following.

In a flash she had it. The company, knowing his former relationship to her, and fearing, perhaps, to test too severely his loyalty to themselves, had relieved him from any duty on the Ladyfinger.

But why? Was there something that the company did not want Kye Dan to know?

Perhaps already Dan knew of some scullduggery. Possibly the letter-writing was Dan's compromise with his own conscience for betraying his employers.

During the greater portion of the day, Saturday, Bird fussed with some odds and ends of old fishing gear that had laid in disuse in a shed for many years. At eight bells of the first night watch, she walked down the beach bearing a small bundle,

climbed into her dory and rowed in the direction of the chuck-house wharf, keeping well within the deep shadows of the overhanging fir and madroña.

There, ahead, lay the Goduck. Fortunately wind and tide had swung the craft so that her starboard side lay to the offing. Bird brought her dory cautiously alongside, made it fast to a cleat, climbed into the cockpit. An instant she fussed about the cabin, climbed back into her dory, minus the bundle and rowed swiftly away.

Lifting the prow of her dory onto the sands before her cabin just sufficiently to keep it from going adrift, Bird crouched against the bank and waited. Presently she heard the chug of the Goduck, saw its port and starboard side-lights come gleaming into sight like the mismated eyes of some water demon.

The instant that the craft had passed, she was into her dory. Here and there she plied, even venturing after the Goduck had doubled the point to flash the rays from the pocket-light upon the waves left in the Goduck's wake.

Nowhere a sign of a strip of paper. Either her scheme had worked, or else Kye Dan had given over his confirmed habit of letter-writing.

At thought of the latter possibility, she turned fairly ill. Perhaps she had, after all, waited a day too long.

Anyway, before so very many hours she would know—what would she know?

Slipping on her tarpaulin coat against the night chill, she set herself to pace the beach and watch and wait. By two bells of the morning, two o'clock, the tide would begin to flood. Kye Dan would be passing by two o'clock, and by two thirty would be in his bunk sound asleep. Then she'd know.

Two bells chimed from the tiny ship's clock in her cabin, two bells, and three bells, and four, and still no sound of the Goduck's asthmatic cough.

Where was Kye Dan? The tide was at full flood. No diver could work in the flood. The Indian diver, Jim Squisqui had tried it, and him they had hauled to the surface a lifeless, broken mass.

Three thirty of the morning, and still no Kye Dan. A smudge of yellow was beginning to show against the clouds in the east.

In her dory, Bird rowed frantically to the point, doubled around into the bay beyond. There, in a sheltered nook, rode the Goduck at anchor.

No longer of a mind to dissemble, or to care whether her night's prowlings might be detected, she rowed boldly to the rail of the powerful craft.

Not a soul on board. Dan's tarpaulin coat lay upon the transom seat, and his lunch-kit and vacuum-bottle were in the rack above the engine.

In her dread anxiety, she had all but forgotten her ruse to obtain the unblotted fragments of Kye Dan's letter. Now she sprang across the cockpit, thrust her arm through the starboard port.

Inside, a small sack made of herring net, spread with a wire-hoop, and fastened in place just below the port-hole, were the torn fragments of a letter, torn but unblurred by any contact with the water.

Nervously she clutched the fragments of paper in her hand, switched on the tiny exploring light attached to the storage-battery, and with trembling fingers began to solve the jigsaw puzzle, disposing the paper bits upon the transom.

At last she had it, all but a few missing words where the vagrant wind had caught a few of the pieces and whisked them beyond the embrace of the net-sack.

She read, read again, her hand clutching into the bosom of her tarp coat.

With a whimpering cry, she tumbled over the side of the Goduck into her dory, rowed madly away straight for the spiller of the Ladyfinger, which now showed a gray, distorted mass in the gathering light, waving to and fro in the mild rush and tug of the flood tide, moaning and complaining like some wounded sea monster as the waters swept through the pilings like wind through reeds.

On the watch platform, near the edge of the spiller, stood the air-tank of a diver's outfit. From it, out over the edge of the down-haul brace into the seething waters ran a thin, wire-bound, rubber hose, and two stout lines of unequal size. The lines had been made fast about a cleat by a

double turn, and the heavier of the lines had been knotted at intervals to form a rope-ladder.

Kye Dan, at flood tide, was plumbing the depths of the Ladyfinger.

Bird uttered a dispairing moan as she dropped at her knees, stared wildly at the face of the tank-register, which showed but a fraction of the required air-pressure.

She sprang to the edge of the spiller. The smaller of the two lines she knew was the signal-cord. She gave it a tug. No answer. A second tug. No answer.

She ran to the air-tank, gave the handle half a dozen swift turns.

Once more she pulled the signal-cord. No answer.

Grasping the heavy, knotted line, she braced her feet against the cleat and began to hoist. At the lower end of the line a burden rose a distance, came to a stop. The body in the diving-suit had fouled against a piling, or in the mesh.

She lowered it away a distance, began hauling in again, tugging away so savagely that red spots showed upon the wet rope coiling upon the deck beside her.

In she hauled, and at last came into view the rubber and canvas diving-suit with the preposterous glass and metal helmet.

Lying prone upon the deck, she leaned far over, unscrewed the lugs, lifted the helmet.

Kye Dan's head rolled weakly, and his deathly pale face stared up at her.

"Kye Dan! Lover! Oh, Kye Dan!"

She shook him, slapped him in the face, shook him again, calling his name again and again.

As the cool, morning air struck upon him Kye Dan sighed abysmally, blinked weakly. Then he sighed again, a deep, thankful sigh as he sucked the sweet air into his dead lungs.

With the strength of ten, she lifted Kye Dan, diving-suit and all.

"Kye Dan!"

"My darling Bird," he answered drunkenly.

She dragged him, suit and all, to the edge of the spiller, loaded him into her pitching dory, made for the Goduck. In the vacuum-bottle was still a cupful of steaming coffee. This she poured between his lips, and presently he was sitting up weakly beside her on the transom seat.

"Just as soon as I knowed what crookedness the company was workin' against you," he explained. "I figured I didn't owe 'em no loyal no more. I seen 'em, at night, when they anchored a deadhead, hemlock log outside the spiller to form a' eddy that would wash out the silt way below legal. I just aimed to dive her alone, cut loose the hemlock. Then when the commissioner come to plumb the Ladyfinger, he'd find her legal. Somehow, I dropped my electric-search, got fouled in the web, and I just couldn't h'ist out. Then I went off plumb *hiyu palton* in the noodle, and you come, darling Bird, and dug me out."

Darling Bird, spilling the last of Dan's cup of coffee in the act, drew the freckled face to her own.

Shortly, laughing now and unashamed of her snooping, Bird spread the jigsaw puzzle upon the transom. Dan stared, and she pointed to the ingenious web-trap hanging below the starboard port.

"Yeah, I wrote one every day," said Kye Dan. "I figured you'd show me a signal, and I'd put in and hand it to you. You never done it. Yeah, the letters was mainly the same, all except about divin' the Ladyfinger; that was just in the last."

This was Kye Dan's letter:

MY DARLING BIRD:

They've sank a dead-head off the Ladyfinger to make a eddy. I'm goin' to-night, when no one's there, and diver her, and cut her loose. They'll get fooled bad. Likely I'll tare this letter like I done before if you don't give me no hail. Good-by, Darling Bird. If this goes through good, I aim to come and make up, anyhow. I just can't stand it no longer. Your loving,

KYE DAN.

In a lower corner Kye Dan had affixed a businesslike postscript. "Fish-trap diving and repairing while you wait."

Bird reached into the bosom of her dress, drew forth the bit of paper that she called her fairy ship.

"Look! Kye Dan. I picked up near every blessed letter you scattered. Out of 'em all this was all that could be read, three precious words. And hain't they precious? If I hadn't found 'em— Oh, Kye Dan."

The Wicked Streak

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Ready to Occupy," "One Bright Idea," "Dodd—His Diary," "Opportunity," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST GOOD-BY.

IN the terrific stillness of the office, a loud puff escaped Dr. Squiers.

"By—by golly!" he breathed.

The implacable Daniel had not moved a muscle. The stunned William Morse had hardly moved one of his own, so far as that went. Dizzily, unbelievingly, he gazed at his uncle, until:

"Well—well—*even* now I don't know what you're talking about, uncle!"

"Oh, don't be ridiculous!" Mr. Hornaday cried. "The case against you is complete! It—"

"But it isn't!" William protested. "I didn't have that cap on last night! I'd even forgotten I owned that cap. I had on a straw hat."

"Yes, I had thought of that," Daniel smiled bitterly. "It was in your pocket, this cap. Rather naturally, put your conspicuous white hat in the bushes before skulking up to the house itself. You—"

"I did nothing of the kind! That cap's been in my closet for two years!" the distracted William broke in again. "And that knife was in the pocket of my old gray trousers—"

"And you yourself were doubtless in the other pocket at three this morning?"

"No, I was sitting on a rock over in Hamden's Woods," said William. "I—I had a lot to think out, and I went there to do it. I think I fell asleep after midnight; it was almost daylight when I shook myself together and started home."

He looked at the doctor. The doctor just now was studying William with mouth half open.

"And as for—for stealing your papers," William went on hotly; "have I ever stolen so much as a pin from you? Haven't I handled money for you by the thousands? Have I ever been so much as one cent short on the books?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Then how in blazes dare you sit there and accuse me now?" the victim shouted passionately, and threw out his arms.

His vehemence affected Daniel not at all. One sharp elbow resting on his desk, Daniel pointed the thin forefinger at his ward.

"We'll end an absurd discussion right here," he said incisively. "You broke into that safe, William, because you knew it to contain almost every document of the Realty Corporation. As if you had not already done sufficient damage, you must needs add the last straw of stealing the company's contracts, receipts, agreements, options—everything!"

"What other damage—"

"Hear me to the end, William. On your word of honor—if you have one iota of such a thing left in you, have you destroyed those papers?"

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for December 21.

"No! I've never even seen them!"

"We have no choice but to accept that as fact. Very well, then, I think, William, if you force me to it, that my very heart will break upon the day I put Henry Morse's only son in prison. Nevertheless, that will be done, if need be. Please understand me clearly, William. The police as yet have no suspicion of your identity. Except for Dr. Squiers and myself, not one soul knows your guilt. I have not even mentioned my finding of these things to my own family. So the opportunity is still yours to repent without a blemished reputation."

"What does that mean?"

"This: go to the spot where you have hidden the papers, William. Bring them to this office before noon to-day, and far though it be from my duty, I promise you that the matter shall be dropped. And if you fail to have them here by noon, William, as surely as I sit here, you'll make your second visit to jail before one o'clock!"

