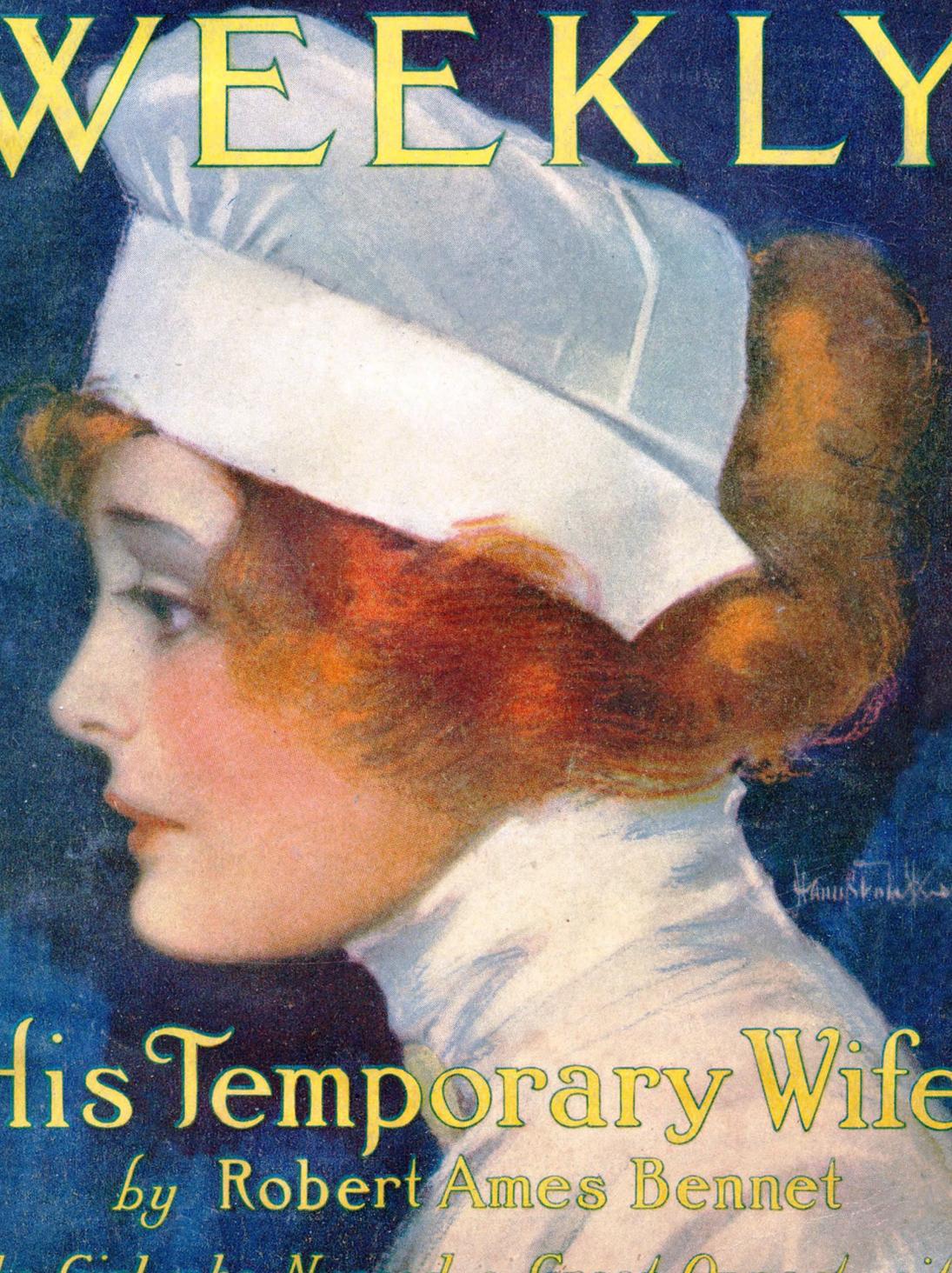


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SATURDAY FEB. 24

BY THE \$4.00 YEAR

ALL-STORY WEEKLY



His Temporary Wife

by Robert Ames Bennet

The Girl who Nursed a Great Opportunity

BIG THINGS are going on at the Capital of the United States--bigger than for a generation. The whole nation should know the men who are in control of the Federal government at the opening of President Wilson's second administration.

MEET THESE MEN

With Judson C. Welliver in the March

MUNSEY'S

where Mr. Welliver writes intimately and entertainingly of the Capital's most influential and conspicuous figures.

"Who's Who at Washington"

With twenty-two portraits.

Also another of William Slavens McNutt's inimitable funny stories, "A Burglar's Feelings"; several other good short stories; a complete novelette, "The Second Generation," by Camilla E. L. Kenyon; the beginning of a stirring new novel, "The Inner Door," by the popular Canadian author, Alan Sullivan; and a generous installment of the absorbing serial by George Allan England, "The Gift Supreme," with a condensation of the opening chapters, enabling the reader to begin the story with this number of the magazine.

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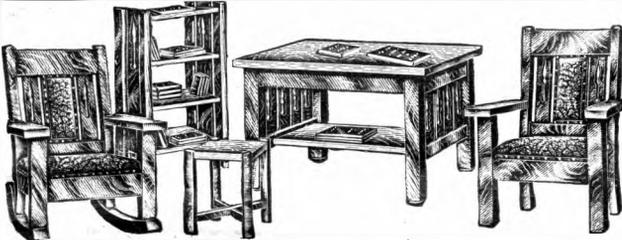
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From the Great **UNIVERSAL** Catalog
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50¢



Special 5-Piece Mission Library Set

All five pieces made to match, of seasoned solid oak, fine rich fumed finish. Correct Mission design. Table is a neat design typical of mission style. The rich, dark fumed finish beautifully brings out natural grain of the oak. Each end has 4 panels with attractive cut-out design. Top 34x24 in.; 8 in. book shelf; legs cut from 2 in. stock and fitted with slides. Rocker's seat and back upholstered in imitation Spanish brown leather; seat supported by 6 heavy steel coil springs resting on steel channel bars. Width 26 in., height 38 in., back 24 in. above seat; seat 21x19 in. Chair has same upholstering and construction as rocker. Width 26 in., height 38 in., back 24 in. above seat; seat 21x19 in. Magazine Rack has 4 shelves; 30 in. high; 17 in. wide, 8 1/2 in. deep. Tabourette; top 11x11 in., height 18 in. Order by No. U123. Price, (complete set of 5 pieces as shown) \$17.95. Terms, 50c with order; Balance \$1.75 per month.

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Here is a plan for beautifying the home that marks the most advanced step ever taken in the history of merchandising. For only 50c we will send you any of the remarkable bargains shown on this page. If more than one is wanted send 50c for each item. You may use what you order for 30 days at our risk. If you then decide to keep it, pay the balance in small monthly payments. If you decide not to keep it return it at our expense and we will return your 50c—the 30 days use of the goods costs you nothing.

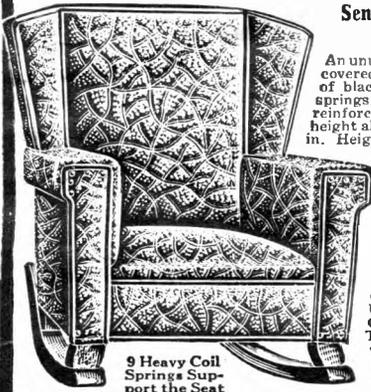
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Send for Special Bargain Book picturing and describing everything for the home—at rock-bottom prices—and on the most wonderfully liberal terms imaginable. We will trust you for anything you want on our liberal, easy-to-pay, credit plan.

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145 W. 39th St.
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Chicago



Sensational Sale High Grade Rockers

An unusually massive, overstuffed Rocker, covered in durable imitation leather, choice of black or brown Spanish. 9 heavy coil springs support seat, attached to frame and reinforced by steel channel bars. Extreme height about 37 in. Extreme width about 31 in. Height of seat from floor 17 in. Distance between arms 21 inches. Size of seat 21x20 in. Size of arms 6x23 in. Height of back from seat 27 in. Mahogany finish frame. Securely packed in a manner to obtain lowest possible freight rate.

This is an exceptionally attractive Rocker, and as will be seen from the ample dimensions, a most comfortable one. It is substantially built throughout, strong and durable.

Order by No. U129. Price Only \$9.68. Terms, 50c with order; Balance 95c per month.

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9 Heavy Coil Springs Support the Seat

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This handy Kitchen Cabinet embodies many features that can add to the convenience and lighten the work of a housewife's kitchen duties. Made of kiln dried solid oak with beautiful golden gloss finish. Hardware is of copper, latest design. Height 63 in.; base top 42x26 in. Contains 1 cutlery drawer; 1 bread drawer; large cupboard space for cooking utensils; closet with door which contains rolling pin; and pan rack; one bread board 18x20 in.; portable 40-lb. flour bin with sifter attached; one china closet with two panel and art glass doors; one 7-lb. filling sugar bin; two spice drawers. Draw bottoms, back, etc., built of 3-ply non-warping lumber.

Order by No. U126. Price \$14.85. No money in advance—50c with order—balance \$1.45 per month.

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If only catalog is wanted put an X in this square, fill in name and address on lines below and mail coupon.

Universal Mail Order Co.

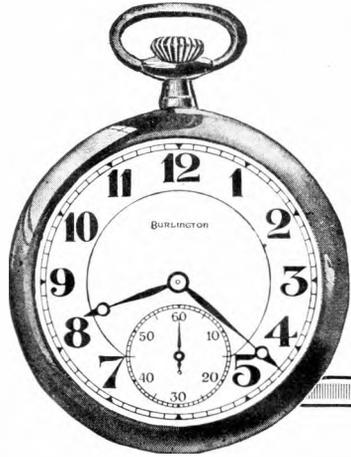
145-153 W. 39th St., Dept. 302 Chicago

Gentlemen: Enclosed find 50c for each item checked below. If satisfactory after 30 days examination I agree to pay the balance as per prices and terms printed in this advertisement. If not satisfactory I will return goods to you.

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Address.....
City..... State.....

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The new Burlington—just out—distributed now for the first time—and on an astounding offer. The superb new model far surpassing everything of the past. 21 jewels, adjusted to positions, temperature and isochronism. New thin design—and all the newest ideas in gold strata cases to choose from. Send coupon today for full particulars.

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Just think of it!
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will pay, at the rock-bottom price, for the New 21-Jewel Burlington—the master watch. This perfect time-piece will be sent to you, prepaid, without a cent deposit so that you can see and examine it for yourself. When you hold it in your hand you will realize what a gigantic value it is—and you will know how the Burlington brought the highest watch value within the reach of all.

21 Jewels

- adjusted to positions
- adjusted to temperature
- adjusted to isochronism
- adjusted to the second.

Runs almost 2 days in one winding.

On an Iron-clad guarantee.

Newest

up-to-date ideas in gold strata cases—the master products of the goldsmith's art are illustrated in colors in our new Watch Book. All yours to choose from. Write for the new watch book now.

Burlington Watch Co.
19th St. and Marshall Blvd.
Dept. 1082. Chicago, Ill.

Please send me, without obligation (and prepaid), your free book on watches, with full explanation of your cash or \$2.50 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

Name.....

Address.....

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Last chance at old prices. Date prices go up will be announced. Write at once for catalog.

Catalog Now Off the Press

Write today for our new catalog. Read about this gigantic watch value. Learn about watch movements and why 21 jewels are the number prescribed by watch experts. Read what makes a watch movement perfect—and how the Burlington is adjusted to the second. The watch book is free. Write for it today and get posted on watches and watch values. Send the coupon.

Burlington Watch Co. Dept. 1082, 19th St. & Marshall Blvd., Chicago

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXVIII

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

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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs 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.

"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.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines

	LINE RATE	
Munsey's Magazine	\$2.00	Special counts
The Argosy	1.35	national rate
Railroad Man's Magazine	.80	\$4.49
All-Story Weekly	.60	less 3 per cent
		cash discount

March 24th All-Story Weekly Forms Close March 3rd.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AMAZING, New Invention, Marvelous Adding Machine. Retail \$7.50. Adds, Subtracts, Multiplies. Does work of 200 machine. Five-Year Guarantee. Offices, stores, factories buy from one to dozen. Enormous demand. Splendid profits. Write quick for protected territory. Dept. 505, Calculator Corp., Grand Rapids, Mich.

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 hands' sample outfit. All Free. We deliver everything free. Look into this. Paragon Tailoring Co., Dept. 201, Chicago.

AGENTS MAKE \$5 TO \$8 A DAY SELLING NEVER FAIL IRON RUST AND STAIN REMOVER, and 125 other fast sellers. Exclusive territory. Credit given. Sample free. Sanford-Beal Co., Inc., Newark, New York, Dept. F.

AGENTS—500% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLE GOLD AND Silver Sign Letters for store fronts and office windows. Anyone can put on. Big demand everywhere. Write today for liberal offer to agents. Metallic Letter Co., 441 N. Clark St., Chicago.

FREE TO A FEW MEN IN SMALL TOWNS or on R. F. D. routes. Suit made to measure in latest style and chance to make money in spare time. For samples and offer write Knickerbocker Tailoring Co., Dept. 554, Chicago.

NEWEST MONEY MAKER! 11 PIECE TOILET SET selling like blazes at \$1 with \$1 carrying set free. Tremendous Hit! Randall sold 30 one day. Success sure. A. Pierce Company, 906 Lake Street, Chicago.

Armstrong Earned \$67.50 First Day selling our new business necessity. Retail \$5.00 to \$50.00. Agents profit 150%. Buyer satisfied or money back. No competition. Exclusive territory. Free Sample. Sayers Co., 421 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

FREE SAMPLE—NOSPLASH WATER STRAINERS SELL THEMSELVES. No talking experience unnecessary. Daily profits \$5 upwards. Send 2c (mailing cost). E. W. B. Union Filter Co., New York.

WANTED—LIVE SALESMEN TO SELL FERTILE FARM LANDS. Ten acre tracts. Easy terms. No interest or taxes. Big commission. Attractive proposition. Palm Beach County Land Company, Box C, Stuart, Florida.

WE PAY \$80 MONTHLY SALARY and furnish rig and expenses to introduce guaranteed poultry and stock powders. Bigler Company, X501, Springfield, Ill.

"WASHWHITE" Cleans Clothes Without Rubbing. Big profit on quick sales and repeat business. Valuable Premiums. Free samples. Exclusive territory. Unusual selling helps. Write for our offer. The Nacma Co., Dept. F-11, 20 W. Lake St., Chicago.

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MAN OR WOMAN TO TRAVEL FOR OLD-ESTABLISHED FIRM. No canvassing; \$1170 first year, payable weekly, pursuant to Contract. Expenses advanced. K. G. Nichols, Philadelphia, Pa., Pepper Building.

GET A SURE JOB WITH BIG PAY, steady work, short hours, regular vacations, rapid advance. Thousands of positions open with Uncle Sam. I will prepare you in a few weeks at small cost. Write immediately for big Free Book DV 1053 with special offer. Earl Hopkins, Washington, D. C.

NO STRIKE: 8 HOUR DAY. MEN EVERYWHERE. Firemen, Brakemen, Baggage-men, \$129. Colored Porters. Experience unnecessary. 837 Railway Bureau, E. St. Louis, Illinois.

OF INTEREST TO WOMEN

FEW RELIABLE WOMEN WANTED; DISTRIBUTE Borax Soap Powder among friends and neighbors. No money or experience needed. Steady work; good pay. R. Ward & Co., 730 N. Franklin Street, Chicago, Illinois.

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PATENTS—WRITE FOR HOW TO OBTAIN A PATENT, list of Patent Buyers, and Inventions Wanted. \$1,000,000 in prizes offered for inventions. Send sketch for free opinion as to patentability. Our Four Books sent free upon request. Patents advertised free. We assist inventors to sell their inventions. Victor J. Evans Co., Patent Attys., 702 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

"PRIZES FOR PATENTS." "MONEY IN PATENTS." "How to Get Your Patent and Money." "Why Some Inventors Fail." "Needed Inventions." Sent free. Send sketch for free opinion. Randolph & Co., 630 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENT YOUR IDEAS—\$9,000 OFFERED for certain inventions. Books, "How to Obtain a Patent," and "What to Invent," sent free. Send rough sketch for free report as to patentability. Manufacturers constantly writing us for patents we have obtained. We advertise your patent for sale at our expense. Established 20 years. Address Chandlee & Chandlee, Patent Attorneys, 913 F Street, Washington, D. C.

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\$50 TO \$100 A DAY CAN BE EARNED with a Long Crispette Machine in any town. Machine a wonder. Makes Crispettes—a new, delicious popcorn confection. Sells at 5c a package—almost 4c net profit. Everybody buys at sight—nickels and pennies. No experience necessary. Investment small. Returns large. Write at once for free book "Dollars & Sense"—a valuable guide to wealth and independence—a start to the ownership of a store of your own. Don't wait. Send postal today. Address W. Z. Long Co., 1324 High St., Springfield, Ohio.

YOU SHOULD MAKE BIG MONEY operating our mail order plan for which we furnish all printed matter on trust, allowing you to pay for same when established from your profits. A. S. Hunter Co., Hollis, N. Y.

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YOU read these little advertisements. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read your message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe your own services? 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, All-Story Weekly, 8 West Fortieth Street, New York.

Make this car your office—

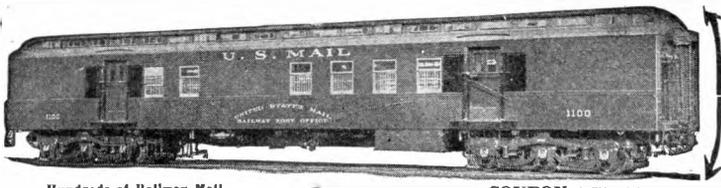
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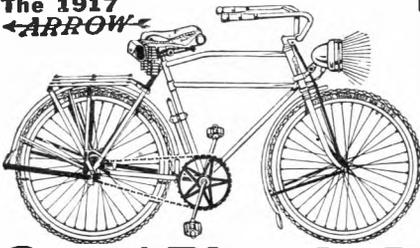
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←ARROW→



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RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE -	.80	
ALL-STORY WEEKLY - - - -	.60	
	\$4.70	

Minimum space accepted, four lines. Ten per cent discount for six consecutive insertions. 3% for cash.

Write for this Booklet

"A New Force in Business," that gives full particulars about the effectiveness of Classified Advertising in "The Munsey Magazines."