"How—how can I get them when I've no idea where they are or what they look like?" William faltered.

The fingers snapped again.

"Go, now!" Daniel said, and strained the truth a trifle. "And it would be well to remember, William, should you contemplate fleeing town, that I am going to telephone Fox when you leave this office, and mention simply that I want you shadowed and kept here if you try to escape. That is all!"

"But—"

"Noon, William!" Daniel cried savagely. "*Noon! Go!*"

More like a youth in a dream than one fully in control of himself, William went. The excellent doctor, more dazed than he had been in many years, shook his head for a solid minute.

"A—a devilish peculiar character, Dan," he muttered.

"A peculiarly devilish character, Tom," sighed Daniel. "It must be ten o'clock."

"Mighty near it," said Dr. Squiers. "I think I'll run along, and—"

"I think you'll stay here," Daniel corrected sharply. "Louise will be here any minute now."

Out on Main Street, William Morse was still drifting, mentally and physically. He seemed unable to think, and still, after a fashion, to be thinking rapidly. He was out here now to get papers he had never stolen from a spot where he had never hidden them—and it was a bit confusing when one really went on the job.

But for the presence of the level-headed doctor, himself plainly perturbed, William would have been all but ready to assume that madness had stricken his unfortunate uncle. Although madness would not explain the cap or the knife, would it? Nor would the impossible theory wipe out the fact that he had been driven from Daniel's premises earlier in the evening, presumably in an enraged state; nor again, had it anything at all to do with supporting his statement about the rock in Hamden's Woods last night.

At the end of Main Street William seemed to have reached no conclusion and no program. He loitered a while, gazing at the impressive statue of Cyrus D. Tilton, who had founded the town in 1812; Cyrus merely gazed back at him with his bronze eyes and offered not a solitary suggestion; and eventually William pulled himself together and wandered down to the Palace. James, thus far, had been no success as the helpful friend, yet William yearned to lean on James for a little while, until his wits returned.

The folding iron gate at the Palace was locked, which meant that James was taking his own time as in the dear old days before it had occurred to him to plan a dinner for William. Back and forth strolled William for another space; until, glancing up, he found that the clock across the street was crawling along to half past eleven. He turned cold and looked around fearfully, as if expecting the official hand to land upon his shoulder. He started for the boarding-house; then, because if by any chance James Sayre had help to give, it would have to be given with much speed now!

Mrs. Podder herself opened the door for him, and that unsmilingly. Indeed, she shook her finger at William as she said:

"Oh, Mr. Morse! Oh, you young men!"

"Eh?" William said, as he passed her.

"You must have had a dreadful night of it, my boy!" the lady sighed. "It ain't right, and it's only for your own good I'm telling you. Mr. Sayre just got in!"

William was moving on. He tried the door of Mr. Sayre and it opened readily; he walked in—and then he stopped. Because, while James was there, it was certainly a different James!

This James Sayre was stretched on the couch exhausted. His trousers were torn about the bottom; there was a rip in his usually immaculate coat, and his shoes were very dusty. His linen collar had been torn and tucked clumsily back under the tie, whence it was endeavoring to escape; and a new straw hat rested on James's bosom and one arm sagged limply from the side of the sofa. He rolled his sunken eyes at William.

"'Greater love than this hath no man'—and all that stuff," said James faintly. "I *betcha!*"

"What—what happened to you?" William gasped.

"Happened? Say, he shot at me! The whole darned police force of Tilton chased me all over the world! Happened!" James croaked uncannily. "Boy, do you know where I was at daylight this morning? Crawling under an ice-wagon, down in the junk-yard half-way over to Dumbury! Half-way over! And I'll swear I thought they were chasing me still."

A great light was breaking in William's brain.

"And I crawled into Dumbury and then took the trolley to the Corners, and then the train back here!" Mr. Sayre's remarkable monotone went on. "I pinched a newspaper to do 'em up in, from a doorstep! I had to pinch a straw hat hanging outside of a store in Dumbury, because I was scared to walk in and buy it! But I got away with it, Bill! I swore I'd help you through, and I'll help you through if it lands me in the chair!" the warrior concluded, and one saw that, though down for the moment, his spirit still flamed.

"You didn't—you're not the one—"

"I jimmied your uncle's window and I opened his box!" James laughed dreadfully. "That much I learned for having been pals with a star handcuff and safe-opening act for two years, anyway. So there's your dad's will, Bill, and all his papers!" cried Mr. Sayre, and pointed at the bulky newspaper bundle on the floor beside him. "They have to be there! I got everything there was! Now take 'em, and fight the old crab through every court in the country—and you're bound to win something, Bill! Oh—my Lord!"

Once more he waved his hand toward the bundle; but it was in William's hands by this time. William was even crouched over it and hugging it, as he gibbered crazily at his faithful friend:

"You—did it! You took my knife and my cap, and—"

"Well, why not?" James mumbled, and there was no understanding in his fishy eyes. "I had to have a cap, Bill. Who wants a straw hat blowing off and knocking around when he's committing a burglary? And I had to have a good-sized knife to get a window open—and I haven't owned a knife like that in years. I had a—had a grand old job finding that one, and—" His words faded out in a tremendous yawn. "Say, I tried to put a fine, bold face on, sneaking up here from the station, but—Bill, none of those cops recognized me, did they? You haven't heard about any of them recognizing me?"

"No, I've heard nothing about any one recognizing *you!*" William hurled bitterly at him from the door.

"Well, say! What—" James managed in exhausted astonishment, just as the door slammed.

Down-stairs went William Morse in three loud bounds. Out of the door he shot, too, leaving it wide open behind him, and then along the quiet street, giving several innocent bystanders the impression that there was a fire elsewhere in town, and several more the idea that a madman was loose in their midst.

It mattered not at all to William. His long legs covered that block and the next and the next, with never a pause. Main Street came into sight, though, and he slackened a little; and now he was on Main Street and walking, and, with the clocks not more than ten minutes short of their noon-

day clanging, even turning into the Hornaday Building.

And then:

"*There!*" gasped William, as he laid the bundle upon Daniel's desk.

Except for a faint sigh, there was no sign of emotion from Daniel, albeit the doctor took to muttering quite excitedly.

"Is everything there?" Daniel inquired.

"Yes!"

"Ah!" said William's uncle, and cut the string with his pearl-handled penknife.

The newspaper wrapping opened like a flower. Bundles of documents it revealed, all neatly bunched and taped—bundles and bundles, and a few thick envelopes as well; and having cast a swift, critical eye upon them, Daniel sighed lightly.

"Be seated, William," he said. "I have a few last words to say to you."

"You needn't say them until—I've said my say!" William panted. "I never stole those things! I never knew they were stolen until I came into this office, and I had no idea where they were until five minutes ago. I never—"

"Who stole 'em, William?" the doctor put in.

The hard-breathing young man just caught himself. James, after all, was his best friend.

"Tell us, William," Daniel smiled unpleasantly. "I will see that the guilty one suffers."

"I—decline to tell you!" William answered. "What I do say is this: I—"

"Please don't say it!" Daniel rapped out. "I understand perfectly, William. At least you lack the nerve of the successful criminal, for it broke at the last moment. That is, indeed, well. You understand, of course, that I shall take no further action?"

"I—yes. I—"

"You understand, I trust, that all relations are at an end between us?"

"I suppose they are, if you say so," William choked; but—"

"William," said Daniel evenly, "I want you to leave Tilton at once. In fact, I insist upon that most emphatically. You have saved a little. Take that, and strike out for yourself somewhere else. What your end will be, I do not know. You are Henry's son and, even against hope, I hope for the best."

"But I refuse to go until I've cleared myself—"

Daniel smiled cynically.

"That is impossible," said he. "Oh, yes, it is quite impossible, for I understand you thoroughly now, William. Even were you to bring your good, if misguided, friend Mr. Sayre to this office—even were he to confess to the burglary on the remote chance of sharing the fortune you will never touch, I should still understand thoroughly, William. I mention Mr. Sayre," Daniel concluded, "because I can recall no other acquaintance of yours asinine enough to try furnishing just that kind of assistance to you."

He smiled again, and more cynically. It was perfectly plain that this shot had hit William with a shock—which was exactly what Daniel had expected. He considered William a little further and his voice sharpened.

"I think I'll withdraw one promise," he said. "Let us say, rather, that no action shall be taken against you, *if* you are out of town by this time to-morrow. Make your departure to-day, if possible. Go next door and draw your savings *now*." He folded his arms again, and sighed. "That is all, William. I will not shake hands with you. From the bottom of my heart, I wish Henry Morse's son the very best of luck. I can say no more than that, I think. Good-by!"

"If you would just—" William began weakly.

"*Good-by!*" Daniel repeated dangerously.

His arms did not unfold until William's stumbling, bewildered step sounded from the stairway. Dr. Squiers shook his head sadly.

"Well, he took it quietly," he murmured.

"There was no other way to take it," Daniel said frigidly. "He is lucky in being Henry's son, Tom. I should have spent thousands to send any other youth to prison!"

"I suppose so, Dan," the medical man pursued with a sigh, as he rose. "Well—your wife isn't coming."

Daniel started.

"Er you might call up the house, if you will, and ask for her," he said unexpectedly. "Ask if I'm home for luncheon yet, or something of the kind, Tom."

So the good doctor obeyed, and in a matter of seconds he was holding converse with Mary. He was also opening his eyes as he listened, and pursing his professional lips.

"She's not there, Dan'l," he reported when he had rung off. "Mary says that she rushed in a couple of hours ago, packed a bag, and rushed off again without saying a word to anybody, even Anne."

"And I sent William out to get the papers he stole—a couple of hours ago!" Daniel muttered.

The doctor scratched his head and avoided Daniel's eye.

"Um—odd, isn't it?" said he.

"Yes, it's very odd indeed," breathed Mr. Hornaday. "Don't go yet, Tom."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RECKLESS WAY.

PECULIARLY enough, Main Street continued to look just like Main Street when William emerged. Even though William's logical end had come, no stores were closed, no sympathetic people rushed up to weep over him; in fact, nobody at all so much as looked at William Morse—and the whim struck him, and he laughed dizzily. So far as Tilton's general public was concerned, he might have been in no trouble whatsoever.

And yet he was ready to wager in all Tilton's history no one man had ever seen quite so much trouble packed into so short a time! Anne was gone; his inheritance was so far gone that Daniel had not even bothered to mention it at this last interview; his job was gone; his very boarding-house home, and his little home life and everyday connections—all were gone!

Only Jim remained. And whether he felt affection or hatred for his too capable friend, William could not decide. He leaned against the sandstone of the building's entrance and tried; but he himself was too far gone!

He frowned. He was trying to think of something. His frown settled on the little swinging brass and black, iron sign of the Tilton Savings Bank next door. Ah, yes; that was what he had been trying to recall. William swallowed twice, and felt in his pocket for the little pass-book. It was there, as usual. He drew it out and inspected the humble balance—two hundred and eight dollars and some odd cents, with the interest written in last week.

William stepped slowly into the bank, and rather astonished the immaculate teller by wiping out his account. Then, with the bills crammed deep into his trouser-pocket, he shuffled into the sunshine again. He was headed—where?

Well, obviously toward home and the job of packing up and deciding where he meant to spend the rest of his life. There was such a thing as staying and fighting it out, of course; he might possibly decide to do that before he left; but the end, as he saw almost immediately, that involved the gravest risk of prison for Jim Sayre. William shook his head dismally and plodded on. The total wrecking of one young life was quite enough; there was no need at all of adding another.

No, he would see Jim for a minute and say good-by, and then depart from Tilton forever. If Jim wished to go to Daniel and tell about the burglary, well and good—Daniel would refuse to believe him, in any case. If he did not, just as well and good. In point of fact, William thought he would ask James to spare himself. He gripped his pitiful fortune the tighter and mounted the three steps to Mrs. Podder's boarding-house; he entered, fortunately enough, without meeting a soul.

At the door of Jim Sayre's room he hesitated; then, unheralded as ever, he turned the knob and walked in.

James, it seemed, had gone to bed; indeed, he had even drifted into deserved slumber now. One brilliant, blue-silk arm was crooked beneath his frowzled head; his spoiled and tattered clothes lay upon the floor, just as he had dropped them; and there was a seraphic smile just coming over James's lips.

Half-way it seemed to stick, as the board creaked under William's foot. One of Mr.

Sayre's eyes opened; blinked sleepily at his friend for a delicious moment, then closed again.

"What what'd he say, Bill?" Mr. Sayre muttered. "He said you stood to win huh?"

"What did who say?" William asked drearily.

"Huh? Th' lawyer, Bill. Who else?" James mumbled.

William threw himself into the armchair with a mighty sigh.

"I haven't been to see any lawyer," he said wearily.

"Uhuh?" Mr. Sayre crooned from a distance. "Well, better see—lawyer, Bill. Quicker you get—get the mill to grinding up the old crab, the better for you. Yep!" James gurgled with a sleepy, senseless laugh.

And then, as was curiously apparent, his active brain refused to drift farther into dreamland. It seemed to bestir itself, and grip anew on William's fortunes; for Mr. Sayre frowned slightly and perplexedly, squinted reluctantly and finally, his eyes wide open, stared at his friend.

"Where the dickens did you go when you rushed out of here, if it wasn't to a lawyer?" he demanded.

"I went to take those things back to Uncle Daniel, of course."

"The other things, you mean? Not the dope on your own fortune?"

"I handed back everything!" William sighed.

This time, to be sure, he had roused Mr. Sayre thoroughly. If the lids had been drifting down again, they snapped up permanently now. James Sayre, winking incredulously, pulled himself up on one elbow. He gazed at William for a moment and then sat upright.

"Say, looka here!" he rasped. "You don't mean to tell me that I risked my life for you—that I risked a jail sentence on top of the one that's already hanging over me, for you—that I devilishly near killed myself last night, for you—and *you handed it all back?*"

William Morse was too far gone even to smile. He merely nodded.

"He thought I'd stolen them, Jim," he said apathetically. "It was the only thing to do. He was going to clap me into jail, and he had a fine case against me. Anyway, you— Oh, that was a crazy thing to do!"

"Why was it crazy?" James demanded harshly. "How else can you fight him?"

William shrugged his shoulders and permitted his eye to rove over James's vast collection of authographed theatrical photographs. He had examined them once a day for a year or more; some of them he had come to know, almost, as friends; and now he was leaving them behind. The pathos of it all struck William afresh, and his head sunk into his hands.

"What's the matter with you?" James inquired unpleasantly. "Have you quit?"

"Yes, I've quit."

"What's the idea?"

"I'm going to leave town, Jim."

"*Why?*"

"Because Uncle Daniel gave me the choice of getting out or going to jail."

"He—he ordered you out of Tilton?"

"He certainly did, Jim."

Out of the bed swung Mr. Sayre's blue-silk legs. The sleep was all out of him now, and his eye glittered angrily.

"Say, who is this guy, anyway? The king of Tilton?" he cried. "Does he own you and everybody else in this burg? Has he got you as badly buffaloed as he has every one else in town?"

"He's justified, according to his own views," William muttered.

"Justified, nothing! I See here. You haven't given up the idea of getting your money, *ever?* You haven't given up the idea of marrying the girl?"

"I've given 'em all up, Jim!"

Mr. Sayre caught his breath.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he demanded of the pictures on the far wall. "Why— Oh, Bill, let's cut out all this stuff! Let's see what we're going to *do!*"

"Do you still—still think there's anything to be done?" William gasped, almost in terror.

James Sayre smiled slightly, as he scuffed over to his box and selected a cigar. He smiled, too, as he trimmed and lighted it. Then, comfortably squatted upon his sofa,

he narrowed his eyes and kept them meditatively on his friend.

"You know, Bill, you're young, and you haven't such a lot of nerve," he reflected. "You haven't been kicked around enough; you don't know what real trouble is. I do, you see. I've been banged about considerable, first and last; and, at that, I'm still here and doing business and tucking a little aside for a rainy day. Why?"

"I dunno!" William muttered, despondently.

"It's time you learned: *I never quit!* I don't care whether it's tying a necktie or opening a theater or helping a friend, once I pick off a job, I never drop it till it's finished!"

"Well, this job has every appearance of being pretty thoroughly finished!" the victim said, bitterly.

"Why, boy, it hasn't even started yet!" James laughed serenely. "Now, let's take it calmly. What did we set out to do? Marry the girl—that was the first thing, wasn't it? The money was unexpected and incidental and got us all tangled up, I guess. All right, then! We'll go back to the beginning and start with the girl. You'll marry her this afternoon, Bill, and get that out of the way, and then we'll grab off the money and—"

"I'll do what?" echoed William, blankly.

"Marry the girl, Bill!"

"How?"

"Elope with her, of course," James explained, rather impatiently. "That's crude stuff, but it's the reliable remedy where the parent is really a nut!"

"And it is no more possible than—"

"Oh, don't talk nonsense!" Mr. Sayre laughed, indulgently. "We'll get that over with first. Then what? Will the dear uncle cut off his son-in-law? He will not! Will he try to jail him? He will not! Will he—"

"But—"

"Don't interrupt me! I'm getting this thing all doped out, Bill! Mrs. Hornaday's your friend, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"We'll pull this stuff at the Falls, if that's where she's staying. If she's gone farther, we'll take the girl and catch up with her, I think. You see, Bill, if the girl's stepmother is present at the wedding, that pulls the last tooth out of the old man!"

"What are you talking about?" William cried. "Mrs. Hornaday isn't staying at Sennett Falls."

"No? That's where she bought her ticket to," James stated.

"When?"

"Just as I came through the station this morning on my way home, Bill. She was standing at the window and getting her ticket. She didn't see me and I had all the stuff I'd pinched for you from her husband under my arm, so I didn't stop to chat," James explained, with his animated smile. "Of course, the Falls is a railway junction and she may be going farther on one of the through afternoon trains, but that's a chance we'll have to take. It 'll be a sight better, if we can have her."

He reached to the table and picked up his watch. He grunted and thrust it aside quickly.

"Hey! Wake up!" he cried. "If you run like blazes you can make the twelve-thirty-three! Get that train, boy, and catch the lady and hold her there till we come!"

"We?" William echoed, thickly, as he rose.

"Anne and I, of course! Anne and I. I'm going to borrow Phil Perkins's car and then sneak up and get the girl and run her over. You might look up a minister, if you have a chance before we get there."

Life was stirring in William again, at any rate. His dulled eyes were clearing; wonder stole into his face, and a little bewilderment, and then an eager, yearning light.

"Jim, do you really think we can work it?" he asked, swiftly. "Do you think Anne will go and—"

"Anne will go if I have to blindfold her and lead her out with a halter. Get that part out of your mind, Bill. *You* can't get her; Hornaday'd see you or you'd be too rattled to throw any real enthusiasm into her—or something else. I can, because I know how to handle those things. Only get up there and catch her stepmother and let's do the thing right."

William's shoulders squared; he smiled, and in the smile there was something that

suggested a man coming to the surface after a long, unpleasant dive.

"Jim, if she will marry me and go away with me, nothing else matters!" he cried, joyfully. "I've got a little money with me, and that will carry us until I can land a job and—"

"And among other things, you've got just eight minutes to jump that train!" James finished, with forced calm. "Are you going to do it or are you going to stay here and talk to me?"

Immediately thereafter, had James listened, he might have heard the worthy Mrs. Podder clucking sadly to herself in the hallway down-stairs, as she closed the door after a long stare at the madly galloping thing that was William Morse.

She might have clucked further, too, had she seen Mr. Sayre just then. Pajamas going in one direction, slippers in another, James bounded into his closet and dragged out a respectable suit, a presentable pair of shoes, the sporty little gray felt hat that would have to serve until he could buy a straw within two sizes of his head.

Into these articles he rushed, chuckling and making many a little underbreath comment. William was out of the way and something was about to be accomplished! With his mentality in its present battered shape, poor Bill was only a hindrance to himself and everybody else. Of course, since he was about to elope, he had to elope to some definite point, and Sennett Falls was as good as any other; and if he did catch Mrs. Hornaday and she was as willing to help as James suspected she might be, it would work out as something of a joke on Daniel, toward whom James was feeling more and more that righteous anger the free soul must ever feel for the pure tyrant. James laughed aloud and, one bright tan foot on the edge of the table, burst into song as he laced his shoe. It was a rather creditable performance for a man who had worked all night as burglar and fugitive.

Elsewhere in Tilton, there was a pair that gave no thought at all to song.