The Frank A. Munsey Company
8 West Fortieth Street, New York

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HAROLD LACHMAN COMPANY
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"Romance of the Automatic Coupler"

"Old Times on the El Paso Southwestern"

"Simple-Circuit Telegraphy Explained"

COMPLETE RAILROAD NOVEL

By Horace Howard Herr

ALSO

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THE ARGOSY

For MARCH is a Dandy

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Timely to the month that holds the inauguration ceremonies is "The President-Maker," by Keene Thompson, a unique tale of the future, showing what might happen in the event of another election proving as close in the count of the returns as three have done.

Sister, Sam and the Sergeant

BY

COL. BEN GORDON WHITEHEAD

a new writer, is a lively story of the troops on the border, and "In Honor of the Beast," a Western yarn that is really a wonder as it rings a fresh change on a much-worn theme. And there are many others, full of life and snap. So don't fail to take your dime to the nearest news-stand and sample this March *Argosy* for yourself.

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
8 West Fortieth Street, New York City

6 Months To Pay 6

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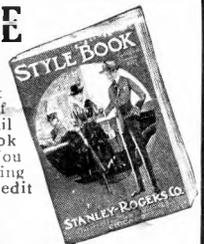
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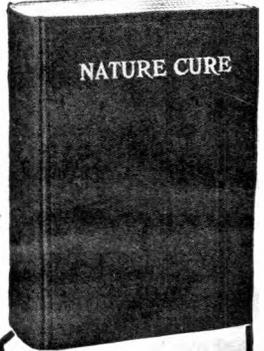
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1917



His Temporary Wife

by Robert Ames Bennet

Author of "Finders Keepers," "The Missing Key," etc.

MR. BENNET is a writer who believes in quality rather than quantity. His output is very small—we had just one story of his for last year, for instance. But it is a moral certainty that if you read "Finders Keepers" you still remember it vividly. And this is another such story—plus!—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

HER CASE OUT.

THE superintendent of the hospital hung up the telephone, pressed a bell button, and jotted down a name and house number. He was making an entry in one of the hospital books when a demure little nurse with flame-red hair glided into the office.

After he had kept her waiting a full minute, he faced her with sour displeasure. The nurse murmured:

"You—rang for me, sir?"

"Dr. Gould's patient left this morning."

"Yes, sir, a day sooner than she—"

"Have you been assigned to another case?"

"Not yet, sir. The matron said that as one of the wards was empty—"

"They would be full enough if Gould and some others refused to treat their cases at home," the superintendent vented his irritation. "Here's Gould short of graduate nurses he likes. Wants you on an outside case."

The girl kept very still. She was in the midst of the hard training course. Graduation was many months ahead. An outside case, even under crabbed old Dr. Gould, would be a great relief from the routine drudgery of the hospital.

"Can't see why he insisted upon having you," grumbled the superintendent. "Because you're the youngest and he thinks you are pretty, I suppose."

"Oh, I hope not! I hope it's because

he knows I've tried so hard to do good work!" exclaimed the little nurse, her cheeks scarlet.

The ill nature of the superintendent did not soften. "Make the most of your chance, Miss Rose. You have that mistake over the medicines to live down."

"But it was my first case, and there was no harm done!" The girl could not restrain her protest against his long-cherished grudge. "Surely you can't still hold that against me? It's—it's most unjust!"

"No fault of yours that the mistake was not fatal. The reputation of this hospital is too high to permit of any more mistakes. Here is the address. You are to report for duty as soon as possible."

She glided from the office as quietly as she had entered. But a minute later, in her own bedroom, she was diving into her bureau with a whirl of joyous energy. Her roommate came in tired from the operating room and flopped on the bed.

"My lands, Nan, if this isn't just a dog's life," she complained. "I'd as soon work in a laundry. What you fussing about? Well, I declare, packing your grip! So he's fired you at last, the old sorehead. Y'ought to 've jollied him, the way I told you. Guess you see now what comes of being so strait-laced and touchy."

"Oh, no; it's Dr. Gould. He has sent for me to take an outside case—acute indigestion—a Mr. Eliot—Howard Eliot."

The older nurse sat up, her big face aflame with envy. "Nan Rose—if I'd ever caught you in a fib! Why, that's the rich Eliot—the millionaire. They say his son is rather wild."

"Well, he'll probably keep clear, if his father has a temper to go with his indigestion," argued Nan as she stripped off her white dress and took up her street uniform. "Old Gould told me the other day it's like the case he had me on in Ward B last winter."

"I'm not so sure," differed the other. "Young Eliot is a howling swell; but they all fall for a pretty nurse, 'specially if she's a sawed-off like you. Just remember, though, papa has the money and he's a widower."

"Yes, but I have an idea Dr. Gould sent for me because he knows I'm not so eager to marry my patients as are some nurses," Nan thrust back.

Her roommate looked at her tartly and slumped down lower on the bed. At best there was slight sympathy between the two. Nan was so reserved and so determined upon being refined that most of the other nurses considered her "stuck up." The old matron had been her only friend in the hospital. The new matron's present main object in life was to curry favor with the superintendent.

Nan's attempt at a cheerful good-by won only an ill-natured mutter from the bed. She caught up her satchel and hurried out.

As she left the elevator the superintendent peered from his office. His brusque gesture brought her to him breathless with haste.

"Fuss and preen all day!" he snapped. "You've kept Mr. Eliot waiting. Gould phoned him to call by for you. His father is worse."

Nan slipped into the office, aquiver with emotion under her outward reserve. A tall young man stood beside the street door, his dark, rather handsome face keen with his eagerness to be going. At sight of Nan he swung the door open.

"One moment, Mr. Eliot," called the superintendent over the top of Nan's prim bonnet. "I'll ask you to remember this is Dr. Gould's doing. For outside cases the hospital does not recommend nurses who are still in training."

The young man nodded carelessly and lifted his cap to Nan with impersonal politeness. His glance fixed a moment on her red head and demure face, only to drop to the valise in her small hand. As she passed out with him into the portico he caught the valise from her,

but his manner suggested that the courtesy was due more to haste than to thoughtfulness of her.

A large touring car stood beside the curb. In the tonneau were seated an exquisitely dressed blond young man and a beautiful golden-blond young woman.

The young man was first to notice Nan as she came down the hospital steps beside Arthur Eliot. The upswing of his arm when he raised an English monocle to his eye drew the attention of his companion. She turned her aristocratic face to fix her bright blue eyes upon Nan. Her type of beauty and the haughtiness of her look and manner exactly fitted Nan's conception of an English peeress.

The young man dropped his monocle and started to open the door of the tonneau. Arthur Eliot stopped him with a gesture and handed Nan and her valise up in front. Before the girl could draw herself into her seat he started the car off with a leap that jerked her small body backward and her little plain-shed feet upward in a most undignified manner.

But she uttered no cry, and her blush of mortification had subsided to the normal pink of her cheeks when he found time for a polite glance to see if she was comfortable. Her feet were dangling three or four inches above the car floor. The corner of his full lips started to quirk in an amused smile. Then his up-flashing glance met the cold reserve of her gray eyes, and the smile faded.

He fixed his attention upon his driving with sudden intentness. Nan saw the hand of the speedometer swing up around the dial. The car had already reached the city's residential speed limit. Within half a block it was whirling along at thirty-five miles an hour.

Outwardly Nan remained very calm. Inwardly she was thrilled and exhilarated by the reckless dash of the big car along the uptown avenue. She had never before motored in a "real" car; and that this was an unusual drive for the time and place was evident from the exclamations of the tonneau passengers.

"Jove, Eliot, we appear to be moving! Better ease off, old man. Motorcycle bobbie coming up in our wake."

"Indeed, my dear Arthur, I hardly fancy a summons before a magistrate!"

"Privileged run, Miss Verna," Eliot flung back over his shoulder, and the speed of the car bounded up to forty and forty-five miles.

Nan's sidelong glances perceived the smile of reckless joy that accentuated the fascinating quirk of his lips. In his lean face was neither fear of the police nor anxiety for his father, only sheer delight over the wild race past the other cars and groups of scurrying pedestrians.

After minutes that seemed to Nan both brief as seconds and long as days, the honking rush of the car subsided at the turn around a parked corner into the private drive of the Eliot mansion. The spluttering motorcycle took the corner a close second and followed the offending car along the curved drive to the side of the mansion. The officer dismounted and touched his cap as Eliot handed Nan out on the platform of the carriage porch.

"Must report you, sir," he stated.

"Report and be hanged," good-humoredly rallied the culprit with a smile at his tonneau passengers. He handed the officer a bank-note without looking at its denomination, and pointed to Nan. "You see, Nurse—emergency case—Dr. Gould. You'll find my number at the rear of the car."

The officer again touched his cap and remounted his motorcycle. Being pre-occupied with the figures on the corner of the bank-note, he quite forgot to note the figures of the car's license.

"Ah, my dear Arthur—you Americans!" murmured the blond young lady.

A footman was hastening out to the car. Eliot tossed him Nan's valise and signed him to lead the nurse into the house. As Nan followed the servant she heard the blond young man remark with what seemed to be intentional distinctness:

"But your American nurslings for mine! Must say, old man, you're quite a fancy poulterer. She's what one might call some broiler."

Nan turned upon him in a flash of white heat. As usual when she was in a temper, her voice was very clear and quiet: "I have not had the pleasure of an introduction, but it is to be presumed that Mr. Eliot's associates are ladies and gentlemen."

Eliot smiled at her with frank appreciation. "Hear that, Devore? You're Lombed—forty-two centimeter shell."

The blond young man bowed profoundly. "We shall hope to justify your opinion of Mr. Eliot's associates."

"I have not the slightest doubt that you will succeed," Nan met his mockery with ironical ambiguity.

Over her shoulder as, with her little nose uptilted, she passed through the doorway, she heard Eliot speak in a tone of ardent deference: "May I ask you in, Miss Devore? I must stop for the latest bulletin on the gov'nor's condition."

A backward glance from the rich gloom of the hall that she had entered gave Nan a glimpse of the young man reaching for the gloved hand of the blond young lady. The blond man, who appeared shorter and older than when in the car, stood with his monocle fixed upon the couple in an amused stare.

Nan went white. Not one of the three was thinking of her. Beyond doubt they had instantly put out of their minds her indignant upflare as merely the impertinence of a servant. She was not vain, but her pride made her very sensitive to any slight.

CHAPTER II.

UNWELCOME.

HALF way up the curved stairway the girl roused to a full realization of her surroundings. The velvety stair carpet, the bronze banisters, the

hand-carved paneling, the mural paintings and art windows—all gave evidence of wealth and heavy luxury that seemed to have been purposely accumulated to overcome and crush her independent spirit.

Above were corridors and rooms no less oppressive. Though Dr. Gould looked even more crabbed than usual, the sight of him was a blessed relief. He snatched the valise from the footman and hustled her into a room whose smallness gave some relief from the all-prevalent ponderous luxury.

"Be quick, girl—change. Patient discharged Miss Swayne over an hour ago. Flung a bowl at her," grumbled the old physician. "Come in smiling, and keep it up, or *you* may leave at once. He's testy, to say the least. Understand?"

Nan understood. She had her white dress and cap out of the valise and was taking off her bonnet before he could reach the other door and step out into the sickroom. Never had she made a quicker change. The swift movement that stripped off her dress ended in deft jerks that unbuttoned and removed her shoes. She jumped into her white linen dress, thrust her little feet into felt slippers, and adjusted her cap as she darted to the inner door.

Hardly had she stepped into the sickroom, smiling and to all appearances very amiable and placid, when a snarl from the bed gave her warning of what to expect:

"Keep your skinny hands off me, Gould—keep them off! Give me that opiate—Damn this pain! Give me that opiate!"

Past the physician's firmly shaken bald head the girl saw a gray emaciated face, moist with the sweat of physical agony. A flood of direct sunlight from the window glared full into the savage sunken eyes. She stepped aside to draw the shade before she glided over to the bed.

Dr. Gould met her smile with a masked look of relief. The patient's

pain-twisted mouth drew up in an ugly sneer.

"Ugh! Simpering idiot — this one. Gould, you're an ass."

Nan's smile became a trifle wooden, but it persisted. She was a nurse well along in her training, and she had her orders. The physician gave no heed to the ill-tempered abuse. The patient was doubly entitled to vent his spleen, first as a sick man, and second as a millionaire.

"You will find the massage by Miss Rose more soothing, Mr. Eliot," he remarked.

"I'll have no girlie business here," snarled the patient. "What's the woman's last name?"

"That is it, sir — Rose. My father was Jefferson Rose of Tennessee," explained Nan.

The dyspeptic scowled as if she had assumed the name to spite him. But for the moment he was too taken aback to speak. Dr. Gould murmured a direction in the girl's ear and moved aside for her to take his place.

She now knew beyond question just why he had sent for her. As she had told her roommate, the older Mr. Eliot's type of indigestion was similar to the case that she had nursed in the hospital. A form of massage discovered by herself had been of decided benefit in the treatment. This was the cause of her good fortune—if good fortune it was to be.

When she slipped her hand under the coverlet the patient flinched and scowled. He reached after with a nervous, bony hand, ready to clutch her wrist. His other hand grasped her shoulder. But there was magic in the firm, gentle touch of the childlike finger tips. Instead of crying out and trying to fling her away from him, the patient soon began to relax from the tension of his agony.

The girl's look of confident reassurance was met by an involuntary smile of relief that deepened into beatific restfulness. The withered eyelids drooped over the sunken eyes. Within five min-

utes after the massage began the patient was sound asleep.

Dr. Gould tapped the little nurse on the shoulder and beckoned her to follow him back to the side room. He thrust her before him through the doorway. She glided in and stopped short, her face suddenly aflame. Arthur Eliot stood beside the cot with one of her shoes in the palm of his hand. He looked at her with his amused, twisted smile.

"Beg pardon. Thought I'd found Cinderella's slipper. On close inspection I see it's not. I'd venture to guess it's an Ar shoe."

"This is now Miss Rose's room, Mr. Eliot," explained the physician. "Hereafter you will come to the other door."

"I beg your pardon, Miss — Rose," apologized the young man with cold formality. He placed the shoe on the cot and faced Dr. Gould. "How's the—" his lips closed hard on the word—"how is my father?"

"One moment. I'll tell you as we go down," answered the physician.

He proceeded to give his full instructions to Nan, each important point accompanied by a tap on her shoulder.

"You have that clear, have you?" he concluded. "No danger except from the heart, and that unlikely if patient is kept calm. But in case of the spasmodic condition, instant use of the hypodermic is indicated. You will find it ready on the stand with the patient's chart. Recharge the syringe every morning. You have that clear—hypodermic vitally important in case of such condition of the heart?"

"Yes, sir," answered Nan.

She waited with her back to them until they had passed out into the hall. When she darted after, to close the door, the noiselessness of her felt slippers on the parquetry floor enabled her unintentionally to overhear the physician's crabbed comment:

"—May prove unreliable; but best I can get, since he will not stomach Miss Swayne."

The young man replied with decision:

"Then you'd better be looking for one who is reliable, if that—"

Nan closed and locked the door. She went back into the sickroom with her lips curved in the smile that the physician had ordered. But the smile could not hide the marks on the lower lip where her small teeth had almost cut through the skin. Everybody was against her—even *he*.

Well, she would show them all. What if she *was* alone in the world? Thanks to the memory of her mother, she had never fallen in the mire of vulgarity. And she would climb up out of the dust of commonness. She hungered and thirsted for the refinements of life.

To win culture, she had sought out the hard course of a nurse's training, for beyond she saw wages to pay her way through college and medical school. After that would come association with people of intellect and refinement.

Marriage was beyond her calculations. Without money or social position, she could not in years hope to be fit to attract the kind of man who alone would suit her, and then she would be too old for the Prince Charmings—such as this young Mr. Eliot.

What was it so fascinating about his face? He was only moderately handsome, and he showed unmistakable signs of over-easy habits, if not outright dissipation. Yet there was something in his dark eyes—and that little quirk of his lips when he smiled—

CHAPTER III.

THE GAME.

AFTER the longest natural sleep that he had enjoyed for a week, the patient awoke to the cravings of ravenous hunger. Because of malnutrition, he was in reality more than half-starved.

Nan had a very bad hour feeding him according to her instructions and then trying to quiet his demands for beefsteak

and other solid foods. It would have been an altogether impossible hour for her had not the irritable patient been in some small measure restrained by the remembrance of how she had eased him to sleep.

At the end of the hour the processes of maldigestion brought on another agonizing attack. The pain did not yield to Nan's massaging until her surplus of vital magnetism had been almost expended. Yet throughout she kept to her placid, cheerful smile.

When he had relaxed and recovered somewhat from the exhaustion of his suffering he growled at her crustily: "What's your first name?"

"Nan, sir."

"Humph! You're less unendurable than some of them."

With this he closed his eyes and sank into natural sleep for the second time under her care. On the small table at the head of the bed she found a volume of Browning's poems. She curled up in an easy-chair and pored over the maze of involved English until dazed into slumber.

She wakened to find Dr. Gould frowning at her in anything but a genial mood and her patient smiling sardonically at them both.

"Asleep on duty, first day," snapped her patron. "You shall go back to the hospital as soon as I—"

"That will do, Gould," broke in the patient. "The girl stays. She has my permission to sleep when she can. Turn off that night nurse."

"But—"

"You have my orders. Good day."

The physician went across to make a note on the sick-chart, and then left, with a veil of smug deference over his dour displeasure. Nan realized that she now had only the thread of the millionaire's uncertain favor to hold her from dropping into the pit of disgrace. Dr. Gould was offended.

She was a girl only a few months over twenty, battling alone against the world

to attain her ideals. Behind her placid smile she rallied all her nurse's skill and her woman's wit and wiles to hold and add to the favor that she had won in the eyes of her employer. The task was not easy. She soon discovered that he was naturally despotic and that his malady all too often released the restraints of his breeding.

But during the first few days, thanks to her persistent tact, she weathered the most violent storms of his wrath. After that she became confident of her position, for her intuition perceived behind his continued outward harshness his realization of dependence upon her ministrations.

By the end of the week her position was well entrenched. Though imperfect assimilation still sapped the patient's strength, his attacks of pain had decreased in violence and frequency. For this he gave no direct thanks; but as between Dr. Gould and Nan, he chose to attribute the results to the nursing.

To hold her own so far the girl had paid a heavy price in vitality. On the other hand, she was enjoying many of the pleasures of wealth. Within a day after her coming, the elder Eliot's dictatorial command had put at her disposal all the comforts and luxuries of the establishment. There was a maid assigned to attend upon her needs. Her bathroom would have delighted a princess. She had only to name the food or flower or book she wished, and it was brought to her by deferential servants.

But her eating and reading, like her sleep, was ever subject to the whim of her employer. Only in mild cases is continuous night and day nursing endurable. Had not the patient's condition improved, Nan must have broken under the strain within the first few days. Even as it was, she lost weight so fast that the sick man's seemingly purely selfish concern over her ability to care for him forced him to heed the thinning of her cheeks and loss of color.