Daniel, after a period of walking this office with a stride that struck the doctor as affectedly Napoleonic, finally succumbed and called his own home on the telephone. Anne was there and her voice suggested that she had been crying long and bitterly. Anne, it seemed, did not know that her stepmother had left the house or even intended to leave: nor at her return to the telephone, after a long wait in which she questioned Mary, did she have any fuller information than that Daniel already possessed. Nor yet, did she seem greatly concerned about it all; Anne had troubles of own that day—and only the fact that he was sending her away to-morrow for a long time stayed the sharp reproof with which Daniel was inclined to wind up the little chat. He ended by ordering his car to the office.

He resumed his walk.

"I think you're working yourself into a frenzy over nothing," the doctor said, finally. "I think she's probably sore at your—"

"Wait, Tom," Daniel said, gravely. "You and I have been intimate friends all our lives. You understand, of course, that this is a thing I would discuss with no other living man."

"Well?"

"But since you are what you are, Tom, let us face it squarely. Louise has gone and she has no legitimate reason for going. That much seems certain. William must leave very shortly. Whatever its extent, there seems to have been warmer friendship between them than I had suspected."

"Oh, but—but she isn't that kind of woman, Dan!" the doctor muttered.

"So I believe! So I shall continue to believe until my eyes have actually seen!" Daniel's voice vibrated. "Nevertheless, I cannot close those eyes now to what is happening before them!"

"Well—well, if you feel that way about it, why not get a grip on William and keep him here?" the doctor suggested. "I think you're senile, Dan! I think you're doddering! But get a grip on the boy before he has a chance to leave!"

Daniel halted, breathing heavily.

"You may be right, Tom," he said. "He has probably gone home. Get him on the phone, if you can, and ask him to come to your office. Do that, and I'll decide on the next move!"

He strode on while the good doctor got

the boarding-house connection. He stopped again and listened while the doctor talked; and eventually, when the receiver had clicked back to its hook, the two gentlemen looked more gravely at one another.

"I guess he made a wild break for the twelve-thirty-three, Dan!"

"Had he—had he mentioned leaving town?"

"No, but she said he took the shortcut behind the old sawmill, down at the end of his street, and that leads nowhere on earth but to the depot."

The unhappy Daniel's lips were the mere line again. He glanced from the window. His car was just then drawing up at the curb. He reached for his hat.

"Come, Tom," he said, crisply.

"Whereabouts?"

"To the station, first. Afterward—the Lord knows where! Come!"

So the doctor, being an obedient soul, followed Daniel, although above and beyond all other things in this world he did detest the idea of being involved in a family mess, of this or of any other character. Still, Daniel was his old friend and there are times when one must needs bury the inner inclination and cling to his friend. The doctor settled into the thick upholstery with a groan; and when Daniel stepped down at the station and strode into the waiting-room, the doctor followed nervously and waited outside, by way of staying any frantic rush of Daniel's toward the next point.

There was no rush at all. Whiter by several shades, Daniel appeared some three minutes later, and the doctor caught him. Daniel smiled dreadfully.

"*She* bought a ticket for Sennett Falls on the eleven-six!" he hissed. "*He* went down on the twelve-thirty-three."

"You—you were right, then! You're not going to follow them?" the doctor chattered.

"I am following and you are coming with me!"

"Well Dan!" cried Dr. Squiers, "Wait! You haven't got a gun or anything on you, have you?"

Daniel's teeth bared again, in the same dreadful smile.

"If matters are as they seem, be sure that I shall know how to deal with them!" he said, as he stepped into his car. "Come, Tom!"

Of these things, most happily, no small suspicion glimmered in the brain of William Morse.

After a run that brought him down almost to the last gasp, William executed a war-dance before the ticket window of Tilton station, while the locomotive bell clanged without and steam hissed, and the agent tore and stamped and made change as if all time lay ahead. Then, having swung aboard a moving platform, William panted his way to a seat, smiled at several inquiring faces in the rather foolish and apologetic fashion one reserves for such occasions and devoted some little time to recovering breath.

But even as he gasped, he thrilled. He was out of bondage; he was on his way to earthly paradise. For just as surely as he had been unfortunate in other efforts, James would succeed in this one of running Anne Hornaday over to the Falls. William knew it! And Lou would help them, when she quite understood, and they would be married. Immediately, William thought, they would catch the afternoon New York train, unearthly as the hour at which it reached its destination.

And to-morrow he would go to Carrier and Carrier, who had been his father's attorneys. Their connections, their big clients, were countless; he himself was rather well up in real-estate affairs. Really, there was no earthly reason why he should not have settled in a position before to-morrow night. They would have to board for a while; or perhaps they would get an inexpensive little flat, somewhere away up-town, and furnish it very modestly and, very likely, on the instalment plan. Anne would not mind! Anne loved him as he loved Anne! He closed his eyes; he could picture her in the center of a tiny white kitchen, in a long, full apron, laughing when he came home at night. Without much effort, William discovered, he could go further with his picturing; he could see the pretty suburban house that would come naturally as he advanced. He could picture himself planting honeysuckle early the first spring. He could

see a bijou garage out back. He could — well, that was far enough ahead to go, of course, just now. William devoted another interval to gazing raptly out of the window; and presently the tracks grew thicker and unlovely little houses clustered more closely; and William experienced several funny little chills, because this was Sennett Falls and somewhere along the State road, at this very minute, James was whizzing Anne to his side! Perhaps, one little hour from now, William would be a completely married man!

He stepped down, painfully conscious that he was embarking on the adventure without so much as a clean collar. He looked around. Mrs. Hornaday was nowhere in sight. He had rather fancied that she would be waiting around the platform, and he smiled at his own absurdity and investigated the waiting-room.

She was not there, either. He lounged about for a little, and finally took to asking questions. Neither the porter nor the ticket agents remembered any one of that description, but a dozen trains went through the station every hour at Sennett Falls, and all sorts of people hurried away from and into all of them. However, further questions established that no through trains had passed within the last hour or so; wherever she might be going, there was a strong chance that Louise was still in town.

William, still afflicted with his funny little chills, strolled over to the rather imposing Sennett House, rambled through the lobby and the parlors without result and at last, rather perplexed, inspected the register itself. Here he encountered a mild shock. He knew Louise's fine little hand quite well, and that "Louise Alden," whose name was last on the page, who appeared to occupy Room 12, was certainly in Louise's writing!

Alden had been her maiden name. William scowled over it for a minute or so and then, aware that something else was afoot, mounted the stairs slowly and, all unannounced, cast about for Room 12. It chanced to lie straight ahead of him and he knocked softly. Steps crossed within; the key was turned and the door opened. Louise herself it surely was who stood before him!

"Oh!" cried Louise.

"Lou!" William exclaimed. "You — you're not stopping here? You—"

He stopped short. This was an altogether different Louise, after all. This lovely little person had drawn herself to more than arrow straightness; her eyes, which usually danced at William, flashed now and her cheeks burned.

"Did he dare to send you after me?" she cried.

"Did who—who dare?"

"You know perfectly! Your uncle! Because—"

"He never sent me!" said William. "I'm eloping, Lou! Anne's going to meet me here and we're going to be married!"

"*What?*"

"Yes, and we want you to help us. You'll do that, Lou?"

There was a moment in which she seemed unable to believe him; then the tension gave and with a fluttering sigh Louise drew back the door.

"Yes, I'll—I'll help you, Will," Mrs. Hornaday said. "I thought—come in and tell me."

William followed and pushed the door after him. He was glad, indeed, not only to have found her, but to have her for a listener. There were many things that William yearned to say just then—yet he was given no opportunity to say them. Mrs. Hornaday, in the center of the room, had whirled on him.

"I've left him, you know!" she said, sharply.

"Uncle Daniel?" William gasped.

"Yes, I've left him forever, Will. I'm never going back! I've found him out, at last!"

"Found out—what did you find out?" William managed.

"Why — why — other women, Will!" Louise stammered, and he observed her hands clasping and unclasping. "I couldn't have believed it! I thought that he was a man among men, Will, and he— he wasn't! I found one of them in his office yesterday, with her arms around him!"

William's lips parted, but he did not speak.

"Oh, a dreadful creature!" Louise cried.

"And he—he was to have told me about her—he had his story ready, I think, and I was to have heard it at the office this morning and I went there, Will! And there was *another* one there then—a worse one. Oh, such a dirty, bedraggled, disreputable little drab, Will! And she was holding his hand and laughing and—oh, yes! I've left him!" Mrs. Hornaday repeated with a very sharp catch. "I'm going to my brother in the West."

"To-day?"

"I meant to do that, yes. Then I—I—the train came in and I decided that I'd stay here over one night and think. Just think. Because I want to be very sure—and I *am* very sure! I saw him—yesterday and to-day, I saw him!"

William Morse straightened and tugged at his collar, by way of easing a neck that had taken to throbbing. Plain duty compelled him to explain what he could, although apparently he was not to explain for a minute or two; Louise had sped to him and was before him, hands thrown out.

"Oh, I never, never could have believed it!" she cried, passionately. "I thought he loved me, Will. I thought he abominated that—that kind of woman, and—I—I loved him so! I did love him so, Will! I—"

There her hold broke! Great tears gushed suddenly from Louise's lovely eyes; she swayed; she burst into sobs of a very distressing nature.

And since she was so very little and so much in need of comfort; since, too, she was about to become his mother-in-law, William's arms went about the unfortunate young woman. Nor was it any unwelcome move; of all things, Louise needed most a proper place whereon to sob, and William's chest was broad.

"There, there, Lou!" William said, soothingly. "Don't go on like that! Stop crying and let me tell you something!"

"I—I don't want you to tell me anything!" the lady choked.

William sighed and patted her slim, heaving shoulder. William also frowned as he searched for words that would prove most quickly comforting. And then William came near to passing from this earthly state—for in the doorway of the room stood the downright majestic form of Daniel himself, a fearful statue of frozen hate, with Dr. Squiers behind!

And now Daniel's voice came like the voice of implacable Fate.

"It is so!" said Daniel Hornaday very slowly. "It is so!"

It might have been expected that Louise would shriek. She did not. She started, glanced at him for a moment, and burst into a more violent torrent of sobs.

"What is he—he doing here?" she asked of William's coat.

"Madam, be sure that he has no wish to interfere with your plans!" Daniel said awfully as he stalked into the room. "I followed you, for I couldn't credit what seemed to be the facts. I am glad, for had I not seen I could not have believed!"

For the present William could no more than stare. His uncle included William in a smile so evil that the young man shivered. Six feet from them the outraged gentleman stopped and drew a deep breath.

"Oh, woman—woman that I trusted!" Daniel's heavy voice throbbed. "And you, you young hound, spawn of the devil himself! Go your wretched way into the world together! Go, and be very sure of my curse on every minute of your vile lives!"

"But—" William began.

"Not one solitary word from you, sir!" Daniel thundered. "I shall divorce her immediately, Morse, if that interests you. I am very merciful, but—go before I lose my grip and kill you both! There is the door—out of this room and out of my life!"

He was quite right about the room part of it, at any rate. The door was exactly in the direction indicated by his shaking, pointing finger!

CHAPTER XIX.

VANQUISHED.

AND only then did William understand! As if a sledge had struck its outer casing his poor brain rocked and reeled; his eyes bulged toward Daniel Hornaday. He tried to speak, but in his own mad way he could only think.

This, by all the gods, was Jim Sayre's

triumph! This was the glorified climax of all Jim's bungling: that Daniel Hornaday believed William to be fleeing with Mrs. Daniel Hornaday! It was incredible! It was impossible! And still William's spinning head assured him, that was just what Daniel believed, and once Daniel had settled his mind it was settled forever!

And that, in turn, meant that he and Louise *would* be sent away together! William gulped aloud. Was it not hideous enough that Daniel had appeared just as he had meant to marry Daniel's daughter? Was he—was he actually to lose Anne and pass the rest of his accursed days with her pretty little stepmother?

These merry ideas sped through his brain in perhaps two seconds. Then William turned what attention he possessed toward Louise herself. Louise had stiffened in his arms. Had she fainted? No, she had not, because she was trembling now and drawing away from him just as poor Dr. Squiers puffed:

"Get her out of here, Morse! Get out of the way, both of you, before he does something! Hurry up and—"

And now he paused, for Louise was standing quite erect. She had ceased her sobbing, too, and for one interesting second she had stared at her husband. And now her eyes were flaming suddenly and her little fists had clenched. She had walked straight to Daniel Hornaday and she was crying:

"What do you mean?"

"Madam," Daniel said majestically, "it is useless to—"

"*What do you dare to mean?*" Louise demanded so furiously that even Daniel gave ground to the extent of one backward pace—a useless move, by the way, because Louise took an added forward pace and, from head to foot, seemed to blaze at him. "Do you know that you're speaking to *me!*"

"Why—golly!" breathed the good doctor.

"Do you dare to imply—do you dare even to *think*—that I am leaving you with that boy?"

"The appearances—" Daniel tried again.

"Oh you—you vile, you nasty, you unspeakable *thing!*" Mr. Hornaday's second wife panted. "You—with your women friends!"

"Well those—those women can be explained!" Dr. Squiers put in quickly. "Daniel's just as innocent as—"

"Dr. Squiers will you be so very good as to hold your tongue!" Louise asked pointedly. "I am speaking to Daniel now. I am through with you, Daniel! Can you lean down far enough from your pinnacle to hear and understand that? I'm through with your filthy, suspicious mind; I'm through with your pretty little secret romances; I'm through with your dignity and your silly austerity and your posing and your importance and your mastodonic conceit; I'm through with your conscience and your mighty silences and your groans and grunts and everything else connected with you! I stopped here to think it all out and be sure, and I might have returned to you, but this last idiocy is too, too much. I'm through with *you!*"

Daniel's cheeks were puffing. Another instant, the doctor believed, and he would blast the erring wife from the face of the earth. The instant was not vouchsafed, however, for Louise had drawn another breath.

"I put up with all your eccentricities and mannerisms Daniel, because I believed you to be a big man in every sense. You're not! You're littler and meaner than the littlest and meanest thing I've ever known! I endured all your tricks because they were dear and funny, and I loved you, and perhaps I was in just a little bit of awe! Well, I don't love you now, and I shall never be in any awe of you again. You go your way. I'll go mine. I won't have a penny of yours, Daniel, and I never want to see you again—after this crowning insult! And if ever again a woman is fool enough to marry you, before you take her, Daniel, go off alone and try to look into your soul—if you've got one and feel that you can trust it—and ask yourself honestly whether you're really fit to associate with a human being!"

She stamped her little foot; her fists were still clenched! And assuredly she had dented Daniel's armor, many years as its excellent plates had shone unflawed. Daniel was mouthing and gaping; temporarily, at

any rate, he seemed to have nothing whatever to say. And, noting these manifestations, a strange thing took place inside of William Morse. His throat was rather tight, but his eyes were clearing rapidly. His jaw set and his color rose suddenly; and with a jerk he, too, stepped to Daniel!

"Louise is absolutely right!" said William amazingly. "When I saw you standing there, I never even dreamed what was in your mind, but—say, do you know that nothing but your years is keeping me from punching in your nose at this minute?"

"Not a—a word from you!" Daniel stammered threateningly. "I—"

"I don't care a rap whether you want to listen or not, you're going to hear several words from me. You and I are through, too, Uncle Daniel. I've got nothing more to lose, and I'm not going to leave any mistaken impressions in your mind. I may have been afraid of you, but, believe me, I'm not any longer! I came on here to meet Anne and marry her, and pretty soon she'll be here, and I'll marry her if it means a scrap that rips this hotel off the foundations! She may not have much of a home for a while, but there'll be nobody around it to keep her cowed, and she'll be a darned sight happier!"

He came nearer; he was even smiling!

"Anne!" Daniel gasped. "Anne!"

"I'm not going to say one-tenth of what I'd like to say," William pursued. "I do owe you something. You gave me a chance to earn my own living, and you asked me to dinner once a month, and for those things I thank you—and there it stops! Beyond that, I want to say that I think you're the coldest, hardest, most unhuman mortal that ever drew breath. I don't know why you've always disliked me; I suppose it's your own nature, and you have my full sympathy for owning a nature like that, but—"

"You've said enough, Will!" the doctor put in.

"Maybe I have," said the heavily breathing William. "Maybe it's no time for talking, anyway. A man who's capable of suspecting a wife like Mrs. Hornaday must be beyond words, anyhow, and—I wasn't throwing pebbles at her window last night, by the way. I thought I was throwing them at Anne's. And I didn't open your infernal safe, either—and I didn't give that dinner for any purpose in the world but pleasing you, if you're capable of believing that!"

He paused, really sneering. Daniel was leaning on a chair now. He had been going red and white by turns, and as yet he was far from himself; but presently, they noted, he would have gathered strength for the counter-attack, and when that came the Sennett House bade fair to rock! Rather uncertainly Daniel was bracing himself even now, and—

"Well, that *was* your car down-stairs!" came calmly and softly from the doorway. "Dad beat us to it!"

They turned. James Sayre stood there, and with him Anne—a rather pale and frightened Anne just then.

Mr. Sayre himself, however, was in no sense frightened. His annoyed gaze, settling on Daniel Hornaday, turned very hard. Exasperation gleamed in his eye, and then anger, for in his time James had tackled successfully many propositions and many people, but nothing quite like Daniel Hornaday. Second by second plain fury was slipping the leash from James's diplomatic placidity—and then it slipped altogether!

"Say! Haven't you any idea of the fitness of things?" he demanded savagely, astoundingly, of Daniel. "Can't I turn a hand to a solitary thing but that you have to bob up in the middle of it and smash it?"

"Are you—addressing *me?*" Daniel asked thickly.

William laughed shortly at his friend.

"Never mind, Jim," he said crisply. "It doesn't affect our plans at all. He followed me here because he thought I was eloping with Mrs. Hornaday!"

"He thought that?" James shouted.

"Fact!" William said.

"Well—well, upon my soul!" Mr. Sayre gasped after a second long look at Daniel. "What right has a thing like you to be married to a regular woman, anyway?"

"And he—*he* had show-girls—I think they must have been—at his office, and—" escaped Louise.

She caught herself, but William laughed again, this time rather wildly.

"Mrs. Hornaday's leaving her husband, Jim," he explained.

James Sayre glanced at him, frowned, hesitated, and then opened his eyes wide. He had been quite busy sneering at Daniel, but a new thought seemed to have been injected into his able mind. The sneer died out, leaving perplexity; the perplexity faded, leaving understanding; and as his gaze wandered from Mrs. Hornaday to her husband and back again, the understanding turned to disgust, and James sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Say, have *I* had anything to do with breaking up this family?" he asked.

Daniel groped out blindly toward one good old stubborn conviction.

"You, Sayre, were quite all right until—until the prospect of William's money tempted you!"

"What?" James cried hotly. "What I did I did to help Bill—understand? I never expected a cent, I never would have taken a cent, and I never expected to start any trouble in your family; but, all the same, it's your fault, because if you hadn't been the pompous, refrigerated old shellfish that you are, Bill never would have needed any help in the first place! Get that? I don't know what you'll do to me later, so I may as well tell you what I think of you while I have the chance!"

"Sayre!"

"And while I'm at it you can have it all! *I* planned that dinner for Bill; he never knew a thing about it in advance. *I* hired those people—women and all! If you don't believe that, I'll give you the manager's name and address. I'd have made you understand all that yesterday if you hadn't been so darned busy bawling me out! And Bill knew absolutely nothing about Dot's going to your office to collect. I—well, *I* tipped her off that you were his guardian; somebody had to pay! And I broke into your house last night to get the papers you had in that little stunt of stealing half a million from Bill! Dog-gone it! I believe I can prove I'm guilty, if you insist!"

Hands in his pockets, he was facing Daniel squarely. Daniel leaned against Dr. Squiers, his one faithful friend, and his eyes were clouding.

"Whatever has happened to you or your family, you've nothing to thank for it but the way you've treated Bill Morse!" Mr. Sayre romped on. "You never gave Bill a square deal—because you never had anybody to kick you into it! Your great trouble is that nobody ever dared stand up and talk turkey to you and wake you out of that trance! Well, *I'm* talking to you now! Wake up! Did you ever, in all the years he was in your office, know Bill Morse to do one solitary little insignificant crooked thing?"

"I—no!" Daniel conceded.

"Then what's the matter with you, anyway? Why do you treat the boy as if he was a disease? Why do you hate him? What?"

Chin thrust out he waited—and a sad little episode came into being. Dr. Squiers, be it said, had been looking hard at William Morse these last seconds, had been noting his clear, determined eye, his firm mouth, his good nose, and all the other familiar and excellent details. And rather suddenly a spell slid from the doctor's consciousness. He blinked, he frowned, he squared his shoulders with a jerk.

"I'm going to tell you what he has against William!" he announced so unexpectedly that they stared at him. "That kid looks something like his Cousin Mark at that age, and Mark turned out to be a bad egg. I don't pretend to say how Daniel got the notion anchored so firmly in his head. I will admit that I've been sharing it this last day or two. But Daniel has a fixed conviction that William has a wicked streak in him, and that he engineered that dinner and all the rest of it for revenge!"