The result was that at night she was no longer disturbed unless he suffered

from an attack, and each afternoon he vented his accumulated spleen upon Dr. Gould while she spent a joyous two hours motoring around the speedway or strolling in the parks. The drives were in her employers own car, behind his chauffeur, never with Arthur Eliot.

That there was dissension between father and son had been apparent to Nan almost from the first. Every day the young man had come to send in his compliments to his father and inquire the progress of the case. But he never entered the sickroom, and his father did not ask to see him.

Nan saw nothing of him until the day of her third motor drive. As she came out into the *porte cochère* he whirled in around the drive, with the blond Miss Devore seated beside him and the blond Mr. Devore lolling very lordly in the tonneau. His car stopped so close behind the other that the fenders touched.

Devore sprang out and, with bantering gallantry, offered to hand the little nurse into her seat.

"Permit me, my dear Miss Rose, to attend upon you—as a gentleman associate of Mr. Eliot."

She ignored him to look at Eliot as haughtily as Miss Devore was eyeing her.

"Stow it, Len," he ordered, and he lifted his cap to her as to an equal. "Glad to see you're getting out, Miss Rose. The gov'nor's mill is a fright, and he has certainly put you through it."

"Mr. Eliot is very considerate for one who suffers so atrociously," replied Nan with tactful discretion.

She stepped into her car past Devore and seated herself with a hauteur that rivaled the bearing of the aristocratic Miss Devore.

"Oh, I say now," murmured Devore, "don't draw the wrong inference from what Artie said. The mill hasn't made you a sight. A vision is all the more interesting for being a bit pale, don't you know?"

Nan spoke to the chauffeur, and was promptly borne away, very erect and

white with anger. But upon reaching her favorite park, she put aside her resentment for the joy of a ramble among the flowering shrubs. Because of her smallness and her white costume, the few persons she met mistook her for a nursemaid.

Those who spoke to her she repelled with a freezing glance of her gray eyes, except one little girl of wealth and breeding. This child she entertained with daisy chains and fairy stories until the negligent French *bonne* joined the party. She then went to watch the society buds and their escorts canter around the promenade.

When she returned to the car the chauffeur swung out to open the door for her and touch his cap as she stepped into the tonneau. News travels fast among the employees of a large household. Intimations whispered by Nan's maid had reached the garage. A man lacking in foresight could not have held the position of chauffeur to Howard Eliot for three years.

Nan gave no sign that she noticed the salute. She took her seat with utmost composure, though her mind was in a whirl of conjecture over the implication of the man's attention. They were almost back at the Eliot mansion before the explanation flashed upon her. A deep flush crimsoned her face. Its subsidence left her cold and pale and her eyes very hard.

Arthur Eliot's car so blocked the platform of the carriage porch that the chauffeur was compelled to stop short. As he opened the door for her to step down upon the lawn he touched his cap and mumbled an apology: "Excuse me, miss. I can't drive closer."

She acknowledged the explanation with a graciously condescending bow. Behind her back the man blinked in self-congratulation over his shrewdness. She went up the end steps of the *porte cochère* and entered the house without looking back.

Midway of the stairs she paused to listen to a rather shrill burst of laughter from the direction of the library. Miss Devore was making a decidedly long call.

Dr. Gould got himself out of the sick-room as soon as possible after a curt order about the nursing. Nan permitted herself to meet the patient's sarcastic sneer at the physician's back with a slight suggestion of knowingness in her smile.

"Gould's a blatant ass," he gibed. "I'll not forget he would have discharged you."

Nan eased the pillows under the restless gray head.

"Be still," he snapped. "Listen. Another cackle. Must be that silly parlor maid—delighted to know I'm on my back—delighted! I'll delight her! Order the housekeeper here."

"Yes, sir, at once—only—"

"What—only what? Out with it!"

The girl smiled. "Only it is your son's guest you hear—a Miss Verna Devore."

"Devore?" snarled the patient. "That adventuress here—in *my* house?"

His sunken eyes flared red with hate; his yellow face became blotched with purple. Nan pressed his head back upon the pillows with gentle force and began stroking his scowl-ridged forehead.

"Be calm, Mr. Eliot, else you'll bring on a heart attack."

He grudgingly relaxed, but it was only from rage to cold malice.

"Send for him instantly," he commanded. "No, go yourself. Never mind Gould's orders. I want to know what they say. Go!"

Nan fairly ran out through her own room and down the side stairs and along the lower corridor. At the curtained doorway into the library she paused.

Between the half-parted Oriental hangings she saw Devore and Arthur Eliot seated on opposite sides of a small card-table. Devore's back was to her. He was looking across at Miss Devore, who stood close behind young Eliot with one of her white hands patting the side of his head. In her other hand she was holding her open vanity case above his shoulder. As he arranged with the cards already in his hand the pair that he had drawn, Miss Devore tilted her vanity box.

Devore lowered his gaze and drawled: "Looks good to me, old man. Let's call it a thou."

Flushed from her haste but very quiet, Nan stepped into the library. Miss Devore flashed an alert glance at the intruder and jerked her vanity case down behind Eliot's back. As it tilted, Nan caught another flash—the glint of the little mirror inside the case. The one glint was sufficient for the daughter of Jefferson Rose. There was no need for her to look at the table to know that the bank-notes and checks were on Devore's side.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Eliot, but your father wishes to see you instantly," she delivered her message.

"Not—the heart?" he exclaimed, his cards face down on the table and his body curving forward, ready to spring up.

"No, I believe it is merely because he was disturbed by the laughter," answered Nan, her hard, bright gaze meeting the coldly insolent gaze of Miss Devore.

Eliot eased back into his chair. "Very well. Kindly tell him I will be up as soon as I play out this hand."

"My dear Arthur, is this filial obedience?" reproached Miss Devore. "Lennie can wait. Better go immediately—that's a good boy."

He shrugged but rose. She smiled with playful coquetry and held up her vanity case. "You see, it will give me a chance to use your little gift."

Nan had lingered at the door. On the stairs she murmured to him over her shoulder: "You do not usually lose at cards?"

"No," he answered, a trifle stiffly.

"Perhaps you know that a vanity case with a mirror above a player's shoulder is a sign of bad luck," she suggested.

The young man flushed. His voice became icily formal. "Pardon me, Miss Rose, but the lady is my friend."

"Accidents will happen," rejoined the girl, no less icily. "The case happened to be open above your cards, and Mr. Devore happened to bet when he had a winning hand. I have heard that the

game is to keep one's cards covered—if only to save friends from the base insinuations of outsiders."

"Are you sure your own cards are covered?" he asked.

"Mine? Oh, no, I hold only a four-flush," she answered with no attempt to hide her bitterness. "In the game of life I've never been one of those who draw the lucky cards or happen to see how to bet safely."

His voice dropped a tone. "No more references to my friends, if you please."

CHAPTER IV.

"MAN PROPOSES"—

THEY came around into the sick-room by way of the main corridor. The invalid was watching the door of Nan's bedroom. He twisted his head to glare at the couple.

"Keep me waiting, will you?" he snarled. "Who was there, girl?"

"One moment, Miss Rose," interrupted the son. He faced the enraged invalid with cool defiance. "I took Miss Devore for a drive. She honored me with a call."

"Alone?" sneered the father.

"With the exception of her brother."

The eyes of the sick man began to redden and his face to purple.

"Both—and in *my* house!" By a miracle of self-control he restrained his fury. "Arthur, do not make me forget you are my son—my only kith or kin. I admit that so far the reports of the detective agency have not confirmed my estimate of that woman; but—"

"She has been quite sufficiently defamed," broke in the young man. "You have only to insist upon the kind of report you wish, and you'll get it. Money will buy plenty of evidence of that sort. I am no child. I can judge the characters of my associates; and Miss Devore's letters of introduction—"

"Forged, ten to one! You refuse to be convinced? You refuse to obey me?"

"I refuse to wrong my friends with unjust suspicions."

"Unjust? That adventuress, that— You dupe, you miserable young whelp of a dupe! I tell you, if you do not at once— *Ahrh!*"

The cry of agony and the frantic clutch of the clawlike hands upon his breast sent Nan flying for the hypodermic syringe. When she grasped the sufferer's arm his eyes were beginning to glaze. She plunged in the needle and pushed the piston of the syringe with steady fingers.

After a long minute the hypodermic overcame the seizure, and the patient sank back exhausted. Nan, with her finger still on his pulse, looked up at the anxious-eyed son.

"It is now normal but very weak. He should have perfect rest and quiet."

"Very well. I shall take myself and my friends away. The less he sees of me the better for him, I expect," remarked the young man with a shade of regret under his habitual antagonism.

Nan soothed her patient to sleep, recharged the hypodermic syringe, and wrote up the sick-chart. She did not telephone Dr. Gould. At his next visit he commented on the fact with reluctant approval:

"No instructions to send for me. You have sense enough to keep your head."

Two days later the patient had about recovered from the extreme weakness to which he had been reduced by the heart attack. The third day his unwonted silence and the keenness with which his somber eyes kept watch of Nan at last convinced the girl that he was brooding upon some plan in which she was to figure.

Toward evening he grumbled a complaint: "Arthur has not been to inquire about me all this time?"

"He thought it best to leave you undisturbed. Twice a day your condition is telephoned to his apartment at the Ritz-Carlton."

"Her hotel!"

"Is it?" the little nurse implied her ignorance of the fact.

"The ungrateful whelp!" snarled the sick man. "Waiting to step into my shoes. Serve him right if he found one of them gone." The savage eyes glinted with cunning anticipation. "Well, why not? At least it would cut her out of half, if he is fool enough to go that far. See here, girl. How would you like to make a fortune?"

Nan smiled over the seeming banter. "That would depend upon the price."

"No price at all—merely your permanent services."

"Permanent?"

"I'll marry you and make a new will."

The girl looked straight into his sunken eyes. They met her gaze without any trace of mockery. He appeared to be hatefully bent upon cutting in two his son's inheritance. She could not believe that he had any thought of her except the selfish wish to assure himself of her skill for the rest of his miserable life.

She answered him with a ready decisiveness that surprised even herself: "I must beg to be excused."

"Why?" he demanded, his piercing gaze fixed upon her face as if striving to penetrate to the uttermost depths of her soul.

She smiled. "Perhaps I'm mercenary, but too wise to be trapped. You could still draw another will. I do not fancy being a penniless widow."

"Laton shall draw a trust deed in your favor."

"My dear Mr. Eliot," remonstrated Nan, "you know virtually nothing about me. You have yet to learn that my father was a professional gambler."

The sick rich man scowled and glared—and returned to his purpose. "Humph—same profession. He used cards; I used stocks. Phone to the license clerk and Laton."

"I own that I feel tempted," candidly rejoined the girl. "But, after all, money is not my object in life, and it will not

pay for what I want, unless earned. Because I am my father's daughter, I know that what is not earned does not belong to one."

"Rot! My money is no more tainted than—"

"Not now, perhaps," she broke in. "Nor am I. But now I am free, and one who is free can endure. Imagine one's frenzy to escape if bound for life to such service as yours. With the certainty of wealth and freedom as reward, imagine the temptation to be a little slow with that hypodermic injection."

The sick man burst into an incredulous laugh. "You are trying to egg me into urging you."

"Not in the least. I am trying to make sure of my present position and self-respect. One who is fettered has a right to strike for freedom. Consider what it would mean if I were married to you. I am no more than human, and you are often inhuman—when you are suffering so terribly."

He continued to smile incredulously at the suggestion that a girl with her hair and eyes could do such a thing. It was a sheer absurdity.

"Paugh!" he sneered. "I say it again. You are trying to make me urge you."

"Not in the least, Mr. Eliot. You cannot be so lacking in shrewdness. As we are now situated, the better your health, the better for me. Would it be the same if we were married?"

"What's your game?"

"To win my own way, that is all."

"You refuse the certainty of half my fortune? I don't believe it."

Nan smiled. "You needn't. I haven't the chance to refuse it. The offer has been withdrawn—or, rather, you never meant it seriously. It has been only an attempt to amuse yourself by teasing me."

"You are devilish shrewd for a girl."

"Yes. You see, I am trying my best to satisfy you—for purely selfish reasons. If you recover, you may consider it a good investment to pay my way through medical school. That would be as a kind

of—what do they call it?—retainer for my services, in case you have a return of this trouble."

The sick man's lips curled in their sardonic smile. "They say gratitude is the lively anticipation of favors to come."

"There would be little gratitude wasted on either side, I believe," replied Nan with an air of cool worldly wisdom. "Your money would buy my services, that is all."

"Devilish shrewd for a girl—or for a man," he added. "If Arthur had half your brains he'd be dancing attendance on me. I am legally sane. I can change my will."

"I should say he has brains and a good deal more," differed the girl. "My guess is that he wishes something else of you than your money, and you haven't it to give him."

"Something else than my money—something else," repeated the sick man, and he broke into a cunning chuckle. "Yes—yes, something else—I'll give it to him."

"Oh, Mr. Eliot, you must not let anything I've said influence you against him," protested Nan.

She had better have kept silent. Her concern only added to his sardonic mirth. After a time he fell to scheming, and his glances at herself told the girl that she was included in his plans.

CHAPTER V.

AND MAN DISPOSES.

THE sick man had thought out all the details of his scheme by the time Dr. Gould made his next afternoon visit. He spoke arbitrarily to the physician:

"I want another go with Laton."

"No lawyer—not even Judge Laton," forbade Dr. Gould. "I told you there must be no more business until your heart—"

"This is pleasure, not business," interrupted the sick man, and he looked

toward Nan with a significant smile. "Do what I tell you, Gould. Send for Laton."

Nan hurried out for her afternoon drive. From the first drug-store she telephoned to the Ritz-Carlton. Half an hour later Arthur Eliot whirled his car around into the secluded drive where she sat waiting for him on one of the park benches. He sprang out to stand before her, cap in hand, his eyes clouded with anxiety and doubt.

"My father? You spoke of a change. He is not worse?"

"Not physically. He has continued to improve."

"Then why the message to meet you here? I was induced to excuse myself very abruptly—"

"From the charming company of Miss Devore, was it not?" put in Nan. She met his frown with a cold smile. "Pray hasten back to her. I have no wish to detain you."

He realized that he had to deal with a girl who did not consider herself a servant. His tone and manner altered.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Rose. I should have known that you would not have sent for me without good reason."

"Perhaps it was, perhaps it wasn't," said Nan. "Your father is to see a lawyer—Judge—Judge—"

"Laton, his personal attorney."

"Yes, that is the name. I have reason to believe he intends to change his will."

The young man flushed, but after a moment his angry frown cleared. He shrugged carelessly and drew up the corners of his lips in their amused smile.

"Well, what of it? The gov'nor made his pile. I've scattered a good bit of it and never brought in a cent. Don't you think I could earn my salt as a chauffeur or a motor demonstrator?"

Nan shook her red head. "I've an idea he intends to dock you only half."

"Half? That's not so bad. You know, half a loaf— And who gets the rest?"

"I'm sure I don't know. He tried to wish it on me. But—"

"You!"

"Why not? I was most convenient. How would you fancy me for a step-mother?"

"Impossible!"

The girl's face whitened. Her bantering smile grew bitter. "I agree with you—fully. I had the pleasure of telling your father so before he withdrew his proposal of marriage."

"Marriage! He offered to— And you refused?"

"Perhaps I'm a fool—or perhaps I'm playing for sweepstakes. Believe what you will," challenged Nan. "You can reason. Dr. Gould has told you that your father will never recover. He is apt to go at any moment. I would be sure of my half of the estate. He seems insanely eager to strike at your blond friend, even if you are hit hardest."

"You felt sure about the money, yet you refused him!" young Eliot again voiced his astonishment.

The girl laughed almost harshly. "Perhaps I couldn't believe it—perhaps I was afraid—perhaps I'm a deep, dark schemer."

He shot an amused glance at her flame-red hair. "Not so very dark on top!"

"But it's the color of danger," she thrust back. "Fire burns. Better run home to Goldie—"

"That will do!" he admonished. "I wish no raillery aimed at my friends."

"For he is a jolly good fellow, with shoals of dear unselfish friends!" intoned Nan. She saw the crook in the corner of his lips straighten, and her face sobered.

"I mean it. Go and tell her. My own advice is for you to see your father and patch up matters. After all, he is a very sick man and suffering frightfully. He should be humored. I fear he is set upon playing you an ill trick. Go and see if your friend does not advise trying to mollify him."

Eliot studied the cool gray eyes with a puzzled frown. "I must confess I fail to see your purpose—your motive behind all this."

"Perhaps I've a wild idea of playing the rôle of fate. You may think of me as weaving the web of your future. The loom is set. You see I've been trying to read your father's Browning. Good afternoon. I've wasted nearly half my outing."

She faced about and strolled away into the midst of the flowering shrubs. He watched her out of sight. Whatever her object may have been, one result was certain—she had compelled him to fix his attention upon her, to puzzle over her motives and personality. His face was still perplexed when he spun his car around and drove away.

Nan returned to the Eliot mansion precisely on time. She found Dr. Gould in the corridor with her maid. The sick man was conferring with a big, fat, beetle-browed visitor. When she let him see that she had returned, the invalid chuckled and pointed an emaciated finger at her.

"Here's the girl now, judge."

The visitor put a fountain-pen and note-book into the pocket of his frock coat and heaved up his ponderous bulk to boom cordially: "Pleased to meet you. Miss Rose. I am Judge Laton."

She entrusted her hand in the fat palm of the lawyer, with a relaxing of her innate wariness. Behind the big, coarse, caricature face she perceived an intellect as keen as his sick client's; but at the outer corners of his small, piggish eyes were radiating crinkles in the fat-tightened skin. He was not a man who smiled only with his lips.

"I am no less pleased to meet Judge Laton," she returned his greeting.

The restless gaze of his twinkling whitish eyes had been flashing into her face and away. He shot a glance at his client.

"You may be less *non compos mentis* than I have been thinking you, Howard," he rumbled. "I expected to see the usual type. After all, I will admit it might be worse."

"It is my will," rejoined the sick man. "I'll have Gould call a consultation of

alienists if there is the slightest doubt of my sanity."

"No need, no need. You're legally sane. Gould and I can testify to that; and you have furnished evidence to explain and justify the unusual provisions."

"See that you make those provisions ironclad," commanded the despot.

Laton's roving glance twinkled at Nan, and his big head rocked toward her over his bulging waist-line. Another glance at the invalid, and he walked out with a deliberate yet elastic step that belied his bulk.

The sick man fixed a sharp look upon Nan. "What do you think of him, girl?"

She answered without hesitation: "He is solid and absolutely reliable."