"Tom!" Daniel mouthed. "You—too?"

"That's all right, Dan! This is a thing that ought to be straightened out, and I'll do my little bit!" the doctor said firmly.

Daniel's bewildered gaze roamed from his friend to James and from James to no particular spot; and James, drawing a long breath, studied him intently, and then bared his teeth in a peculiar, vicious way. He was an enthusiastic and expert observer of

many fights, this James, which may have accounted for the sudden, triumphant little sparkle in his eye. At any rate, he advanced upon Daniel quite as if meaning to spring!

"Thought he had a—what? Thought he had a wicked streak? Say! Where d'ye get that stuff?" James shouted, roughly and coarsely, as no living being had ever shouted at Daniel Hornaday before. "That kid's so white that you look like a bottle of ink beside him!"

"He is that!" breathed the doctor.

"He certainly is!" James confirmed in a horrible rasp, albeit his attention never wandered from Daniel. "Say! What's the matter with you, anyway? Huh? Why don't you beg that boy's pardon? Huh? Why don't you get down on your knees and crawl over to your wife and see if she'll let you beg *her* pardon? Your shell's all smashed! See? You're wise to that, and we're all wise to you, and you're wise to what you've done! It's in your face! Say, get down there and crawl, or—aw, I wish you were just about twenty years younger!" James hissed from the down-pulled corner of his mouth!

This was indeed a ghastly and impossible speech. One of Daniel's groping hands felt for the doctor and found that he was not just there. The other fumbled in the general direction of the doorway.

"Come—come, Anne!" said Daniel. "We—we will—"

Shall the vulgar truth be told of James Sayre? Aye, let it be told, for perhaps it is not discreditable, everything considered. James, then, at Anne's side, poked his thumb into her delicate ribs—a stimulating, pregnant poke, delivered while he whispered:

"Slam him, kid! It's your only chance, if you want Bill. He's draped all over the ropes and just going down for the count, and—slam him!"

And, although Anne shuddered and whitened, she was quick to grasp an idea. Just one glance she sent toward William; then she stepped quickly toward her father.

"I'm not going with you, dad!" she said firmly. "I'm going to marry Will!"

"Hey?" croaked the remnant of Daniel.

"No, dad. You were very wrong about Will. I'm going to marry him!"

She faced him steadily, and Daniel faced her as steadily as he could face anybody just then. There was a chair behind Daniel, and, somehow, he sat down with a thud—his hand still groping toward Dr. Squiers. The doctor grunted and offered an arm for the hand to clasp; and not perhaps without a little sympathy he gazed down on his old friend.

"I guess you're licked, Daniel!" he muttered.

The dazed eyes rolled slowly upward, fixing upon the doctor with a numb, inane stare. Daniel nodded very slowly.

"I—I fear so, Thomas!" he whispered.

In the lobby of the Sennett House the old clock struck four.

Many things had happened during these last two hours. It must be granted that Daniel, having once reached the point of surrender, had made a really handsome job of it. With a humility beyond belief, after a deep-thinking three-minute period of mental reconstruction, he had taken his apology to Louise; and it is quite possible that Louise may have felt some shame at her outburst, and that some of her original affection for Daniel had survived. At any rate, as they sat over this extremely late luncheon, it is a fact that Louise held the hand of her husband beneath the table.

And with a frankness almost equally beyond belief, Daniel had begged the pardon of William Morse, which had sent William into quite a flutter of excitement until he caught James's sharp, warning eye. With his nicely freshened vision, Daniel had spent some time in looking steadily at William; and after that came their first real handshake, and very quietly indeed Daniel had informed his ward that the Henry Morse estate would not be applied toward the founding of a home for rheumatics.

There had been quite a happy little outburst from all hands over that. There had come near to being a cheer from Dr. Squiers, later on, as William timidly inquired about his chance of joining the Tilton Realty Corporation, and found that Daniel did not repel the suggestion. Daniel, after that, had

gone into the silences again for a brief period, to emerge with a sigh and a suggestion that William and Anne might prefer a church-wedding in Tilton.

And, this point settled, James Sayre had overflowed suddenly and gripped Daniel's hand and congratulated him on his splendid judgment; and although Daniel may have shuddered as he looked at the capable James, he had smiled faintly at last, and, head shaking, had actually patted Mr. Sayre's shoulder before turning away.

So that it was an altogether different Daniel, and likely so to remain, but it was the same James Sayre. James had talked freely and at great length, sketching his assorted iniquities and their purposes, with an occasional wink at William. James had expanded steadily, and had even grown a trifle patronizing when he stayed William on their way down to the delayed luncheon.

"Well, kid?" James had whispered. "Anything else you'd like me to put over for you?"

"Jim!" William said with great feeling.

James patted him kindly.

"Did I tell you to leave it to me, Bill?" he asked complacently. "Did I tell you to leave it all to me?"

Now, in the far corner of the big, empty dining-room, with Louise's key surrendered again to the management, with the car waiting outside to take them all back to Tilton and the life his brilliant scheming had interrupted, James was still talking. He had explained up to the moment of calling for Anne; he was explaining that now.

"What made me so late getting to the house," James's tireless tongue went on, "was Jones—the assistant police chief."

"Oh?" Daniel said with sudden interest.

"Yep—Jones! Fox is gone, you know," Mr. Sayre hurried along. "He packed his trunk this morning, wrote a resignation, and left it on his desk, hired somebody's car, and beat it for good. Funny stunt, wasn't it?"

The doctor and Daniel Hornaday glanced inquiringly at one another.

"Well, never mind Fox; he was no good, anyway," said James with a relieved sigh of his own. "It seemed that he took Jones aside just before he left and told him you gentlemen wanted that dinner and the raid hushed up for good and all, and that if it wasn't done, Jones would be out of his job for keeps! Maybe he did it for a joke; maybe he was just decent; I don't know. Anyhow, he got Jones all stirred up, and now he's running around Tilton like a madman. He saw both the papers, and they're both going to print denials to-day and to-morrow about the malicious rumor somebody's been circulating. Oh, yes, and he handed Jones three hundred dollars to spend, if he had to." James paused and looked brightly from Daniel to the doctor. "Somebody got scared and parted with some loose change, apparently. Neither of you gentlemen had to pay any blackmail on my account, at least?"

He laughed. Daniel and the doctor were looking at one another again—this time with a tinge of sadness as, all wordlessly, they compared views on the thrifty, departed Fox. The doctor started and glanced indignantly at James Sayre.

"Hey? Blackmail! *Pooh!* We had trouble enough without paying blackmail!" he said quite honestly.

"Well, I should say so!" said the sympathetic James. "Anyway, Jones got a signed statement from Timson and Bull and Mr. Farmen, saying that they were in conference at the store all evening. Then he got another from Keeley, swearing that there never was any dinner! And—er—" said James, glancing at the ceiling—"he wanted to know where you gentlemen were so he could get a statement from you, and I didn't know just where you were, so I doped out one in a hurry, and—er—signed your names to it myself. I said you came over here toward the Falls that evening, doc, and Mr. Hornaday came with you because he had a mortgage on the dying man's property, and wanted to tell him it would be canceled and handed to his widow if he shuffled off! Was that all right?"

The doctor smiled blandly. Daniel cleared his throat.

"Er—yes, I think that was quite all right, Sayre," he murmured.

The little omnibus approached with the finger-bowls, hovered about a moment, and then flitted away again. James Sayre looked

up suddenly, his eyes very bright with an entirely new idea.

"Well—by George!" he muttered. "Yesterday was Bill's twenty-first birthday."

"I'm likely to remember it for some time!" William muttered rather grimly.

"Yes, but do you know what we all forgot?" cried the breezy James. "Well, this is what we all forgot to say!" He rose and laid an affectionate hand on William's shoulder. He swept them with his calm grin. "Just this," James declaimed. "*Many happy returns of the day!*"

Then he waited for the glad, unanimous acclaim. It did not come immediately. There was a stunned hush of a second or so. Then:

"Why, Will! *Will!*" Anne cried. "You have knocked over your finger-bowl and your glass of water, too!"

And in the same breath Louise's voice came sharply and affrightedly:

"Dan! Whatever is the matter with you? Why do you jump and choke in that manner and turn purple, and—why, *Dan!*"

(The end.)

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

BY KATHERINE HOFFMAN

ALAS for the hero we worshiped of old—
The Guardsman all conquering, the dark, brooding Childe,
The good country Doctor, who braved heat and cold,
The Beau, whose fair victims half swooned when he smiled,
The Heir misanthropic, the Clergyman mild—
Their glory's departed, mere legend their power.
By lads in jean roundabouts now they're exiled:
The clocks are all striking the juveniles' hour!

Alas for the ladies whose stories were told
In volumes that once all our ennui beguiled—
Amelia the tender, and *Katherine* the scold,
Virginia the chaste, and poor *Tess* the defiled.
Now, though their adventures were Pelion-piled
Each publisher'd greet them with countenance sour,
By pinafored misses they're rivaled, exiled:
The clocks are all striking the juveniles' hour!

No more may poor *Jem*, as he trudges the wold,
Dream day-dreams of *Jess* and a cottage red-tiled.
No longer may *Edwin* triumphant infold—
At end of the book—*Angeline*, reconciled
To wooing once flouted, to love once revived.
Small now is the use of a moonlighted bower:
By nursery tears are the passions exiled.
The clocks are all striking the juveniles' hour!

ENVOY

Prince, pray for its passing, this vogue of the child,
Before we train ogres the young to devour—
We old-fashioned authors from print far exiled,
While clocks are all striking the juveniles' hour!

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

THE moral slacker, throwing the burden of his evil days upon the gods, hugs to his soul that bit of Persian pacifism from his favorite Omar Khayyam:

> We are but pieces in the game He plays
> Upon this checkerboard of nights and days;
> Hither and thither moves and checks and slays,
> And one by one back in the cupboard lays.

But the Anglo-Saxon conscience of the average American, who sees life straight and sees it whole, finds its creed in the words of Shakespeare:

> The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars, but in ourselves,
> That we are underlings.

And this, too, is the creed of Semi-Dual, the mystic detective, who found in the disposition of the stars, not the cause, but the clue, of the evil which it fell to his lot to investigate. For we moderns, unlike the medievalists who fled to convents and to deserts to escape the evil of the cities, have pledged both brain and brawn to make the world a fit place to live in. No celebate of the desert ever gave himself more uncompromisingly to the sanctification of his private soul than this chief pledged himself to the service of his fellow man and the cause of justice. Next week we are offering the first instalment of a new three-part story—

STARS OF EVIL

BY J. U. GIESY AND JUNIUS B. SMITH

Authors of "The Black Butterfly," "Solomon's Decision," etc.

(A Semi-Dual Story)

This latest tangle of crime and mystery by the versatile creators of Semi-Dual is sure to win your unqualified approval, and to hold your unflagging attention from the moment Nadine Norgall is found with her murdered guardian in his study until —

The until is for your pleasant investigation.

EVEN before the advent of the ubiquitous automobile and the dusty cloud of glory that follows in its wake, the true knight of the road shunned the well-defined highroads of a country, and set out on his adventure by the by-paths and the secluded lanes, where lurk the real rewards of the open. There will, of course, be always those who prefer the smell of gasoline, the lazy luxury of padded cushions, and expensive refreshment of road-houses to the primitive pleasure of a healthfully tired body, a snack from one's rucksack, or a couch under a spreading brookside tree. The relative merits of either method of locomotion can only be determined by experience and temperament.

The roads through the country of the imagination are much like the roads of the real world. Some prefer to take the much-traveled ways of high emprise and romantic adventure, incredulous of the compensations that often lie rich and rare about a quiet country lane in the land of make believe. But just as surely as the man who takes

his stick and sets forth on foot alone knows the joy of going a journey or the secret of the out-of-doors, so we are equally convinced the most unpromisingly quiet of fancy's trails may lead to Eldorado.

Anyhow, as Cæsar used to say in his Commentaries, these things being considered, York Desmond, dilettante decorator and near-artist from New York, discovered the adventure of his young life on such a by-path. Desmond, both by nature and inclination loved the beauty of quiet places, far from the madding crowd. Consult

THE HOUSE OF SKULLS

BY H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Sword-Flame," "The Rajah of Hell Island," "Nuala O'Malley," etc.

to learn how this man of quiet tastes and subtle moods was projected into the whirlwind by so simple and prosaic a procedure as the purchase of a house.

This fascinating novelette will be found in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

ONLY the insatiable curiosity of the human mind tops the natural naughtiness of the human heart. We are all law-breakers, whether it be the urge to throw off the restrictions of the moral law or the unquenchable desire to break through the natural limitations of the finite mind. Having entirely discarded the classic tradition of the ancients and gone over bodily to the naturalistic program of the moderns, who, not content with the exchange of the earth for the air, are determined to push their pursuit into the very arcana of the gods themselves, we refuse to recognize any limitations to the human intelligence. That such a quest may lead to unforeseen disaster, that a man may know *too much*, is the underlying theme of a very brilliant and unusual story, which appears in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and which the author very aptly calls

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

BY JOHN D. SWAIN

(A "Different" Story)

No one who has followed the diversified progress of our friend, Shorty Kilgour, and his picturesque pal, Jim Caldwell, will be entirely incredulous when they learn this versatile pair "once upon a time" had a professional career. True, they did not receive their scripts in a Broadway office, off Forty-Second Street, from a bediamond agent, but Hatch's All-Star Cast gave them their big opportunity; and how they improved it, and how they justified the bold pretensions of Hatch's stellar aggregation, you will find amusingly chronicled by Frank Condon in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY under the title, "ON AND OFF."

WE'VE loved a lassie or two in our day, and still love one a little better than the rest; we've voted and orated for suffrage, and always suspected that a woman was, somehow, made of finer clay than a man. But when it came to a subject of domestic harmony, to say nothing of the beans, the bed, and our socks, we always thought it was a question of fifty-fifty. In a way, we long suspected a man's selfishness was not a minor excrescence, but a vital organ; that a man took his wife, as he takes his dog or his gun, for granted; in fact, that a fairly good man may come to regard her as a habit. But after reading "DAUGHTER OF AYLER," by Jennie Harris Oliver (see next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY), we begin to wonder if the whiteness of a woman's soul can ever purge out the yellow in a man. In this particular instance, the leading of a little child—But that's the story.

"CHANNA'S TABU," by H. A. Lamb, is the latest McKechnie story from this author's pen. For those who recall the dour captain of the Auld Alfred, no further comment will be required. For those who have still to make the acquaintance of this crafty but honest Scotchman, past master in the reading of bushman human nature, we need but add that the stories are located in the South Seas, and head-hunters, pearls, bushmen, and European adventurers make a combination from which drama is bound to take its rise. See this particular tale of a most interesting series in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

FROM FAR SIBERIA

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of your two magazines, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy* for so long a time that since arriving here I am lost without their cheery, humorous, interesting tales—tales that carries one's thoughts and interests traveling through so many and varied scenes and incidents that all thoughts of to-day fade, for a time, and one is wrapped in forgetfulness in the vivid incidents so interestingly portrayed by your many entertaining authors. I have favorites, of course; but they are all good, and I regret exceedingly that these magazines are not procurable here. I would subscribe, but "we are here to-day and gone to-morrow." Possibly some way will be found to get them here—who knows? Good luck to you and your little "cheer carriers." Good-by.

Very truly,

M. S. E. Co. D. LEON E. HARPER.
53rd Telegraph Battalion, Signal Corps,
A. E. F., Siberia.

MAKES MANY HEARTS HAPPY

TO THE EDITOR:

Just a word of appreciation to you and all the authors of your fine magazine who help to make

us all happy. I have been a reader for several years, and don't think your stories can be beaten. As the Irishman says, "More power to your elbow."

Last March and the March before you published two of my letters on the work I was doing, writing letters and sending parcels to soldiers, and and those letters were answered from all over the United States from loving friends, who have been helping ever since with this work, making happy many of our brave boys in France. This week I got a letter from a United States soldier in France, saying he got hold of an old magazine with my letter, and said he was so lonely for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, as he had not seen it for six months, he being a regular reader before going across. I sent him several back numbers containing your serials, and others are doing the same. So, dear Mr. Editor and authors, you little realize how many hearts you make happy with your stories and letters.

Wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY editor and authors the very happiest year they have ever had,

Your sincere friend,

MAMIE FITZGERALD.

428 Mance Street,
Montreal, Canada.

LIKES SAD ENDINGS

TO THE EDITOR:

Please continue my subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for another three months. Also you may add my name to the list of your *Argosy* subscribers; money order for same enclosed. As I am renewing my ALL-STORY WEEKLY subscription, thought I might as well subscribe for *The Argosy* for a period of three months.

Max Brand is certainly a fine writer. He knows how to write stories that hold the reader's undivided attention. Whenever I read one of his tales, it always sets me thinking; while so many stories that I read leave no impression whatever on my mind. But not so with Brand's tales, or not so with me, at least. Take that fine writing from his pen, "Devil Ritter," even after I had read it—and a good while afterward—I still remember its details as vividly as if I had just now finished reading its closing lines. Such a wonderful mind as *Devil Ritter* had! A wonderful mind, but a weak body; which is as it should be. Brand's latest tale, which was a short story entitled "The Great Stroke," is a gripping story, even though it is a short one. So many of your readers liked that story of his called "Who Am I?" I have always been sorry that I never had a chance to read it. But it was published before I joined the ranks of your subscribers.

Although of all the writers on your staff I prefer Max Brand, there are quite a few of the others that I like. Mystery stories, especially very weird ones, always attracted me. I enjoyed the "Crimes of Old London" series of short stories exceedingly. E. K. Means is fine for a humorous writer. His Southern tales are very witty, and I never tire of them. I liked "The Texan" very much. It ended in such a sad sort of way, which is just the way I like for stories to end. I read so much, and there are so many stories that end with happiness, which is always the opposite to real life, that I do not like those kind very much any more. Of course I don't object to stories that end up with happiness for all of the characters, but I much prefer the other kind. Just a little sadness in the ending always pleases me.

I like the following writers fairly well: Isabel Ostrander, Burroughs, Jackson Gregory, Freeman Putney, Parrish, and a few others whom I do not recall just now. Although of all the writers on your staff there is not one to find fault with, I much prefer Brand or Means or Ostrander. Let us have as many stories from their pens in the future as in the past. This is hoping that I will receive my magazines promptly, and that I haven't taken up too much of your time.

MISS RUTH E. SMITH.

Crawfordsville, Indiana.

HUMOR THE THING

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed find post-office order for two dollars for four months' subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, beginning with the next number issued. I am a confirmed reader of both the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy*, and as the news-stands here cannot be depended on every week, I have suffered some disappointments in the past in not being able to secure a copy every week, but do not intend to be without one or both publications in future.

I have a brother expected home from France this winter, where he has fought since the summer of 1916, and I am saving my copies of your magazines for his perusal when he arrives, as he always appreciates good reading matter.

In most of the letters which I have read in Heart to Heart Talks, the writers give more or less detailed accounts of the stories they like best, so that in the long run almost every story has its admirers, while some have received their quota of knocks. Personally I admire the majority of stories, and enjoy reading them all (serial and short story alike), with the exception of the so-called "different" stories, and for them I have no welcome whatever, but find them one and all disgusting and trivial because of their impracticability.

I like stories about matter-of-fact people, especially stories with a touch of comedy, such as the ones entitled "Ready-to Occupy," by Edgar Franklin, and the *Wuggles* stories, by Freeman Putney, Jr. Other stories I have especially enjoyed in the past are "The Texan," "No Partners," "Above the Law," and, more than all, "Claire," the story with the blind hero. I started to read the story entitled "The King of Conserve Island," by Homer Eon Flint, but could not interest myself sufficiently to finish it, although it

has, from my point of view, got some of the other "different" stories beat all to pieces.

"Safe and Sane" is absolutely silly as well as far fetched in its nonsense. Glancing back at what I have written, I find my letter takes a rather "knocky" view of the stories in the best magazine printed, so, in apology, I will say in confidence that every copy is to me, in spite of a few unappreciated stories, chockful of the finest enjoyment to be got out of any reading matter in the whole wide world; and I know of no more pleasant recreation, for the long and frosty Saskatchewan winters, than to sit in an easy chair by a comfortable fire, and contentedly read either an ALL-STORY WEEKLY or an *Argosy* magazine.

La Fleche, W. J. PASSMORE.
Saskatchewan, Canada.

IN DEFENSE OF MISS OSTRANDER

TO THE EDITOR:

I simply cannot refrain from saying something in reply to E. M. Adams. He states that "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" and "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian" are stories fit for "he" men, but "Draft of Eternity" and "Suspense" are fit only for "lounge lizards" and women. "Palos of the Dog Star Pack" was one of my favorite stories, and while "Draft of Eternity" did not measure up to "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," it certainly was close upon its heels. "Suspense" was surely a fine mystery story. I resent anything said against a story by Isabel Ostrander. I read "The Mad Ape of Verdun," by Egbert R. Morrison, and I think it was a very startling story. Also it was rather preposterous.