"An easy inference from the fact that he is my confidential attorney."

"Oh, is he?" innocently remarked Nan.

A shade of doubt darkened the sunken eyes. He muttered somberly: "If it doesn't work— But it must. Laton will have to make it."

Nan sat down to read him into a propitious humor for his evening meal with one of his favorite Browning poems. He always derived a keen intellectual enjoyment from the involved psychological analyses of the great moralist, though the lessons contained in the poems never seemed to stir his conscience.

In the morning Nan was still working to overcome her patient's pangs from the maldigestion of his breakfast when Judge Laton was announced. The lawyer brought with him five alert young law clerks, all of whom looked at the little nurse with scant interest. They gazed over her red head at the sick rich man and harkened to the reading of the will as if to a legal lesson.

While Nan's hand under the coverlet kept steadily to its massaging, her little ears listened to Laton's solemn recitation. Out of the maze of technical terms and phrases she gathered that all of the sick man's property was being willed in trust, and that in certain contingencies part or

all of the estate was to be diverted from Arthur Eliot to other legatees.

Before the naming of the contingencies and of the other legatees Nan was ordered from the sick-room. She at once sent her maid on an errand, and telephoned to the Ritz-Carlton. Arthur Eliot was not in. Without a moment's hesitancy she called up Miss Devore.

"Tell Mr. Eliot that his father is making a new will," she murmured into the transmitter and promptly broke the connection.

Before long she was called back into the sick-room. The law clerks were signing the will as witnesses. Her patient pointed to her.

"This is the girl—Nan Rose. Not hard to identify, you see."

The five clerks faced about and stared at the little nurse with a curiosity and respectfulness that told her she had suddenly attained importance in their eyes. Her face went white. Could it be there was a spark of kindness in his flinty heart? Could he have willed her enough to pay for her course through medical school?

As Laton drove out his foxy young flock Nan thought she saw pity for her in his restless glance. She turned and met the, mocking gaze of her patient. The normal pink seeped back into her cheeks as she took up the volume of Browning. Beyond doubt he was all that she had thought him. He glowered at her and sneered whenever she looked at him.

Early in the afternoon he ordered her from the room with a command to send in the five men servants. Half an hour later the butler bowed to her to enter the sick-room. He lined up with the chauffeur, the two footmen, and the groom, to witness their master deliver into her hands a sealed envelope. On the envelope was a precise direction in Eliot's tremulous handwriting:

"To be held by Nan Rose, and, in the event of my death, to be opened by her sixty days thereafter."

He shook his fleshless finger at the girl.

"Give me your word you will not open that envelope except as directed."

"I promise," she replied.

"You hear her," he snarled at the servants. "Get out."

As they hurried from the room he gibed at Nan: "Now let's have 'Pippa Passes.' That idiot Browning is an amusing ass."

CHAPTER VI.

● RECONCILIATION FAILS.

ABOUT half an hour before the usual time for Dr. Gould's afternoon call Nan's maid brought in word that Arthur Eliot had come to inquire his father's condition and wished the pleasure of a personal call.

The sick man smiled ironically.

"Laton must have dropped the young whelp a hint. Much good it will do him! Tell him to come in. No, girl, you need not look toward that hypodermic. There'll be no need for it to-day. I have a little secret to keep me amused. He can say nothing to make me angry—when I think of that little secret."

His son sauntered in, clear-eyed and cheerful. He gave Nan a pleasant nod.

"Well, dad," he greeted, "I hear you've made a new will."

"Don't know that you've any reason to smirk over it," sneered the father.

The young man's lips quirked in their fascinating smile.

"Why not? You've fired your howitzer, haven't you? I'm smashed, of course. All right, that's over and settled, and it has done you a world of good. You're looking fit. You'll be up on your pins again before we know it."

The father glared. "Trying to smooth down my fur, eh?"

"Sure thing." The young man seated himself beside the bed and began to stroke one of the emaciated hands.

"Come, dad, loosen up. You've shoved the moneybags out from between us. Thanks be, that's done with. Now

we can get together like human beings. How d' you think I'll make out as an auto salesman for a start in business? I'm up on motors, from records to rear tires."

"Humph—your salary might pay your cigar bill."

"Not at first. I struck the Streeter Company. They are willing to give me a trial, with commissions on sales, but no salary unless I make good."

"And if not?"

"Well, a chauffeur makes fair wages. Only last month a frat of mine who worked his way through in my class, told me his law practise brings him about what you pay Wason."

"But the lady in the case?" gibed the sick man. "How long is she to wait for you to win the fortune with which you wish to endow her?"

The lover smiled. "Never fear, dad. She'll wait a lifetime for the fortune, if need be. But neither of us will wait for the other. You may have heard of love in a cottage."

"That woman!" The sick man burst into a derisive laugh that shook him until he sank back among his pillows, exhausted.

His son continued to smile with cheerful serenity. "Glad it amuses you, dad."

"Yes—yes," panted the scoffer. "Nothing equals a farce—good farce!"

"Yet if convinced it is not a farce, you'd take it seriously, wouldn't you?"

"If convinced—yes, if convinced—most seriously—tragedy!"

"You're a man of your word, dad. Glad you've enjoyed the first act. May the second prove to be high comedy."

The young man straightened to his full height, smiled, and sauntered out. His father frowned after him.

"Not a whimper—the young whelp. Game—but my blood, of course. Everything about him from me—except this silly blind faith in others. *Pah!*"

He twisted his head about to scowl at Nan.

"One thing certain—that woman will

never get legal title to my property if they marry. You know, when a woman marries, all her property goes by law to her husband."

"I thought that had been changed," said Nan. "Do you think it fair and right?"

"It is right if she is the right wife and he the right husband. Marriage is not a matter of business. It is a spiritual state. The difficulty is that there are spirits of darkness as well as of light. Marriage should be pure trust, and the parties should be worthy one another."

Nan's gray eyes glowed. "Oh, I believe that!"

His sunken eyes closed to hide the light that shone from their depths. He scowled again.

"Trouble with the vampires, they make a business of love. That woman will ruin the young whelp. Business is business! Never take a promissory note without collateral, unless you wish to end in the poorhouse. Trust the unsecured word of no one."

"There is that envelope," she reminded him. "You took my word."

"A woman's word—the word of a red-headed girl!" he taunted. "Pandora has a box!"

"Fortunately it is sealed."

"No, only pasted. A few minutes over steam would loosen the mucilage. Afterwards you could paste the flap down again, and no one would know the difference."

"I would know."

"And you'd know what's inside," he chuckled with sly suggestiveness.

Nan looked steadily into his eyes. "Pandora guesses that there's an imp in the box. She will now return it, with thanks."

"Your promise—you gave your word."

"Not to open the envelope except as directed. I made no promise not to return it unopened."

He scowled, unable to dispute this. She smiled and went into her room. Before she could unclasp her satchel the

voice of the sick man reached her, shrill with anger:

"Take her away—away! Nan—Nan Rose!"

The girl darted back into the sick-room. Her patient was sitting erect in bed, with his fleshless hand out-thrust in menace. Before him, side by side with his son, Miss Devore drooped appealingly.

From the other door Devore was sidling into the room, his ruddy face set in a deprecatory smile. At sight of Nan he paused to raise his monocle. She spared him only a half glance as she hastened over to the bed. Her plump little figure thrust resolutely between the couple and her patient.

"Miss Devore," she directed, "I must ask you to leave at once."

The drooping young woman did not look up. Arthur Eliot placed a reassuring arm about her bent shoulders and frowned at Nan.

"A son has a right to be heard, Miss Rose," he declared with quiet determination.

"I am in charge and responsible," rejoined Nan, no less firmly. "Miss Devore must go instantly."

The young man gazed over her red head at his father.

"Dad," he appealed, "can't you be fair for once? Listen to Verna, if only for a minute."

"Take her out!" shrilled the sick man. "Adventuress—vampire!"

"Oh, Mr. Eliot! no-no-no!" cried Miss Devore, and with a thrust for which Nan was not prepared, she forced her aside, to kneel and imploringly clutch her denouncer's arm. "Hear me! I wish to be a daughter to you! We're to be married—Arthur and I. No hireling can nurse you like a daughter! Only give me the chance—permit me to prove—"

The enraged man wrenched his bony fingers free from her white hand.

"Daughter? You!"

His eyes were bloodshot; his face was mottling with purple. He clenched his fist to strike the golden head that had

bowed until the fair face and blue eyes were hidden by the coverlet. But the blow did not fall. As his son lunged forward to stop the upraised fist it jerked down to clutch through the silk gown on the sick man's emaciated breast.

Nan whirled and darted toward the stand on which was kept the hypodermic syringe. Devore was within arm's reach of the stand. The hand with which he had started to raise his monocle shook as Nan came at him, tense-faced and alert. Then he saw that her gaze was fixed upon the stand. As she caught up the syringe and darted back, he screwed the monocle into his eye. Before she reached the bedside he was sauntering toward the door, his over-red lips set in a bland smile.

Miss Devore had not moved. Young Eliot had knelt beside her to support the head and shoulders of his writhing father. Nan thrust between them to grasp one of the pain-twitched arms and administer the hypodermic.

"There; he will soon be all right," she said. "Better go now—leave him quiet."

The son nodded. His father's body had begun to relax. He started to ease the disheveled gray head down upon the pillows. The clawlike hands reached up to touch his anxious face.

"No—stay. He wants you," divined Nan.

As she spoke the appealing hands jerked down to tear again at the silk robe in spasmodic frenzy. A swift upswing of Nan's arm brought the syringe on a level with her eyes. The piston was all the way down in the barrel. There could be no more than a drop of fluid left in the needle.

Yet the hypodermic dose had failed. Her patient was in a worse convulsion than the first. Though she had received no instruction to administer a second hypodermic, she turned to run back and recharge the syringe.

Behind her the agonized sufferer gasped breathlessly: "Son—will—tell Laton—yours—all—no inten—"

The straining voice stopped with an

abruptness that halted Nan even as she reached out for the bottle on the stand. She flashed an alarmed glance over her shoulder. At the same instant Arthur Eliot uttered a cry of dismay. His father had sagged down, flaccid and still.

Nan darted back to the bed. But she did not need to look into the face among the pillows to know what had happened.

"He's gone, Mr. Eliot," she murmured.

Miss Devore started up, her face gray-white, and her blue eyes hard and bright.

"You dolt! To stand there gaping!" she reprimanded Nan. "Do something—give him another dose!"

"Hush, my dear," soothed her fiancé. "Miss Rose is right. He is gone—and all my fault bringing you here!"

He drew his arm from about the inert body and stood up, heavy with remorse. Miss Devore sprang from her knees to fling her arms around his neck and bury her face in his bosom.

"Not your fault, Arthur—mine, only mine! I should not have come! My fault—I permitted you to know I wished to persuade him."

There was no more need for the little nurse at the bedside. She went to open the door into the corridor. Devore stood just outside, chaffing the maid. At sight of Nan's face his monocle dropped and his mouth went slack.

"I say, what's up?" he muttered. "You look as if— Has Verna pushed you out of the nest?"

"Mr. Eliot is dead," explained Nan. "Dr. Gould may be here any moment, but I must at once report the death to his office."

Devore bowed with becoming solemnity and drew back out of the way. As soon as Nan had telephoned she went back into what had been the sick-room, after sending her maid to meet Dr. Gould.

Devore sprang to the telephone.

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.

U U U U

SALLE DE JOIE

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

SHE had *such* a cheery bedchamber!

* * *

The walls were striped in black and white;
Black *crêpe de chine* draperies shrouded the tall windows;
There were white onyx vases here and there, filled
with waxy, odorous tuberoses.

The low ebony bed was hung with sable velvet, draped
with silver cord and tassels of silver fringe;
There were pillows of white satin and a white satin
couvre-pieds embroidered with *immortelles*.

Tall candles flickered unshaded in silver holders—
Such a cheery, smart room for a convalescent!
The *derulier cri* in everything, indeed.

* * *

And, after all, she did not recover. . . .
Strange!

The Great Disappointment

by Frank Condon



A "SHORTY KILGOUR" STORY

I REMEMBER seeing it in a book where some deluded nut had confessed, and it read something like this: He couldn't understand three things --the way of a ship on the sea; the way of an eagle in the sky; and finally, the way of a man with a maid.

That's what the gentleman wrote in his book, and I wish to state that the answer is--bull! Plain bull! He was treating the ship and the eagle in a truthful way, perhaps, but he was certainly kidding the vest off Mister Man of the well known Stronger Sex.

The way of a man with a maid is not hard to understand. Everybody understands it. If you're only half-witted you can understand such a thing, but these old-time kidders wrote it in books, and Mister Man swelled up with pride and sent his picture to the newspaper.

When you want the truth, simply switch that sentence around and you have it. The hard thing to understand--the thing nobody can understand and

there's no use trying--is the way of a maid with a man.

Get that straight. Nobody in the world can prophesy what any female girl is going to do next. I've been in the girl-prophesying business for a number of years and my batting average is still .0001. I'm willing to admit that I can't tell a thing about women, and neither can any other sane man, and the reason is, not that my intelligence is at fault, but that females are, by nature, half grown up, half feeble-minded, and altogether illogical, insane, nutty, irresponsible, and immature.

In addition, they have no sense, whatever.

I suppose you will say that I've been getting another wallop from our well-known and left-handed sex, and that I'm sore at them. Well, I have and I am. But that don't alter the truth. I have recently been laid out cold by a woman, and if there is one grain of consolation amid the wreckage it is that the rest of

the outfit likewise has been buried among the quivering ruins. That gang of roughnecks is all shot to pieces. If you say "girl" to them they will rush shrieking into the wilderness and hide themselves under decayed tree trunks.

Yes, we're all in the same grave, and the Bar-C Ranch isn't a cheerful spot these days. Gloom seems to have taken up its permanent home among us, but I suppose the sorrow will wear off, and I hope so, because otherwise we'll all take to killing each other.

It came about through the sudden appearance on the Treadwell Bar-C Ranch of a lady water-color artist, who designed to paint old Saw-Tooth Mountain.

She came sudden and unannounced, bringing along the implements of her trade, and we first beheld her sitting behind a wire fence near the Broad Ditch, dressed in a day night-gown and covered with an umbrella. She had her easel up and was painting persistently, so we all took a respectful look and went along.

There were four of us coming back from Sawtelle—myself and Joe Maloney, Jake Caldwell and Tim Kirk.

"Who is she?" Jake asked when we went by.

"New one on me," I answered.

"Most likely a friend of the Old Man. Could you see her face?"

"What I saw of it looked all right," Tim put in.

"She ain't very tall," Joe said. "Wonder how long she's going to stay?"

And so on, *ad infinitum* and *et cetera*. We discussed that subject all the way back to the ranch. After we reached there we continued to discuss it, and that night, after supper, we got a long look at the water-color painter.

She came down the porch steps, wearing a blue dress with lace on it here and there. On her head was a baggy little cap of velvet, which hung down on one side. She carried a parasol and wore white shoes. And I hope I drown to death in the bottom of an old well if she wasn't the prettiest woman I had ever

feasted my eyes upon, which the said eyes have been in the feasting business for years.

"Judas Iscariot!" I heard Jake mutter, signifying his amazement and pleasure at the sight.

"Some weaker sex," Joe added to the comment, and Tim Kirk confined himself to brevity. "Hell!" he said moderately, staring at her and refusing to believe it.

Then the Old Man came out of the dining-room and stopped beside the water-color lady. He looked down toward the bunk-house and saw us giving an imitation of astonishment, and then he summoned us. He waved his hand, and we all tried to run each other down.

"Boys," said the Boss, "meet Miss Darling. Miss Darling, these are the hired hands. The little guy is Shorty Kilgour, my foreman."

She stood there, smiling and swaying her parasol, and we muttered the confused and insane ejaculations you might expect from a lot of embarrassed school-boys. My, my, but she was pretty to look at. Her face was nice and so was all of her. Her blue dress fluttered in the evening breeze and her little white shoes peeped out at us, and I noticed that she had the slimmest waist I'd seen on a woman. Both your hands would just about fit around it.

I observed Jake Caldwell, and he was twisting a four dollar hat into a rope, which indicates mental excitement in Jake, he being careful of his raiment. I tried to say a few pleasant words myself, but discovered that my speaking tubes were clogged tight. Just looking at Miss Darling was something like drowning in a tank of champagne, with the bubbles sizzling down your nose. It was great, boys; although a trifle disconcerting to a man of my age and experience.

In a general way of speaking, that moment developed four burning love affairs, and the four burnt victims were myself, Jake, Tim, and Joe Maloney.

We fell for the charms of the fair sex

at once and hard, and for a short time we each tried to conceal our condition from the others. This didn't last long. I was riotously for the lady and so was Jake, Tim, and Joe Maloney, and as you can't very well spread your hatred over three men, you have to center on one rival. I centered on Jake.

"You," he said, when he saw how things were with me. "What chance do you think *you'd* have with a girl like this?"

"The chance that comes once in a lifetime," I told the poor toad. "I know when the right woman has entered my life, and she has just entered, slamming the front door. One of these days it will give me pleasure to invite you to my wedding, because here's the lady I'm going to win."

Jake laughed scornfully.

"Not while I live," he replied with heat and pounding one hand into the other. "When I looked at Miss Darling I knew that my bachelor days were coming to an end. There ain't enough to you, Shorty. You oughtn't to marry any girl, because you're all on the surface."

"Yes, and if you get in my way *you're* going to be all underneath the surface," I answered him. "Do you think she'd look at a he-hyena like you?"

And so on.

Meantime Joe Maloney and Tim had elected each other for mutual abuse and subdued threats. And thus things began to boil upon the hitherto placid Bar-C Ranch.

When four men fall violently in love with the same lady, things are bound to happen. I remember asking Doris—her full name was Doris Darling—if she would like to walk in the moonlight after supper, over as far as the foot-hills, and she said she was sorry, but she couldn't go.

Fine. And then when the moonlight came and the walking was great, I took my grouch and rolled it down the lane, cursing feebly. Jake was missing somewhere and for a very good reason. About

eight o'clock I saw him and Doris coming back and they had been on the identical walk I suggested to her.

Well, I suppose I lost my temper a trifle. I waited till Jake said good-night to the lady at the ranch steps. He came down toward the bunk-house, whistling cheerfully, and I approached him.

"You're a dirty sneak," I said, without explaining.

"I am, am I?" he returned.

"You're an under-handed skunk," I went on. "Come over here behind the barn and I'll show you if you can steal my girl, you white-livered coyote."

Jake didn't have to be invited twice, because he was beginning to dislike me anyhow. We sailed around the barn on the run, and then we went at it.

"Take that one," I said, putting all I had into a right swing. He took it and handed me a receipt on the beezee. It was a good fight, and when it was over we were both bleeding freely and one of my eyes resigned from the partnership and quit. I suppose I licked him. At any rate, I didn't feel licked myself, but we stopped mauling each other because we were out of wind and very tired.

"And to-morrow I'll give you the same dose all over," Jake said bitterly, wiping one of his wounds. "I'll teach you to interfere between me and a lady."

We walked back, cursing each other, and all we found on the way home was a struggling mass on the ground behind the bunk-house. It turned out to be Tim Kirk and Joe Maloney, who were trying earnestly to kill each other.

It seems Joe and Tim had begun a little argument about Doris and they were concluding it as we came up. We pulled Joe off Tim, and then they were both going to unite and wipe me and Jake out. It certainly was a fine situation on a decent, civilized ranch.

From that time on life on the Bar-C was just about as peaceful as Verdun. With Jake ready to fly at my throat, and Joe Maloney growling at Tim Kirk, things seemed all wrong.

The lady who caused all this amorous turmoil went serenely on her way, painting water-color pictures of old Saw-tooth and having some one of us carry her utensils for her. I'll say this: She was a beautiful lady, but her pictures didn't amount to much. I could do as good myself, if I had enough paint.

And while she failed to fall violently in love with me or Jake or Tim or Joe Maloney, still she was interested in us. To our sorrow she was interested.

It took the form of an investigation into our manner of life, and when Doris found out how four young men live on a ranch she began to disapprove.

To begin with, we all swore. Most men swear, I suppose, but us four were regular in our profane habits. We also chewed tobacco, smoked, drank rum, and played cards, and it seems that where Doris came from, these things could only lead you into a life hereafter which had no pictorial charms to it.

"I'm surprised, Shorty," she said, looking up at me with those blue eyes. "You're a nice young man and you have plenty of intelligence. It seems terrible that you should swear and drink. Haven't you ever longed for higher and better things?"

"Sure," I answered. "I wanted to be a railroad fireman once, but nothing ever came of it."

"I mean," Doris said, moving a little nearer to me and thereby upsetting the regular beating arrangements of my heart, "I mean, don't you sometimes think of nobler things? Don't you reach out sometimes for the All-Good?"

"I've done a heap of reaching," I told her, "but there's one thing I never did reach for. However, if you want me to, I'll begin reaching to-day."

"A man is not for the coarser things," she said earnestly, laying the tip of her finger on my coat. "You would be so much a better man if you stopped swearing, Shorty."

"I've stopped," I said. "I stopped two minutes ago."

"You mean you will not swear any more."

"I'm all through swearing," I answered seriously. "Any time you ask me to do a thing, Miss Darling, it's done. You know that. There ain't a thing in the world you could ask me that I won't do."

"Then, your drinking habits," she continued, with the light of a true apocalypse shining in those deep blue eyes, and right about there I lost my taste for rum. In five minute Doris had swept me clean of bad habits. I no longer chewed, smoked, drank, swore, or played cards, and I had made resolutions about wearing neckties and keeping my shoes shined and my hands in trim.

I was converted all over, and when I walked away I was so good that if they buried me on the spot I'd have gone straight through on the Celestial Express and begun playing my golden harp at once.

A few days later I began to notice that Jake Caldwell had stopped cursing, and to make it quick, Joe Maloney and Tim Kirk also fell under the new influence. Up to then the gang used to gather every night and play fluff or sixty solo—but no longer. The bunk-house table was desolate. No more did the old room resound to muttered curses and no longer did the old bottle stand there with open mouth.

"I see you've reformed," I said sarcastically to Jake, because while I didn't mind being reformed myself, it irked me to see Doris take so much interest in the rest of them bums.

"You don't see any more about me than I see about you," he replied. "You're just about good enough to cook lately. Why any girl 'd take any trouble with a worthless hound like you is beyond me."

So we had some more pleasant conversation, during which he threatened to remove the nose from my face, and I offered to kick him off the ranch if he felt the need of travel. Joe Maloney and

Tim Kirk likewise indulged in personal recriminations. It was quarrel and bicker and fight from morning till night. I never did see such a ranch in my born days.

The reformation stunt actually went to extremes. One Sunday afternoon, for instance, Doris gathered the four of us and took us into Tulena, where there was a Sunday-school orgy going on, and we sat there and listened from beginning to end. If you'd told me I'd mix up in a thing like that, I'd have laughed at you.

At odd times Doris read literature to us, designed to improve our minds and lead us on to better and nobler things. How she expected to improve minds like Jake's and Tim's and Joe Maloney's I swear I don't see, because there ain't any too much to those minds to start with. You have the same chance to improve them that you'd have to improve a two-year-old egg.

We used to sneak into the ranch and gather in the sitting-room under the big lamp, and Doris would sweep in wearing some dress or other, each one of which made her look prettier than before. Then she'd sink into the Morris chair and read to us from the "Pilgrim's Progress" or Emerson or books like "In Tune with the Infinite." Maybe she'd take up something lighter and flood our combined intellects with improving material from "The Beautiful World," or "The Ideal Life," or "The Mind Triumphant," or "Personality and the All-Good."

We stood for it. Words coming from those lips were good words, no matter whether they came out of a green book or a red one—or no book at all.

"It's like this, Doris," I said to her a little later. "I don't mind being improved, and you know it. I've reformed and if there's any other little faults you see, I'll correct them when you mention them. But I like to be improved alone. Why can't you and me wander out there on the desert, which is the only place where we can get rid of those three lizards, and you can improve me alone?

Just by myself I'm a heap easier to improve. Those suckers distract me."

"Oh," she said, "but I can do so much more work when you are all together. There is the enthusiasm of progress when you listen together."

"There ain't a bit of enthusiasm in me over them three stiffs," I answered moodily. "Any time you want to, you can dispense with the others, especially Jake, who's liable at any minute to put this reform movement on the bum."

To tell the plain truth about us, we were all unhappy. We were unhappy because we couldn't smoke or play cards or do anything that seemed natural, and we were also unhappy because, while she liked us, she wouldn't agree to marry us.

I asked her.

"I'm sorry, Shorty," she said, looking at me gravely. "But I'm not the marrying kind. I have my work to do in this world and I must be free to do it. I'm sorry."

"You ain't as sorry as I am," I said. "You're the kind of a girl I've always been looking for. I thought maybe you might marry me."

"I'm sorry," she said again, and so, not to cause her too much grief, I went away, and it was lucky I didn't run into Jake that morning, because most likely I'd have slaughtered him without further words.

So I knew my fate. I didn't have any fate, so far as Doris Darling was concerned, and at first I felt like wiping out Jake and Tim and Joe, so that no good luck could happen to them. I knew each one of them was going to try to lead this beautiful creature up the aisle to the minister, but every time I looked into one of their faces I knew that no joyous fortune had yet befallen. They were all as glum as deceased clams.

On the veranda one night Doris opened the subject herself. We were all sitting around, and it had got too dark for her to read us any more from "The Life Beautiful."

"Boys," she said, in that calm, dis-

turbing voice, "your affection for me makes this one of the happiest periods of my life, and I do want you to continue as my friends. I feel that I have made great progress with you. Each one of you has honored me with an invitation to become his wife, and it is something I shall never forget. To receive an offer of marriage from such honest, manly young men is indeed an event, and one of which any woman can well be proud. But as I explained to each of you in turn, I am not the marrying sort. To uplift mankind is my mission in life, and my only one, and as I look into your eyes I can see that you all agree with me. You are mentally and morally better men than when I came. You no longer use profane language, and you have stopped smoking and drinking. I desire no credit for this fine change, because none is due me. You have changed because you now see the folly of your past ways."

"Not me," I burst out. "Not me, Doris. I'll tell the truth. I ain't got a fault in the world right now, but I'd have 'em all except for you, personally. And if the rest of this gang says otherwise about themselves, they're all liars."

"I'm sorry, if that is so," Doris said, with her gentle, sweet smile. "I have been honored by your several offers of matrimony, and now, as I look into your virile, manly faces, I feel that perhaps I ought to be frank with you."

"You can be anything you want to," said Jake sadly, "as long as you be it with me."

"I will tell you something which I have concealed from the world," Doris went on, "because I know I can talk openly and freely with men of your type. The generosity of the open spaces is stamped on your faces and you will understand me."

"Shoot," said Tim Kirk cheerfully.

"I will admit, then," she continued, "that I have put all thoughts of love out of my mind forever. I have thrust matrimony and marrying forever behind me. Into my life there has come a great

and grievous disappointment, and I have fled from a painful situation. That is why I am among you in this free, wild country."

"You mean a man?" I asked.

"A man," said Doris gently. "I will say no word of ill concerning him, because that is not my way. What I am suffering, what I have suffered, and what I shall suffer, I shall think of no more."

"Where is this guy?" I demanded. "If you could slip me his name and address, I'll go and guarantee that he'll cause no more sadness in this world."

"No," said Doris calmly, "there is nothing you can do, Shorty. It is a closed incident. It is something that has gone from my life completely, and while it is sad, still I shall bear my sorrow resignedly. It was a great disappointment, to be sure; a great disappointment, but I shall bear it."

"I'd like one small wallop at this disappointment of yours," Tim Kirk remarked, but Doris shook her head.

"So you can see, boys," she said, "that love is not for me. Love is a divine thing, and when it flows into one's life, one is ennobled. But there can be nothing like love in this world again for me. I have loved one, and I shall never love another."

As the lady seemed on the point of tears, it looked to me like the right time to beat it and give her a chance.

"Now, ain't that a shame?" Jake demanded later on. "That's too durn bad. Here's a nice, sweet girl, and some reptile's gone and busted her heart. Worse than that, he's made it impossible for any other guy to win her."

"I'll tell you about Doris," said Pop Treadwell, when we asked him direct for information. "You want to be kind to Doris, because she's had trouble. There was a young lad in love with her and something happened, so she came away from her home in Tucson. Dropped everything and fled. Put her heart affair behind her and scampered into the wilds. So be kind to her."

There being nothing else to do about it, we were kind to her, and when the four of us found out definitely that we couldn't win away her young heart, we began to lose our hatred for each other. I began to see Jake pass me without wishing he'd fall over and die, and Tim began again to converse with Joe Maloney.

The little white bird of peace descended upon the gang, as it always will when a lady passes out of your thoughts, and one night, not long after this love revelation from the heart of a sweet young woman, we all got together in the Last Chance bar and buried the hatchet with formality and éclat.

And, of course, with the memories of that sweet, pure maiden so strong within us, we still clung to our habits of virtue and sobriety. When we lined up at the bar, Joey Cook looked at the four of us and shoved over the hard licker.

"Put that away," Jake said with dignity. "We're having a love feast and we're drinking pop."

"Four pops," said Joey, grinning, but saying nothing insulting.

Well, we stood there swizzling pop and telling each other what a fine world it was and how noble to know a girl like Doris Darling. We shook each other by the hand and I slapped Jake affectionately on the back, where a week before I'd have slapped him with an ax on the slightest provocation. Joe had his arm around Tim Kirk's neck, and was explaining how the ennobling influence of one sweet woman can bring the roughest natures together, and how, after all, it was a splendid thing for two such men as them to love the same girl, providing neither could get her, and nobody else, either.

There was a commotion outside the Last Chance, and an automobile stopped in the darkness, giving off the loud noises of its breed. The door opened, and in comes a little guy with a toothbrush mustache, a pale eye, and thin, yellow hair, which looked dandruffy. He was some five feet and a half high, and he had on a

gray cap and wore spats. Maybe he was twenty-three years old, and he was smoking made-up cigarettes, which he took out of a silver case.

I didn't like him, and neither did the boys. Anyway, we were having a reunion.

"Howdy, boys," he said. "Have a drink with a stranger."

"That's just what we won't do," said Jake, eyeing him. "Can't you see we're drinking here together?"

"That's all right," he insisted, throwing down a bill. "Have a drink with me?"

"Little feller," I said, "this is a sacred and exclusive gathering here. We're drinking together all by ourselves, and nobody else gets in with us."

"Go on," he jeered.

"In a little while you ain't going to have no good health at all," said Tim Kirk sourly. "Here you come bustin' into a private party where you ain't invited. If you got any sense, you'll keep still, and if you ain't got any sense, you'll soon meet up with trouble."

The little man glared at us resentfully, but confined himself to his drink, and I looked him over. A pale, watery eye, he had, and a sallow complexion. He was no good to look at, but he would talk to us. After he held himself in for awhile he broke loose again.

"No sense in you fellows being stand-offish," he remarked genially. "Maybe you're sad, but I'm glad. I want everybody to be glad with me. I'm bounding around the surface of the world in my automobile, scaring the prairie-hen and chasing the coyote before me. I'm as happy as a lark, and to-day I've rattled off two hundred good miles. And why am I happy, I ask you?"

"You don't need to ask me," I grunted, "and anyhow, you ain't going to keep on bein' happy in a minute. You got something coming to you, young gosling."

"I am happy," he went on, "because I am winding up the great adventure, at the end of which lies matrimony. Boys,

I am about to be married. As sure as you stand there! I took my time and let her go. Why should I worry? Why should any man worry over a woman? We're the strong sex. Let *them* worry. So I saw her depart, careless of her going. And then, when I got good and ready, I hopped into my trusty auto and flew across the desert sands. I draw near her even now, and soon I shall look again upon her and say to her that I am come. That's all. That's a man's way. Then I'll marry her."

"You don't interest me none at all," I said to him. "Your affairs are less to me than desert dust, and furthermore, as I stated before, you're bustin' in on a gentlemen's private party. We wish to converse and drink together, and you better go away before bad luck gets you."

He laughed at me and lighted another gold-tipped cigarette. Then he walked calmly to the door, and in another minute we could hear his automobile roaring outside.

"Anyhow," said Jake, "the little liar's got an automobile. He ain't lyin' about that. Imagine any woman doing what he said."

"Yeah, imagine it!" repeated Tim in a jeering tone.

"I am imaginin' it," I said shortly, because while the sucker had been talking a slow, somber thought worked its way into my brain and began messing around.

"Maybe we better not drink any more of this pop," Joe Maloney said after a time. "I wouldn't care much if I didn't drink pop again this week. We better be goin' home."

"You said it," I remarked with some eagerness, and I led the way out to our horses.

Well, we rode slowly along the trail toward the Treadwell ranch, full of friendship for each other and foamy pop, and not a thing happened until we were well on the up-grade, where the road narrows down and runs along between the ragged rocks. It was a nice moonlight night, and I was leading the parade and think-

ing over my thoughts, when I looked up, and far ahead I saw a gleam of light.

In a minute what that light was became certain. It was the headlight glare of an automobile, and it was zinging along toward us right merrily.

"Now, what do you suppose that is?" Tim demanded, pulling up.

"I don't need to suppose," I answered. "I know. It's an automobile."

"But who's?" Joe asked.

"You're going to find out in a minute," I told him, and we were, because the road was so narrow that we had to step aside and urge the ponies up against the broken rocks.

The car came roaring on, and pretty soon the headlights slowed down and brought us into strong outline.

"Who's that?" I yelled.

"Why, it's Shorty," came a subdued voice.

"Did I hear my name mentioned?" I asked, and then the four of us drove up beside the car and out of the headlights where we could see.

In the car was the bird with the tooth-brush mustache, and beside him sat Doris Darling. She looked up at me and a smile of rapture was on her face.

"Whatever does all this mean?" I asked her.

"Where are you goin' with this little runt?" Jake demanded.

"Gentlemen," Doris said, rising to her feet in the car, "I present you to my affianced husband. Gerald, dear, these are the boys, and you mustn't mind their rough ways."

"Your *-what!*?" I demanded.

"This is my affianced husband," Doris went on, speaking as though she liked the words. "We are going away to be married, aren't we Gerald, darling?"

"You said it, dearie," remarked her affianced husband, and I thought Tim Kirk would fall bang off his horse.

"And this," I bellowed, pointing to Gerald, darling, "*this* is the great disappointment you spoke of, is it?"

Doris stared at me and didn't answer.

"This is the disappointment, hey?" I went on. "Well, that's the proper name. He's all of that. Shall we let her go away with her disappointment?"

"If she wants it, let her have it," Jake answered in a voice full of melancholy.

We silently gave the automobile more room, and Gerald, the affianced husband, started the machinery. A minute later we could see nothing but a red point of light receding in the distance. Where the automobile had stood we gathered in an irresolute circle—all but me.

"What time is it?" I inquired of Jake.

"Fifteen minutes after eleven," he re-

plied, holding his watch up to the moonlight.

"Which gives us *just* time enough, if we rush, to get back to the Last Chance before Joey closes up."

One second later there was nothing but the rush of hoofs on the calm desert air, and what we did to that supply of hard licker still remains one of the historic points in the county's annals.

And that's why I state, as I did in the beginning, that anybody who informs you he can tell something about the way of a maid with a man—there's a guy who's handing you plain, every-day bull.



SIX OPTIMISTS

BY W. E. NESOM

"HOW'S trade?" I asked a legless chap
Who does a juggling trick;
And he replied that things were slow,
But that he couldn't kick.

"How's trade?" a deaf man I besought,
Who peddles plaster saints,
And who, I learned from his reply,
Had heard of no complaints.

I questioned next a one-armed wight
Who runs an apple-stand,
And learned that he, he really thought,
Could use another hand.

"How's trade?"—this to a toothless dame
Who bears a pedler's bag;
And while she didn't boost a lot,
She didn't chew the rag.

"How's trade?" I asked a blind galoot—
A knife and scissors whetter—
Who smiled and answered: "Out of sight!
Can't hope to see it better."

"How's trade?"—I queried last a mute
Who tends a "filling-station";
And he had not a word to say
Against the situation.

The King's Jewel

by Stephen Chalmers

Author of "Fear," "The Frozen Beauty," "The Castle on the Crag," etc.

WE like to have history wrapped in pretty packages, and in this particularly pretty and lively package you get a glimpse of a page from the book of England's most romantic history—the page that tells of an orange girl who rose out of the gutter to find great and lasting favor in the eyes of a king. You have met Nell Gwynne before, but never in a better or a sweeter rôle.—THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

MY FRIEND, THE ANGLER.

AND so I found myself at last on the road to London Town!

That was become reality which had been so long a vision deferred, at first on account of my youth, for I had been but fifteen years old when the king was restored to Whitehall.

For some years after that the affairs of the kingdom were in a tumbled condition. Then, just as I again prepared for the road, came news of the great plague, and no sooner had we country folk heard the last of that than something more definite than tongues of flame glowing in the southeastern sky told us that London was burning.

But in the spring of 1667 the time seemed ripe for the carrying out of my boyhood's dream; to go to London, see the king wearing his golden crown, mayhap obtain his favor, and, in short, make my fortune.