I have been reading your delightful magazine since last February, and have enjoyed all of the stories. Since I have been taking your magazine I do not think I have found a single story that did not interest me. I always read the Heart to Heart Talks first, and many times I see mention of *The Argosy*. That was what first aroused my interest in *The Argosy*. I bought one, and I have never been without either of your excellent magazines since. My favorite authors: Means, Ostrander, Burroughs, Franklin, and Achmed Abdullah. They are great, especially Franklin.

When do we get a sequel to "The Moon Pool"? Please hurry it up, for I am all impatience. I hope to see this in the Heart to Heart Talks, but I do not suppose I will, as it is too long. However, this is my first offense, and I humbly crave and hope to receive your pardon. Long live the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy*.

Dallas, Texas. (MISS) M. BELL.

"AUTHORS DON'T WRITE ENOUGH" ONLY KICK

TO THE EDITOR:

It was in the year 1910, in the month of June, that my news-dealer called my attention to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, beginning the serial, "The Fugitive Sleuth." Since then I have been a constant reader of the magazine; and to show my appreciation to my news-dealer I do not subscribe for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, but let him make the few cents' profit. To say that I am sorry that I haven't started to read the magazine earlier would be putting it mildly. But you can be sure that I shall not miss a copy in the future, unless circumstances force you to discontinue the publication of the issue.

About six months ago, on a Friday, having been finished with the ALL-STORY WEEKLY (I generally finish it on Thursday about the witching hour of A.M. Friday), and not having anything else to read, I decided to try *The Argosy*. The result—I am still reading it. I haven't any fault to find with the stories, with about one exception, and that is that the authors don't write new stories for publication fast enough. My best authors—that is, those whom I consider best—are Charles Alden Seltzer, Max Brand, Frank Blighton, Zane Grey, Jackson Gregory, Hulbert Footner, William MacLeod Raine, and James B. Hendryx. "Everyman's Land" was good. The Williamsons' stories are always good. I am glad to know that you have a safe full of good stories for 1910, and am patiently waiting for them to appear. I won't bore you with this letter any more, so with best wishes for a merry Christmas and a prosperous and happy New Year for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy*, and also to you, dear editors, I am, out of a city of six million people, a Munsey fan.

MARTIN A. RUSSELL.
New York City.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Enclosed find ten cents in stamps for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY of November 16. Was unable to get it here. Can't possibly do without one single copy. I have only been reading your magazine a short while, but I'm contented to read it the rest of my life. I never read a better one, and read quite a lot, too. I can hardly wait till it comes. "Ready to Occupy" was fine. I like "White Tigers"; want to finish it; it's the one I'm writing for. "Lady of the Night Wind" was splendid. I like every story in your magazine. Thanking you, I remain.

MRS. W. L. SHANKS.
3728 Elm Street,
Indiana Harbor, Indiana.

It gave me considerable pleasure to find Isabel Ostrander's name on the list of contributors for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY this week. I belong to that class of your readers who cannot abide *Tarzan* and *Koyala* sort of stories, but who admires Miss Ostrander, Giesy and Smith, Mary Imlay Taylor, Natalie Sumner Lincoln, Carolyn Wells, and Achmed Abdullah (when he is not *too*

Oriental). Well written detective, mystery, and adventure stories, and even historical ones, laid in modern surroundings, always attract and interest me. I consider the ALL-STORY WEEKLY (which I have followed through its many reincarnations) and *The Argosy* two of the cleanest and most interesting fiction magazines.

Very truly yours,

R. A. B.

Greenville, Alabama.

I wish to say a word for Perley Poore Sheehan's story, "White Tigers." I do not care for that kind of tale, but I liked the way it was written very much. That poetic-narrative style was perfect to the finish without a "falling-off" effect. Sheehan's is the first story I ever liked well enough to write about; yet I didn't like his plot. With all good wishes.

GLADYS F. TALLMAN.

412 Brook Avenue.

Enclosed you will find twenty cents in coin, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for October 19 and October 26. Could not get them at news-stand. Have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for over a year, and like it fine. "Suspense" was the best story I ever read. I liked "The Texan," too, but would have liked it better if he could have married *Alice*. Same way with "Koyala the Beautiful." The new story just beginning, "Twenty-Six Clues," is very good, so is "The Substitute Millionaire" and "On the Night of the Storm." Did not like "The Pirate Woman"; it was entirely too awful. Hoping to receive the magazines at once.

RUBY GALLATY.

Weatherford, Texas.

Enclosed find money order for sixty cents, for which send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for September 7, 28, October 5 and 12. I have been reading your magazine for several years, and these are the first numbers I have missed. I was in a hospital with a broken shoulder, and my newsdealer did not save these numbers for me. My favorite authors are: Burroughs, Dr. J. U. Giesy, Bedford-Jones, Jackson Gregory, and others too numerous to mention. Hoping to receive these numbers in the near future, I remain,

WM. J. C. TYSON.

Niagara, Wisconsin.

I thank you very much for the books, and will renew the subscription, as I like the magazine a lot; in fact it is the best I ever read. I enjoyed "The Moon Pool" sincerely, and hope for a sequel. You sure have some good authors—Edgar Franklin, Max Brand, *et cetera*. "The Peacock's Eye," "One Bright Idea," "A Threefold Cord," "Lady of the Night Wind," "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," "Crimes of Old London," and the *Valentine West* stories were great; really, there are only a few I didn't enjoy. "The Substitute Millionaire" is simply grand. Long live the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

Yours truly,

HAROLD F. RAU.

Sarcona, Pennsylvania.

I am sending one dollar money order, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months, commencing with the November 16, 1918, as I missed that number. It is no use trying to get it at the stores. I get left every time, so I am just buying myself a Christmas present, and one that is always new. I think the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is the best magazine ever published. What is the matter with E. K. Means? We haven't heard from him for a long time. So wishing you the best of luck and a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and lots of success for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, I remain,

MRS. RICHARD PASCOE.

Globe, Arizona.

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for five years, and this makes the third time I am writing to you, and must say it has been a wonderfully good publication. Please let us have some more stories like "Voyage of the Nantook," "Draft of Eternity," "The Moving Finger," "Palos of the Dog Star Pack"—that was a wonderful story, and couldn't we have a sequel to it?—"The Three Elks," "Lady of the Night Wind," "Claire," "A Threefold Cord," "Diane of Star Hollow"—in fact they are all good and can't be beat. Couldn't you get Miss Margaret G. Hays to give us more of her poems, as they are very interesting, and I feel a kind of disappointed when I don't see any of her poems in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Wishing you and the ALL-STORY WEEKLY a merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year, I remain,

PETER GRUB.

Portsmouth, New York.

You will find enclosed check for $2.10, for which please extend my subscription for another six months. I think my present subscription runs out December 7, and the ten cents is for the November 16 issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. For some reason or other I have missed that number, and I can't get it out here. I was somewhat surprised to see my former letter to you printed in the October 26 issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and have had lots of fun and good entertainment writing to so many readers who answered my other letter. If for nothing else it has broken the loneliness for me, marooned out here in the country that God forgot. Wishing you yet more prosperity and success, I am, an ALL-STORY WEEKLY friend,

FRANK D. SMITH.

Dismal, Nebraska.

If The War Had Continued!

If the war had continued, the pair of U. S. "Protected" rubber boots that you will now be able to buy at your dealer's this winter would have gone to France for one of the boys "over there."

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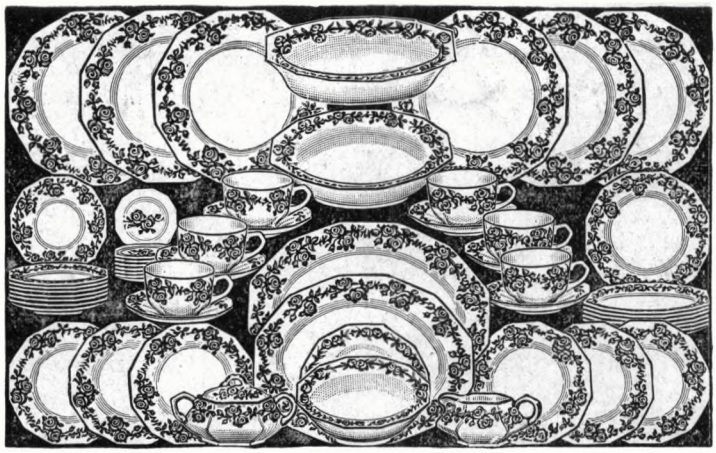

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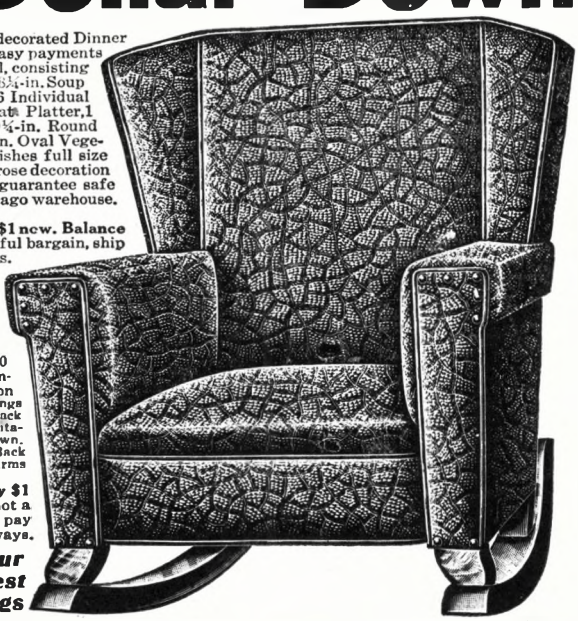

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RACQUET CLUB, St. Louis:
"Fatima is largest seller"

THE PONCHARTRAIN, Detroit:
"Fatima is the second best-selling brand"

THE SHOREHAM, Washington, D. C.:
"With one exception, Fatima is best seller"

UNION CLUB, Cleveland:
"Fatima is one of the largest sellers"

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A Sensible Cigarette

And Fatima gives full, honest value—instead of "showy" looks. It is for every smoker who wants a cigarette that never "talks back," even if a man should smoke more often than usual.

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THE MUNSEY PRESS, NEW YORK