And if my choice of time need further explanation, I had just passed my twenty-first birthday, was grown tall, strong of heart and muscle, and the road never beckons so strongly as in the month of May. Besides, all men said there was need of willing hands in London Town, which was seeking to rebuild itself.

So here I was on the third day of my travels, sitting under a tree by the stream of Avon, making a frugal noon meal. My kerchief was spread upon the green grass as a cloth whereon was my modest store of bread, cheese, and red apples. For drink, the Avon flowed clear and sleepy at my feet.

This kerchief of farmy foods I usually carried, with the corners knotted over the end of a stout stick, across my right shoulder. It was my sole encumbrance and tie—for I had not a relative nor, for that matter, a friend in all the world—and the weight of my bundle grew less as time and my appetite continued. For the rest, my worldly possessions consisted of the

clothes I wore and a great belief in my future.

As I sat there munching my bread and cheese there came to my ears from the shade of another tree—almost at my elbow, it seemed—a sound of singing. Yet it could hardly be termed that, for the noise was like the whining of a crazy old mill-wheel, only that it articulated words that were not at all unpleasant.

“I care not, I, to fish in seas,
Fresh rivers best my mind do please,
Whose sweet, calm course I contemplate,
And seek in life to imitate.”

Taken by surprise, I peered around the side of my tree. There, under the shade of the next, sat a very ancient man, who yet seemed as cheerful as any lusty youth with visions of London in his head.

He must have been full threescore and nigh ten in years. His hair and beard were snow-white, but his face was strangely unmarked by time. It breathed kindness and a good liking for life. His dress was that of a man of the outdoors. An open knapsack by his side suggested a traveler. The reason of his pilgriming, I surmised, was in his present employ, for he was fishing in the Avon with one hand while the other supplied his mill with bread and cheese between snatches of the song it was grinding out.

“Good morrow, young sir!” he broke off, catching sight of me.

“And so say I, good master,” I replied. “Any luck?”

“Ah!” said he. “There spoke a lad of fellow feeling and an angler, if not in practice, at least in the making. Come sit by me, good youth. It is too bright for fishing.” He was taking in his line as he spoke. “Besides, I have here some fish for fortune’s buttering, as our late friend o’ the village hath it. You have read his ‘Pericles’?”

I did not know then to whom or what he referred. In truth, during the days that followed and in my peregrinations with this curious ancient, I was often at loss to follow his words, saving their

meaning. But I shared his tree with him, as he asked me, also his meal, making an exchange of my apples for his fish which he said he had taken fresh from a stream “before his morning sup.”

While we ate, his speech was of the pleasantest, concerning no great matters (as we think of such), but discoursing upon the time of the year and the skies and the trees and the birds and the fishes—particularly the fishes, which, he told me, repaid much study, for they held many lessons of profit to men.

“Our late friend of Stratford village,” he said, “may have fished on this very spot when he was but a lad and dreaming of London Town. It was he who said the big fishes swallow the little fishes, and you who hie to London Town, as did he, would do well to bear that in mind. But I would know more, young sir, for your face likes me.”

Whereupon I took courage from his favor and told him of my condition and my hopes. He listened with great attention, and his interest became greater, it seemed to me, when I told him of my father. It was as if from that moment my affairs were of his own personal concern.

“My father,” I said, “was a gentleman and a knight—Sir Rolfe Hollywood. That, good master, is also my name, barring the ‘Sir,’ for as yet the king hath not returned the honor nor the estate that went with it, and both of which were taken by Old Noll.”

“Sir Rolfe Hollywood?” said the old angler musingly, “—of Hollywood in Warwickshire? He that died of wounds after the king’s flight from Worcester?”

“Even the same, good master. It may be that you knew him?”

“Nay,” said the ancient. “But I have heard of him as a good knight who served his king and died that he might live. But proceed, young sir.”

I then told him how I was a lad of eight at that sad time. My mother had followed the king’s forces to be near my father. After Sir Rolfe’s death—and we

did not hear the truth of it until long after he was buried near his hiding place—my mother sickened and died. Thus I was left alone, with no ties, landless, nameless of all honorable title, and thrown upon the charity of a yokel family in whose shelter my mother had died, and who, in the goodness of their simple hearts, continued to keep me as their son, for they had none of their own.

They did not hide from me that I was of gentle birth, and treated me with much consideration, agreeing with me as I grew older that when I was come to manhood I should fare to London Town, mayhap win to the king, reveal myself as the son of my father, and come into what was rightfully mine.

"Aye," said the old angler, interrupting, "and if you be indeed the son of Sir Rolfe Hollywood, I am thinking the king will even listen to you with a straight face but no disfavor, for he had reason to love your father much."

He spoke as if there was more that he did not speak, but he bade me go on with my tale, the rest of which concerned my determination to do as I had done—take the road for London Town and seek my fortune.

"An action to be commended, young sir," he said, "but remember what Will Shaxper said of the great fishes that swallow the little ones, and while you conduct yourself with a true Christian meekness, beware of overtimidity; yet be not over-bumptious. Trim your hook to suit the season, and fish either up or down-stream as experience and the moment's conditions teach.

"But of instruction anon. For the present you are to understand, good lad, that I also fare toward London Town. I would fain have your company by the way, which lies not so much by the direct road as along the byways where little waters flow, and wherein a man so minded may wet a line. My business in London Town—where, God willing, I may arrive later if not sooner—is that of a friend, and, strangely in accord with the way

the world falls out, that same business hath a connection with yourself. But of that I am not prepared to speak further at this time.

"And now," he concluded, "forasmuch as during the days of our intercourse you shall be as a pupil to my instruction, I will read to you that passage from 'Pericles' of which your face told me you are in complete ignorance."

At this point, having finished his meal, he took from his knapsack a volume which he was at pains to tell me he had bought at the Sign of the Sunne in Pater-noster Row, and began to read from it.

"And we'll have flesh for holidays, fish for fasting days, and more'er puddings and flapjacks," he declaimed, adding, seeing that I was more than half asleep, "Marry! 'Tis strangely fitting to our case, good lad. And that we may be more familiar in our address, you may call me Master Walton."

CHAPTER II.

WE MEET A HIGHWAYMAN.

AFTER our meeting at Avon, Master Walton and I continued our way to London, but together. And a very interesting companion was my ancient angler. He seemed to know something of everything. He discoursed most interestingly on one thing and another, and so persistently that one thought of the old mill-wheel and the continuous waters turning it. But it was pleasant withal.

I found that his full name was Izaak Walton, that he was a native of Stafford, and a widower, having but lately lost his second wife. He had seen much trouble and sorrow in his time. Most of his children died. But he still maintained a faith in the goodness of the world that was inspiring in one so old. Yet, in faith, the world did seem a good place as we fared forth by field and stream and by-way in those fresh days of the flowery month of May.

Sometimes we lay out of a night upon the green grass, but my friend, Master Walton, was partial to an inn at nightfall. Though young in spirit, he had respect for his years. Furthermore, he was fond of an audience to which he might discourse of an evening over a cup of ale. It was his rule in the main to go to bed each night with a mellow light in his eye and a stave of mill-wheel song upon his lips.

We started on the road always at daybreak, and found a little brook to fish in by sunrise. As a rule, we had fish for breakfast among the alders. We would then tramp toward London Town until noon, when we would rest in a shady spot for two hours, eating a light meal, during the leisurely course of which he would give me my daily lesson in general instruction.

All his discourse was instruction to me who had known little of books until this time, but the noon period was a special effort on the part of both of us. Thus I became acquainted with Shakespeare and other writers, including Dr. Donne and the poetic King James.

I found, too, that my ancient friend had written books himself, several lives of great men, such as Donne and Sanderson. Then he had written a book on his friend Sir Henry Wotton, who, it seems, was a very clever hand with the fly-fishing. And Master Walton confessed to me that some of the songs he sang were of his own making.

He was very modest about his own writings, except on one occasion (which is to be noted), and there was one other book written by him about which he did not tell me at this time. As he was deeply religious in a simple way, I thought this book was a Bible, for he slept with it under his pillow o' nights, and often in the daytime he would take it from his knapsack, fondle it as if it were a precious thing, and, without ever reading a line of it, fall into meditation.

It was always after such reverie that he would begin again to ask me about my

father and what I knew of the circumstances of his escape from Worcester, particularly in connection with the king's flight. But to my original story I could add nothing.

Well, we had passed Oxford and were on the straight road to London, I with my stick and kerchief bundle and Master Walton with his fishing-rod and his knapsack full of books and hooks and lines, when we came upon a sad spectacle at a fork of the ways.

Here upon the stout arm of a mighty oak there hung by the neck a gentleman whose appearance suggested that in life he might have been a brave lad on the highway. He swayed in midair with the moods of the breeze. One of his boots had fallen to the ground, and on near-by trees sat a number of crows, their reluctance to approach nearer, Master Walton explained, being proof that our friend on the gallows-tree was not yet cold from the hanging.

While we looked upon this tragic thing, a voice at our very elbows spoke up.

"Marry, God wot and saving your honors' presence!" it said. "There would be Dick Scarlet, as merry a lad as ever pressed a willing horse over a ditch and relieved the distressed of their willing burdens. A sad commentary, good gentlemen, on the wages of sinfulness."

We were the more surprised to find that the author of this speech had no scholarly appearance. I think he must have come from the woods that skirted the road to our right. His dress was that of a yokel, yet his face was shrewd in a ratlike way, and his speech was too glib for that of a clod. This may not have appealed to the learned Master Walton as to me, for my ancient greeted him without suspicion.

"Aye, good sir," said he, "you speak true. Ye seem to ha' known this unhappy Scarlet. An' ye go our way, let us even be going, for the picture is not to my liking. Yet I would hear more of it, sir."

So the clod with the weasel face fell in

with us and we tramped on with him at our side, and he told us the story of Dick Scarlet.

"A merry lad in his way," said Clodhopper. "Many a reaming swat ha' drunk wi' him. Therefore a kept me hid while they hanged him, for that he made the mistake of calling a servant of his majesty to stand and deliver, thinking he were a harmless and maybe fruitful wayfarer.

"Yet ere he was grafted on yon oak he blabbed a scandalous thing, my masters, hoping thereby to gain his life. He said that he was in the service of my Lord Buckhurst—of whom I have never heard, save as Master Scarlet said he was a favorite of the king's majesty."

"Aye, so—my Lord Buckhurst," said Master Walton, nodding sagely. "What said Master Scarlet of him?"

"Said that he served him to waylay one Master Walton, who carried some item touching on the welfare of our lord, the king, his crown and dignity."

At the revelation that the dead man had lain in wait for my ancient angler, I glanced at Master Walton, but he was merely nodding as if much interested in the tale.

"But marry!" said Clodhopper, "the bailiff's servant, whom he took up by mistake, believed none of it; so, calling his men, who were hid in the ditch for that very purpose to catch Dick Scarlet, he swung him up among the acorns. Aye, he was a merry lad, was Dick Scarlet!"

"And this Master Walton, of whom ye speak," said the angler coolly. "What of him? Is he of the king's party, or against? What is it he carries that my Lord Buckhurst might seek to prevent reaching the king?"

"That I know not," said Clodhopper. "I am not versed in matters of kings and lords. I attend to my business, which hath more to do with swine than politics. I know only what I overheard and ha' told you."

Notwithstanding his reference to his profession of swineherd, I could not help

thinking the man too clever of speech for a yokel. What Master Walton thought I could not tell, but to him the stranger's speech may have seemed crude enough.

But I was right in my suspicion. It being about the noon hour, we went aside by a brook to eat our middle-day meal. Master Walton must invite our yokel friend to share with us. This the fellow did right willingly, and he made such inroad into our provision that he must have fasted that morning, at least.

When the meal was ended, Master Walton drew from his knapsack a book, and, explaining to the clod that it was the hour for my instruction, bade him lend an attentive ear, by which he would no doubt profit. I was surprised to note that the book in hand was that which he had not read from before, the same which he so often fondled and which he placed under his pillow as for safe-keeping at night.

"This," said he, addressing the yokel more than me, "is a book of my own writing. It is called 'The Compleat Angler, a Discourse on Fish and Fishing, Worthy to Be Perused by Most Anglers,' and it is to be had of Master Richard Marriott in St. Dunstan's Churchyard." Thereupon he began to read, while the clod and I sat cross-legged on the grass and listened, I with much respect if little great interest at that time, the clod with no attempt to hide that he was rapidly growing weary and would fain have some other entertainment. And it was he himself who created the diversion.

"And now I shall tell you," my angler read from his book, "'that the fishing with a natural fly is excellent and affords much pleasure. They are to be found thus: the May-fly in that month, near to the riverside, especially against rain; the Oak-fly—'"

"Plague take your flies!" interrupted Clodhopper suddenly, and, looking up at this rudeness, Master Walton and I found him seated there with a large pistol cocked in his hand and a grin on his weasel face.

I at once leaped to my feet and

seized my stout stick, ready to defend my ancient and goodly friend from this sorry requital of his hospitality. But at once the clod, or robber—for the latter was now clearly enough what he was—turned his pistol fully upon me.

"Ah," said Master Walton, "I perceive, good sir, that thou art a hunter."

"Aye, marry—a hunter that is hunted," said the robber. "And now I know thou art he whom I seek, good Master Walton. Deliver to me that which you carry, the news of which hath traveled upon the road before you. *Deliver me the King's Jewel!*"

I was as amazed at this speech as Master Walton took it calm. What was the robber talking of? The King's Jewel! And what might that be? And what did my harmless ancient angler with such a thing?

"You are to remember, good sir," said Master Walton, "that if I am that Walton you seek and carry anything of worth, Dick Scarlet may be but one acorn on an oak-tree."

The robber laughed.

"Nay, Dick Scarlet hangs on no oak-tree as yet," said he with a chuckle. "I be that same Dick Scarlet!"

"How can that be? Ah—then who is the man in the oak?"

"That was the clod," said Master Scarlet. Seeming to enjoy the amazement on our faces, he could not refrain from explanation.

"I will even tell you how it was," said he quite cheerfully. "Two nights ago at the Crown Tavern in Oxford, while drinking a pot of ale, I overheard some lords on their way to London Town speak of this King's Jewel, which was lost and was found again, and word had come to one of them—my Lord Buckhurst, he was called, and that is all I know of him—that an ancient fisherman named Walton had been entrusted with it to carry to the king at Whitehall.

"I had forgotten the affair until I met you, good masters, by the crossroads. Before that I had been followed by the

bailiff's servants from Oxford. Finding me in dire straits, I waylaid this yokel fool, and at pistol-point made him change his cloth for mine. It was he the king's men caught and gave a rise in life.

"As for me, I took thought of this Walton who was a fisherman when I saw you and this good youth, and devised the tale of Dick Scarlet's confession. Faith, good sir, I came nigh being deceived, for thou didst not wince at the name. But the book and thine own admission made me sure ye were that same Walton.

"Now, good master, I must urge you to deliver me the jewel that you carry. Dick Scarlet hath more need of it than the king, and its worth may win him to the colonies as a gentle instead of felon rogue."

"Master Scholar," said Izaak Walton, turning to me, "you are to make note that this is a very rascal among fish—a pickerel of the weed that preys upon worthier fry."

"Deliver!" said Master Scarlet impatiently.

"If I have aught to deliver," said Master Walton, while I stood by fingering my staff and eager for an opening, "you are welcome to choose from my humble belongings. I prithee leave me my rod when you have looked upon it, for it is a good hazel, and you are to observe that it carries a fine line and a fly made from drake's pinfeather, which is to be commended for bright fishing.

"And here," he said, emptying his knapsack upon the grass, "is as goodly an assortment as an angler could wish for all seasons, also bait for the mind. If you are so inclined, good Master Highwayman—and I bear you no ill-will, having spent many a pleasant hour by the wayside with your kind—I would even inscribe your name, as for a gift, in this 'Reliquae Wottoniana,' for I give the palm to Sir Henry as a master in the art of the fly. I myself find more delight in the use of the bob-float."

And so he rambled on while Master Scarlet, keeping a sharp eye and a pistol-

point never far from me, rummaged with his disengaged hand among the contents of Master Walton's knapsack. He cursed as he pricked his fingers among the hooks, and cursed more as he tossed aside "Pericles" and the "Reliquae" and "The Loves of Amos and Laura."

"And you are not to forget 'The Compleat Angler,'" Master Walton reminded him, handing him the book from which he had been reading. "No present edition bears the imprint of Master Marriott of St. Dunstan's."

But Master Scarlet, furious that he could not find that which he sought, knocked the book from the ancient's hand. At this insult to my gentle friend I lost all discretion, and flung myself bodily upon the highwayman, regardless of his pistol, which, as we grappled, went off with a fearsome noise. The ball went wide, and I distinctly heard it rip among the branches overhead.

Captain Scarlet—for so I afterward learned he was known to ill fame—tried to brain me with the heavy butt of his weapon, both barrels of which had contributed to that deafening explosion. By good fortune rather than skill my staff sent it spinning from his hand, and my next stroke caught him upon the skull.

But his head must have been used to hard knocks, for the blow but incensed him to fury. He closed with me, and we fell to the ground in a wrestling embrace. Thus, when I cast away my stick, which was but an encumbrance at close quarters, we were man to man; and at twenty-one I was a match in any fair test of muscle and endurance.

As we rolled and panted in the grass I could hear Master Walton urging me to more heroic effort. Out of the corner of my eye I caught fleeting glimpses of his face, which was alight with enthusiasm of sport, the while he danced around.

"At him, stalwart lad!" he cried. "'Tis man to man, and thou'rt no spratling. Play him well! Give him line! Thou'lt bring him to bank an thou keep'st thy wit!"

I have fought many a man, good and bad—aye, and without weapons, too, for it is in time of peace that the bare hand avails—but never have I closed with a better mill than Dick Scarlet. He was as slippery as an eel and as shrewd as a fox. He had strength, too, of the lithe, sinewy kind that bends but does not break.

I was never so hard put to it to win; but there was my gentle old angler shouting encouragement; there was the insult to one so venerable—and his own book, too! and there was my obligation to him for many a kindness. All that put fire into my strength, and I fought my first fight with a full-grown man, myself no spratling, as Master Walton had said.

We were at it for the better half of a quarter-hour, and both of us were still confident of mastering the other. But I suddenly gained an advantage which brought us to a deadlock. Master Scarlet was flat upon his back, but so holding me that I could not move lest I yield my advantage. It then became a matter of which of us could endure longest in that straining grip. Just as I thought my shoulder muscles must crack, or become numb, I thought I felt Master Scarlet's clutch relax. But it was a ruse, and next instant he had buried his teeth in my neck, and I could feel them sinking deeper and deeper into my flesh.

The pain and my fury at this scurvy trick blinded me to forgetfulness of the rules of the game. It was his own fault that, to compel an end of his biting, I was forced to draw up one knee and drive it forcefully into the pit of his stomach. Instantly the highwayman's tooth-grip loosened, and at the same time he uttered a gasp and his arms fell limp.

I staggered to my feet, blood streaming from my neck and all adown my leathern jacket, but Captain Dick Scarlet only rolled over on the ground with a groan. I tried to explain to Master Walton my regret at the manner in which the fight had ended, but he merely said:

"You æe to note, young sir, that the

pike is only a goodly game fish when it fights fair and does not seek to swallow the hook."

He tended roughly to my wounded throat, and quickly satisfied himself that Master Scarlet suffered nothing but exhaustion and lack of wind. At that Master Walton bade me quickly get our things together, as we had better be on our way.

We left the highwayman propped up against a tree-bole, too dazed even to thank us for this small service, and presently struck the road for London Town. We had nothing further to fear from him, I thought. But Master Walton was very grave after the incident, and omitted his usual fishing that evening. We passed a very likely brook for trout. My angler looked at it wistfully, but decided that we should press on to the nearest inn, whereat we arrived in the dusk.

That evening he drank little ale, was thoughtful over his food, and went to bed early. In the morning early we resumed our journey, and again he did not fish. At noon we rested in a copse and ate our bread and cheese in silence. He produced "The Compleat Angler," but read me no instruction from that or any other volume. Instead, he sat fingering the precious book for a while, then put it away, not in his knapsack, but in his bosom.

The afternoon travel was like the morning's, and I began to think he was troubled; but he was merely thinking deeply of many circumstances, and particularly of that tale the highwayman had heard at the Crown Tavern in Oxford.

In the afternoon, when we were come upon Hampstead Heath, and the roofs of London Town lay some way before us, Master Walton suddenly came to a halt upon a little bridge. He looked at the brook beneath it for a while, then sat down, bidding me do likewise beside him.

"And now, young sir," he said, as if it were the continuation or the end of an argument, "here we must go our sep-

arate ways. It were dangerous for you to travel further with me, since it is known that I carry something of great value.

"Know, then, that Lord Buckhurst spoke true in that rascal's hearing, and there may be those who will seek to take from me that jewel which I carry. So it behooves me to fish and reflect awhile.

"In the mean time, good lad, I would have ye to know that you have some connection with this matter. It was to thine own father, Sir Rolfe Hollywood, that the king at Worcester, fearing it would be stripped from him were he captured, entrusted this Jewel of the Garter, to be returned to him when times were more fortunate.

"Thy father died, but remembering his trust, passed the jewel to a certain Mr. Barlow, of Blore Pipe House, and he in turn gave it to one yclept Mr. Milward. So it passed from hand to hand until one who was dying at Stafford gave it to me, bidding me convey it, when time was favorable, to his majesty. Hence my present journey, taken, however, in the manner which most pleases my taste and habit."

"Then," said I, "you indeed carry something of great worth. How hast so well concealed it?"

"That, good lad, I may not reveal even to you. But you will understand that whoever returns this item to the king should win his great favor, and there are many lords of the court who would stop at no villainy to have the honor and profit of bringing this jewel to his majesty. Therefore thou may'st see wherein there is danger in my company."

I protested that if there was danger, especially born of a charge laid upon mine own father, it was my right to share it. I should have said that I might even claim some right to the safe carriage of this jewel in my own person; but I had mind of his great kindness to me, and of his wisdom in all matters, and feared to offend him.

"Nay, good lad," said he. "A good

pupil taketh instruction from his master. Mayhap I shall win some advantage for thee in this matter, but it were better that a lad should make his own way without favor save that which he wins for himself.

"So now," he concluded, drawing from his breast his copy of "The Compleat Angler," "go ye on to London Town. Be not afraid that ye shall not see me again, for it may be I have a purpose in this. And observe that in all your doings you be of a true Christian meekness, as I have said, but ever insisting that who crosses thy path shall *also* observe the said meekness.

"And as a parting gift, I give thee that which I most greatly treasure, 'The Compleat Angler,' to be your companion and continued instructor. Study it diligently, good lad, for within it you shall find the truth in many things—particularly relating to the proper method of fishing for pike with live roach."

CHAPTER III.

I MEET NELL GWYNNE.

ON the evening of that day I entered London Town—alone.

I had left my fisherman, much against my desire, at the little bridge on Hampstead Heath. No protest of mine had availed to benefit me with his further company. I had even gone so far as to hint that I had some claim upon the custody of that jewel myself, as it had been confided to my father for safe-keeping, but Master Walton had assured me I was yet too young in the ways of an artful world to discharge the mission.

He feared to entrust me with the jewel for that its safe return to the king had been a charge upon him. He was aware that my fortunes might hang by the difference, but promised me that he should have advantage for me in mind when he received favors of his majesty.

And so he dismissed me, even a little impatiently when I would have argued

further. He bade me again study "The Compleat Angler," which I was of a mind to throw to the trout in the next brook after I left him. The last I saw of him he was meandering down the little stream from the bridge, looking for a likely eddy in which to try a cast.

Coming into London, my depression was deepened by a certain disappointment in the city of my golden dreams. The outskirts seemed but half inhabited. I afterward learned that between plague and fire more people had left London than had returned to it. Also, many had died before they had had a chance to leave.

As I penetrated the heart of the town I came upon the burned part, which seemed to me the greater part of it. To right and left and ahead of me at every turning the city lay in charred ruin. Black beams and skeleton ribs clutched at the evening sky, and where there was an open space it was where gunpowder had leveled rows upon rows of houses.

The people in the streets struck me as curiously indifferent to their surroundings, or as if they had become hardened to calamity. Roisterers were everywhere. There was much ribald laughter, and often I caught strains of reckless, drunken song.

Occasionally there passed me a procession of linkboys bearing torches in the dusk, which was deeper in the narrow streets between the charred ruins. Behind the lights gorgeously clad menials bore chairs in which was a lord or a lady, sometimes both, who looked out on either side, pointing and chattering as if at some fair where strange sights rapidly succeed one another. To these, it seemed to me, the ruins of London Town were as some spectacle provided for their entertainment.

I wandered around until hunger and weariness suggested that a lodging and food should be my first consideration. Fortunately, I had a little money left in a small store saved and secreted against this very adventure to London Town, and

to it had been added a few crowns, at my first refusal of which my angler patron had become so angry that I had need to accept it of him.

Of the first and least indifferent person I met I inquired as to a place of food and bed. He laughed and said he himself had slept in a coal-cellar for months, and he did not judge from my stick and bundle that I could afford to pay the prices asked for shelter in these days.

"But an ye have the wherewithal," said he, "for a bite and a sup, get ye to the Mitre, which is in Fleet. It was burned to the ground, but beneath that there is the old crypt where still the fortunate make merry."

Asking my way as I went, I at last found the Mitre. It was a pile of ruins through which an alley had been cleared to a flight of half-charred wooden steps. These led down into a cellar from which came light and savory smells and bursts of laughter.

Down the stairs I went, not sure but my appearance might lead to my being turned out, for I was travel-stained and as behind fashion as any yokel with a staff and a kerchief bundle; and the wound on my neck and the bloodstains on my doublet added nothing to my charms.

But no one even noticed my entrance to the place, which was the resort of a gay, reckless middle-class, such as is servant to the nobility or clinging to its skirts and bounty—popinjays, poets, actors, women of studied smiles, fat burghers, and occasionally an aristocrat in quest of diversion.

I took a seat by a rude table in a far corner of the room, the walls of which were hidden by tiers of wine-barrels. Great gaps in the half-burned rafters revealed stone arches of a distinctly monastic look. These formed the old roof proper, for the place was an ancient crypt, the whole structure having been at one time a habitation of monks, and this their wine-cellar.

I was served with a very honest meat-

pudding, and that I might appear more at the ease I did not feel. I took out my copy of "The Compleat Angler" and pretended to read it. But just as the serving fellow had cleared away my platters and I was becoming really interested in the discourse on fishing, there entered upon the scene that lady whose memory was to haunt me for many a day and around whom my great adventure centered.

There came a sudden confusion at the head of the stairway, above which I heard a bell-like trill of laughter. The sound arrested every one in the crypt, even as it thrilled me as the musical harbinger of something entering upon my life.

There was instantly a rush of the serving fellows to the stair-foot. Even mine host hustled to the place and stood bowing and smoothing the air with his hands. There entered several gallants escorting as lovely and merry a vision of woman as ever poised on slim, silken-hosed ankles and the shapeliest of little feet, and surveyed the scene before her sparkling eyes.

I can still see her as she stood there on the third step from the bottom, her satin skirt raised slightly in her finger-tips, her hair falling in ringlets about the tiniest of ears, delicate eyebrows that arched in humorous inquiry as she glanced over the guests with a curved smile that was not so much *for* them as *because* of them. The world, I was to learn, was as much a show to this woman as she was a show for the world.

"'Tis Mistress Nell!—Nell Gwynne—sweet Nell!" I heard whispers run through the crypt.

One of the gallants who accompanied her gave orders to the host, who was still making efforts to flatten the air for the lady's tread.

"Make places, sirrah!" said the one whom the host addressed as my Lord Buckhurst. "Nay, that corner is too dark! Beauty loves the light if beauty be true. Ah, this is well," as the host

designated a table in the centre of the space. "Now, set us forth— Marry! serve us of thy daintiest and best, and the wine— See that the sun hath kissed it in its youth, so the same may be restored when 'tis honored by Mistress Nell's lips."

The host and his servants scurried to the kitchen cellar, and presently my lady was the center of toast and turned compliment. To each and all she bowed with the air of a little queen, for she was not overlarge, which is something that likes me in a woman.

As for me, I forgot all about my angler book, and felt the more friendless as I sat in my corner feasting my eyes upon her beauty, and drinking in as wine the mellow rills of her laughter. I felt in that moment that the glance of her eyes, the award of her smile, her speech in friendly converse, would have been greater fortune to me than that I had come to seek. But I was a country lout, and she, no doubt, some high lady escorted by her lords upon the seamy path of London night-life.

I presently noticed her eyes occasionally glance with a sort of frowning anxiety or defiance at a seedy person who sat at a table in the corner opposite me on my right.

This man, with a curiously lined face that was strangely mobile in expression, long and rather unkempt hair, and a dress that was shabby where it had at one time been fantastically rich—this man sat there with a half sneer on his sensuous lips, and his eyes never left Mistress Nell for long.

She was aware of it, and, as I say, threw him occasional looks in which there was no fear, but rather defiance and a little anxiety to avoid an encounter, as if she would say—"I seek no quarrel, but beware if you force one."

Despite this her merriment grew, as did her bewitching charm, while mine host brought more wine. The leading male spirit of the party, my Lord Buckhurst, was a tall, well-fed person of jovial manner, and a face that became very red

when he laughed, something which he did most boisterously.

He ate much and drank prodigiously, and his talk grew louder and his jests broader; yet I did not see the slightest change of color in the lovely Mistress Nell. Indeed, to his every jest she capped with a better one.

Another companion, who might have been her husband, or a humble lover, or even a servant, was a quiet, overdressed person who did nothing but smile upon Mistress Nell and approve milord's every utterance.

All at once, after a shout of laughter following some remark of my lady's, Lord Buckhurst sprang to his feet with a goblet in his hand, spilling some wine on the cloth as he did so.

"Good friends—gentles and commons—what odds?" he cried in jovial spirit. "'Tis many a day since Mistress Nell graced the Mitre crypt with the sunshine of her presence. She—"

"She was but Peg Lymcourt then," said a voice from the shadows, and there was a coarse laugh with it.

"Aye, marry!" cried another, but an she sold oranges and a kiss with a rosebud; she could even sing like a meadow lark and foot it like a fawn."

"Aye, could she!" squeaked mine fat host, scenting what was coming. "Mayhap she hath forgot such simple arts in such high company as the king's servant-players of the new Theater Royal?"

"To the orange lass of the Old Mitre!" cried Buckhurst. "My good friends—gentles or commons—what odds?—a bumper to Peg o' the Tavern—Mistress Nell, of Drury Lane—Mistress Eleanor Gwynne!"

Everybody rose and drank, I with the rest. But I forget. The long-haired vagabond in the opposite corner sat still and sneered the more.

I saw Mistress Nell cast a quick, defiant flash at him, and then, just as the cups came to the table with an empty clattering, she got up with a little laugh, set one foot upon a chair, offered a hand

to my Lord Buckhurst, and next instant she had sprung lightly to the table-top.

And now she was as beauty on a pedestal, the overhanging lamp shining full upon her. Her slim, silken-hosed ankles gleamed beneath the skirt, which she slightly raised with her finger-tips, and she struck the attitude of a dancer about to begin, but stood thus for a moment, smiling down upon us all. Then she began to sing with all the charm of a practised performer:

"It was a lover and his lass,

With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino!
That o'er the green cornfields did pass,
In the spring-time!"

Presently, as she tripped a pretty measure on the table-top, all joined in the chorus:

"In the spring—time,
The only pretty ring—time,
When birds do sing, hey ding-a-ding-ding,
Sweet lovers love the spring!"

There was a loud clapping of hands, but over that there came cries for "Peg Lymcourt! Give us the old Peg!"

Mistress Nell frowned. The shabby person in the corner sneered. She saw it and, tossing her head, raised her skirts an inch higher and began a saucy song such as she may have sung in those days of which as yet I knew naught.

I had never heard it before, and do not remember it now. I would that I had never heard *her* sing it, and for that reason I do not set the thing down here. Yet for all its wickedness, it had a charm which she gave it.

She was more bewitching in this semblance of deviltry, and as she was helped from the table-top amid an uproar of plaudit, Milord Buckhurst tightened his grip upon her hand, suddenly swept her into his arms, and kissed her full upon the lips.

Instantly she dealt him a resounding smack upon the face, but there was so little of annoyance on her dimpled face that milord must seek to kiss her again. At

that she indeed grew angry and struggled with him. Her hair became unloosed, and her face flushed, but none sought to interfere, not even the overdressed person, whom I had taken to be her escort proper.

I happened to glance across at my shabby person in the corner, and he was openly jeering. At this I sprang to my feet and abandoned my book and bundle, determined that she should not be kissed by any man in my presence if it were not to her liking.

There was never such a silence and astonishment in the Mitre crypt. I am thinking, as when I laid my hands upon my Lord Buckhurst's shoulders, hurled him half-way across the crypt, and stood before Mistress Nell with my stick ready against any further assault.

Buckhurst's friends had drawn their swords, but Buckhurst himself ordered them back, having recovered, and being determined to punish me himself. But on noting my dress, while his fury abated none, he drove his weapon back into its sheath and summoned mine host's fellows to deal with me for an unmannerly churl.

I do not know what mauling and indignity I might have suffered had not Mistress Nell, who had been panting behind me and setting her hair in order, suddenly appeared between me and my enemies.

"Lay no hand on this youth!" she cried most imperiously, stamping her foot and flashing her eyes around until they resentfully rested upon Milord Buckhurst. "A mannerly churl likes me better than an unmannerly duke," she said.

Seeing that she was indeed angry, Milord Buckhurst turned scarlet. He, too, was wrath at this humiliation put upon him before his friends; but for some reason he curbed what was upon his tongue, bowed low, and made his excuses, offering Mistress Nell the chair which she had previously abandoned. She accepted his courtesy as one granting a favor; but when milord would also have seated himself, she said:

"Nay, milord, let me have time to smooth my ruffled feathers. Sit ye apart from me until thy company pleases me more. And it is but fit that I have a word with my rustic Sir Galahad."

Buckhurst flushed scarlet again and bit his lip, but he covered his feeling with a laugh. Beckoning one of his friends—the overdressed person who had a curious, strutting gait—he retired to the very corner which I had vacated. I turned to find Mistress Nell regarding me curiously.

"Where got ye such manners?" she asked abruptly.

"I know not," said I, which was truth, "save where the grass grows."

"Marry, thou'rt clean and green, too," she said, twinkling and dimpling. "Ye may sit, for that thou art a gentleman."

I sat down, dumb with astonishment. But presently my courage returned, for the moment we were seated the grand lady vanished, and she became simple and sisterly; or perhaps I should say she was that Peg Lymcourt of whom they spoke familiarly.

She leaned half across the table, her delicious chin almost touching the fair white arms that she crossed upon the board, and in this abandoned pose she talked to me, her voice lowered almost to a whisper of secrecy.

"Who art thou, lad?" she asked. "Thy face and thy way both like me. Also, thou art handsome—and clean—"

"And green?" quoth I.

"That I mistrust—and distrust, too, even as the devil who reads Holy Writ for his purposes. But ye have an honest face and a clean eye. What is thy name?"

"Rolfe," I said, adding "Hollywood," somehow, as an afterthought.

"Rolfe. Good Rolfe! I like the name. Mine is Nell. So may you call me."

The suddenness of her gracious bending to a country youth and the little white hand that she softly laid upon mine across the table puzzled, even disappointed, me for the moment. But as she touched me thus invitingly I saw her flash

a side glance across the crypt at Lord Buckhurst, as if to note his noting of her acting.

She must have suffered disappointment, for milord seemed to have forgotten her. While pretending to be interested in my "Compleat Angler," which he had idly picked up from the table where I had left it, he was in close conversation with his overdressed friend, whose name, I learned, was Lacey.

This Master Lacey was, like Mistress Nell, one of the king's servant-players. Even as I looked, momentarily anxious for my book, Buckhurst and Lacey cast a glance at Mistress Nell—a glance which maliciously included me—and milord made a quick signal to the shabby, long-haired fellow in the opposite corner. The shabby one scowled, but went over and sat with them.

"Now there is mischief plotting against poor Nell, for a wager," whispered my mysterious lady. "Why else should milord hold speech with the vagabond Hart?"

It struck me as odd that she should know this same "vagabond Hart." Noting my interest in the mismatched trio, Mistress Nell diverted me into telling of myself. But while I obliged her whim, I kept an eye upon Master Hart, Master Lacey, Lord Buckhurst—and my book.

Buckhurst had dropped the "Angler," and was now urging something which, by his glances, concerned Mistress Nell. Lacey seemed to oppose the proposition most emphatically, while Master Hart sneered and argued away his scruples. Finally Lacey agreed to whatever was planned, but with bad grace, as if under some pressure he could not resist.

In the mean time I told Mistress Nell of my coming to London Town and my hopes of fortune. I think she but half listened, her attention being more upon the plotting trio. She was absent, too, when, my story briefly ended, she found it necessary to cover her true employ by telling me something of herself.

"Be of good cheer, lad," she said, patting my hand the while she shot a glance at the corner. "Fortune awaits the brave. Even I—to the high and mighty I am high and mighty, but to the humble I am but plain Nell Gwynne—I was not always so well favored i' the world. But yesterday I was a bandy of quip and tavern jest."

Her magnificent eyes suddenly turned full upon mine with a kind of wistfulness.

"Aye, but it was undeserved. I was no man's lass, as clean and green as your grass, lad—aye, even as seventeen years ago, when this same king, hiding in trees, had never a thought for a brat that sucked its thumb in a Drury Lane coal-cellar."

The harshness of the woman of the world was in that last speech. But she recovered herself. It seemed to me a bright moisture came into her wonderful eyes, and this time the little pressure upon my hand was of honest friendliness. She averted her eyes from mine, and all at once she said:

"Sirrah, where are those gallant manners?"

She looked at me with mock imperiousness and pointed to the floor. There lay something that brought, I am sure, a color to my face.

On the floor lay a little bright object—a silver buckle it was, attached to a length of blue satin ribbon.

I could not be mistaken in what the thing was. No doubt the color deepened on my face, for in the country we had been taught, even among simple people, to ignore the existence of such things. Mistress Nell, seeing the look on my face, again pointed in most queenly style and said:

"Marry, my good knight! *Honi soit qui mal y pense!*"

And not knowing for the world what she meant, I picked up the thing, just as out of the tail of my eye I saw the shabby, long-haired vagabond, Master Hart, slip up the stairway after flashing a

covert grimace at his two fellows in the corner.

CHAPTER IV.

AS BECOMING A KNIGHT.

AS I laid the little feminine trifle on the table before Mistress Nell Gwynne, whatever she may have thought of my embarrassment, she must have read my complete ignorance of her French. She threw her head back with a trill of merry laughter, and her shining white teeth seemed to me as the keys of some instrument of bell-like sound.

Her mirth attracted Milord Buckhurst and Master Lacey. Seeing her mood changed, they ventured a return to the table at which we sat. She did not protest; even bade them be seated. The long-haired rogue went back to his opposite corner, and out of the tail of my eye I saw that my kerchief bundle and my book still lay safe where I had left them.

"Marry!" cried Mistress Nell. "An it had been you, milord, I would safely ha' wagered a kiss ye would ha' craved the right to refasten it. But here is a coy lad who blushes like a maid and never heard of good King Jamie!"

Then, as if she told a fairy tale to a child, she enlightened me about that gallant king who declared the only shame is his who thinks shame of a thing, which, she told me—while I felt like an unversed fool—was the motto of the Order of the Garter. Hearing this, I thought to regain something of my conceit, and I had inwardly vowed I should teach this merry lady that I was something more than a "coy lad"—aye, and the teaching would be at her expense, too!

"Indeed, madam," said I, "I should know something of that, for 'twas to my father, Sir Rolfe Hollywood, that the king entrusted his Jewel of the Garter during the flight from Worcester field."

At this Lord Buckhurst ceased twirling his mustache.

"Rolfe Hollywood?" said he. "Art

thou indeed son of that Sir Rolfe? Ye are then bearer of the King's Jewel! And yet it was told to me that even now an ancient man of the woods and waters brought the Royal George to London."

"I did not say that I carried it, nor that I did not," I said, feeling a better grip upon my situation. "But I may say that you are even right. Izaak Walton, who carries the King's Jewel to Whitehall, is my friend and instructor. 'Twas even he wrote that goodly discourse milord was but thumbing so curiously."

Then I could have beaten myself that conceit had led me astray. I suddenly remembered that it was this Buckhurst Captain Scarlet had overheard speak of Walton and the jewel at Oxford. The angler, too, had warned me that there were those who would stop at nothing to have the honor of personally returning the jewel to the king. I had imperilled my friend. Then, too, my reference to the book affected Buckhurst oddly. He glanced sharply at the table where my bundle and the "Angler" innocently lay.

Perhaps Mistress Nell, too, imagined I had made a mistake. Before Lord Buckhurst could question me further, she interrupted:

"Marry! I think this Master Walton of thine is a rogue, good Rolfe, for an the king entrusted the jewel to thy father, the honor of conveying it to his majesty were surely the son's. He might well ha' given thee the jewel 'stead of a dry book, but most like he is some titled ninny who seeks to add further honors to his name."

"Nay, Mistress Nell," said Buckhurst, while Master Lacey, himself silent, nodded fawning approval of milord's every utterance, "it were not fitting that one of yokel speech and appearing should carry this priceless thing, much less place the king under obligation which were better borne where more fitted."

"Sir," I said with what dignity I could command, "my yokel speech and appearing are born of that my father died for the king's sake, as did my mother for my father's. Had both lived, I have no

doubt they would have taught me at least to be mannerly in speech!"

"Bravo, Sir Rolfe!" cried Mistress Nell, clapping her hands in delight at Milord Buckhurst's scarlet discomfiture. Master Lacey pretended to frown, but I think he was secretly pleased that some one had dared to beard the lion.

"Saving Mistress Nell's presence," said Buckhurst with quiet venom, "you deserve whipping."

"As for that and my yokel appearing," I retorted, "an we both repaired to the green and stripped, I would wager a sound apple to a rotten turnip that I were the better man. That I bear not a title such as you do when attired were in the main my misfortune more than my fault."

Our voices had risen during this wordy duel. As Buckhurst arose in outraged lordliness, all eyes in the Mitre crypt again turned upon us two, who seemed destined to cross one another several times in an evening. Again I stood in danger of being mauled at milord's order, and again it was Mistress Nell who saved the situation.

"But in sooth he hath a title!" she cried, also rising and picking up the buckled ribbon from the table. "And by the king's gallant favor, it is Mistress Nell Gwynne who says so!"

She struck a royal pose in most delicious mimicry and bade me kneel. Glad of anything that might change the weather, for I had no liking to being hurled into the street by kitchen mops, I entered the spirit of the thing and knelt with bowed head at Mistress Nell's feet.

Buckhurst, seeing the mock purpose, protested.

"But, Mistress Nell," he cried, "you would usurp the king's prerogative!"

"Marry, indeed! But so I make it my prerogative. And mark ye, milord, there'll come a day when his majesty shall set more by Nell Gwynne's garter order than that which he gave this lad's sire at Worcester."

With that she fastened the blue garter

ribbon around my neck, binding it with the silver buckle, and cried:

"Rise, Sir Rolfe Hollywood, Knight of the Garter—*Nell's!*"

I got up laughing, yet somehow filled with a prescience that something really important had made a mark upon my destiny. As I stood there fingering my order, Mistress Nell looked straight into my eyes with the same wistfulness that I had noticed when she spoke of the girl of yesterday. And the crypt rang with the plaudits of her mock court.

Buckhurst, I could see, was furious. Yet I marveled at the man's self-control when he could have had me taken up by the watch for *lese-majesty*, if nothing else. It was as if the man tholed much now that he might accomplish something later.

And now, the evening being spent and the comedy ended, Mistress Nell was for home. Instantly she was surrounded by the host and his servants, all eager to serve her, and for the moment I was shouldered out of the circle. It was Master Lacey who held the wrap for her pretty shoulders, but it was Buckhurst who offered his arm to escort her to the waiting chair at the stair-head.

"Nay, my lord," she said peevishly. "I do not desire your company. Lacey will escort me to the modest hovel whereof he knows. But where is my good knight, Sir Rolfe Hollywood?"

At that I came forward, and she placed both her hands in one of mine. Again that little touch of wistfulness as she said:

"Fare thee well, good lad. I shall not see thee again, but whiles remember thee. And see thou keep'st the grass green, for some day I might wish again to play upon its freshness. I have that in my heart would let thee kiss me, but that I have been overkissed to-night where it were less welcome"—with a spiteful flash at Lord Buckhurst. "Fare thee well, Rolfe."

She turned away and laid a hand upon Master Lacey's arm, as if already she had dismissed me and the incident. But as I looked after her and Lacey, I saw the

actor turn at the foot of the stairs and over his shoulder throw a meaning glance at some one who stood at my right. I turned, and found it was Milord Buckhurst.

He remained staring for a moment at the stairway up which Lacey and Mistress Nell had disappeared, then he started slightly at sight of me.

"Aha!" said he. "Now, yokel, I might call thee to account for thine insolence, but that you are no clod indeed, but son of him who was a gallant gentleman. Will you be seated?"

Mollified, I sat down opposite him at the corner table beside my book and kerchief bundle. The other guests of the Mitre crypt resumed the buzz of their personal talk.

"What would you of me, milord?" I asked.

"Why should I anything of you?" said Buckhurst. "Yet am I interested in thee; wherefore, as I say, I pardon thy rudeness. I might even say that I do not dislike you, for you played the game well, and Mistress Nell must have humoring of her whim. But you spoke of the King's Jewel. Good young sir, an ye have that glittering royal George about you, your fortune is assured and I would bring you to his majesty."

"Me—or the George?" I said, slipping "The Compleat Angler" into my bundle and rising to go.

He also arose, his face flushed over his failure to wheedle the yokel.

"Nay," said he, "I need no grasshopper's aid to royal favor. I shall accomplish that to-night which is worth a dukedom. As for thee, insolent, an I were so minded I could raise a cry that would have thee taken as a robber who no doubt gained his knowledge of a certain ancient fisherman from having waylaid him upon the North Road!"

At this implication I raised my stick to strike him, whereat a roar of laughter filled the Mitre crypt. "Odd's bods! They're at it again!" some one cried. This served to check my impulse. I lowered

the stick, before which milord had never winced, and said quietly:

"Why does not your lordship raise the cry, have me seized and searched, and thou come fawning to the king's feet with the precious jewel?"

"Ha! Then thou hast it!" he half whispered. "Come, young sir, be not a fool. Alone thou canst never win to the king's presence. But with my aid--"

"Sir," said I, "no need have I of such aid as yours. I am no fool, even if I be from where the grass grows green. Neither am I a robber knave. As for the jewel, an ye think I carry it--and I do not say nay to that--call the watch an you dare!"

With which brave speech I clapped my bonnet on my head, braced my shoulders, and, forgetful of everything but my dignity, strutted across the crypt and up the stairway. As I went there was a momentary silence in the place, followed by a burst of hilarious laughter.

It was not until I was at the head of the stairway that it occurred to me, with my yokel appearing and Nell's garter about my neck, my haughty exit must have savored somewhat of the ludicrous.

The realization of this and the sound of footsteps right behind urged me to turn about, fearing some one followed with the intent of playing a trick on me.

But it was Milord Buckhurst who had also retreated before such share of the mirth as was at his own expense. He favored me with a look charged with malice, then entered his chair, which was awaiting in the street, and was hurried off to the westward, his linkboys preceding him.

Then I felt like strutting again, for I had had the best of it after all.

CHAPTER V.

SPURS AND A CRACKED HEAD.

NOW, at this time I was twenty-one years old, and a grown man in stature of body if not in mind.

I have written down these things just

as they appeared to me at the time of their happening, and I can see clearly now that, until the night I left the Mitre crypt, I was as a child in experience in both the outward and the inward things.

I can see it clearly in the way I sat at the feet of Izaak Walton and accepted his fatherly treatment of me. I can see it even more clearly in Mistress Nell's freedom toward me at our first meeting, granting me, as she did, favors for which other men would have shed blood.

She thought me but a yokel, a fair-looking country lad through whom, for the time being, she could play her arts against Lord Buckhurst and that fellow Lacey, who seemed to be either her servant or her present cavalier. But an intuitive knowledge had come to me during our curious interview--that Mistress Nell had discovered that I was not such a fool as I appeared outwardly, and I think the revelation that I was not low-born inspired a closer interest in me.

It is useless to try explanation of how such intuitive knowledge comes. Lovers know but cannot tell. But when I left the Mitre crypt with my head in the air I knew that my sudden self-conceit and my daring of Milord Buckhurst were born of this knowledge. Mistress Nell had betrayed an interest in me that linked us together in a silent intimacy which needed neither speech nor proximity, save as it would make us yearn for the latter.

I do not know where I went that night. I walked rapidly just as my footsteps and the street of seeming least resistance took me. Once I became conscious that I was penetrating deeper and deeper into the ruined section of the city--that portion which was as it had been since the fatal September day eight months before. It was easy to lose one's self in this monotonous wilderness, so I turned westward where I knew the fire-line ended. And again as I tramped I fell into a whirling reverie.

Nell Gwynne! She was the center of it, a bright star around which all lesser lights moved. I saw her in every imagin-

able situation, and ever she was sweetly kind to me. I kissed her lips and looked beneath the bright surface of her eyes into the depths beyond. I unbound her hair and bathed my face in it, and she laughed and laid her head upon my shoulder and whispered "Rolfe!"

You smile as you read this, mayhap? But remember I was a lad. First love had swept me off my feet in its own sudden, unprovoked, unreasoning way. It was like a sweet tide in which I was willing to drown; for death was thus a sweet thing. It was like the exhilaration of first intoxication and, regardless of consequences, the condition but craved more of the wine that caused it.

Mistress Nell—Nell!—Nell Gwynne! I saw myself in highly fanciful situations, all of them creditable to myself and in her sight. Had the watch seen me break from a rapid walk to a run, then halt and swing a wooden falchion against imaginary enemies of Mistress Nell, they might have taken me up as Milord Buckhurst wished. Had they seen me slow my pace and come to a sudden, blind halt of musing, the watch would have been justified in saying that there went a lover dreaming of his mistress.

I awoke after a time to find that I had left behind me the fire-swept portion of the city. In fact, I had left the town proper and was come into that western part beyond the Temple Bar. Here the fire had barely reached, and here, I said to myself (as an excuse for continued wandering in pleasant dream). I might find lodging for the rest of the night. And again I fell to imaginings as I walked this way and that.

I thought of the events of the evening. My hand went to my throat and, remembering how that knightly order had amused those in the crypt, I consciously thrust it out of sight and closer to my skin. Then I thought of Nell's companions, and wondered what it was the trio in the corner had so mysteriously discussed.

That it concerned Mistress Nell, or me,

or perhaps both of us, I had judged from the wary glances they had cast upon us as they and we talked apart. And I had good mind of how the shabby fellow, Master Hart, had slipped out after some agreement, and how at parting Master Lacey had cast back a meaning, understanding look at Lord Buckhurst.

I might have thought it was some plot to attack me and recover that jewel which they thought I carried, but I am sure they had had no inkling of that matter until I broached it myself to Nell in Buckhurst's presence *after* the trio's conference. Then, no doubt, it concerned Mistress Nell, and I remembered how she kept an anxious eye upon the plotters while she pretended to listen to me.

I tried to think of the relationship of these men to sweet Nell. Buckhurst I could understand, for we of the country know that, given a lord and a fair maid of lower degree, his show of favor is but a means to an end.

Master Lacey seemed the more intimate with her. Perhaps he was the lover or guardian yielding under protest to the pressure (and perhaps the gold) of milord. Master Hart, on the other hand, was a rogue. That was clear enough, and his sneer as he looked upon Nell suggested that he had known her in the coal-cellar and tavern days, and was cynically amused at her present fine feathers. And he had urged Master Lacey to accede to milord's proposal, whatever that was. Then he had gone out ahead, as if to put some project into execution.

Aye, it concerned Nell! Something threatened Nell. I was calling myself a fool for not having followed her and the treacherous or weak Master Lacey, when—I came to a sudden halt—listening.

From not far away—in one of the narrow side streets, it seemed—came a single scream, such as sprang from no man's throat. It was followed by a vociferous shouting and a clashing as of metal.

Such conflict was common enough, God wot, in these days of reconstruction in London, and a hardened citizen would

have minded his own business lest he find his skull cracked for his pains: but to me it was something novel and alarming. And that there was a woman in distress, whom the trend of my imaginings conceived as Mistress Nell, did the rest.

Next moment I was running at top speed toward the sound of the fight, and I presently discovered the scene.

A queer sort of fight it was at first glance. In the middle of a narrow street stood a chair which the bearers had set down at the first alarm and themselves apparently fled. Even as I turned the corner and got my first glimpse of the picture, the linkboys were in the act of throwing their torches into the gutter and taking to their heels. This may have been their menial caution in such emergency, but it savored to me as if they fled with very little confusion, which might argue some prearrangement.

Thus was the chair and its occupant, whoever that might be, left to the mercy of a half dozen ruffians, save for a single man who was shouting loudly and wielding a sword vigorously, although I did not see any of his opponents suffer. Stranger still, despite the number of blades that pressed close against the chair's sole defender, not one even touched him. As six to one they were either very poor swordsmen, or cowards, or mayhap sought to take him alive.

But he was fighting against odds, and in defense of a woman; so, still fired with late thoughts of knightly chivalry, I rushed into the fray and began to good effect by dropping an oxlike rascal with a blow which broke my stick into smithereens. Instantly I sprang to the man's side and took his sword from him.

Now was I armed with a real weapon and eager to show that if I had little skill I had much strength. And if that vigor needed any further firing I got it from the face that looked out at me from the interior of the chair with an expression that seemed to me, in that flash, to be of utter amusement or amazement—I did not know which.

By the guttering light of one of the fallen torches I recognized the lady as Mistress Nell Gwynne, and therefore I was not at all surprised to note upon the instant that her sole defender was Master Lacey. Nor, remembering all the circumstances in a lightning thought, was I taken aback to detect the long-haired rogue, Master Hart, seeming leader of the attacking gang.

Now everything was clear, except two things. An attempt was being made to abduct Mistress Nell Gwynne, probably at the instigation of Milord Buckhurst, but either Master Lacey had been deceived or had enjoyed a change of heart, for he was lustily defending her. Then I was puzzled by that look on Mistress Nell's face as she momentarily looked out at me, but I must have been mistaken in the uncertain, guttering light, for again her scream rang out and I heard her cry in a choked voice:

"Oh, good Sir Rolfe—help me, Rolfe!"

I had no time to answer with assurance. It was a moment for deeds. I threw myself into the fight by Master Lacey's side, and I roared the only war-cry that I could think of, that which I had heard was the battle-cry of Harry Morgan's buccaneers:

"*Ho! For Whitehall! Amain!*"

And so crying, I skewered a ruffian so clean that I came nigh wrenching my shoulder as I pulled my blade back.

"Whitehall, indeed!" I heard a voice growl somewhere in front of me, and the same voice uttered a curse of exasperation.

Now was the red blood in my sight. I hurled myself into the thicker fray with a joy that astonished me afterward, although I now know what that joy is—the intoxication of battle. My heart was set upon finding the chiefest rascal of them all, the long-haired Master Hart, but after that first glimpse I did not see him again until near the end of the fight.

As I fought I saw, out of the tail of my eye, Master Lacey standing for a moment with his blade lowered. He was

staring at me in the fitful light of the expiring torches and with blank astonishment.

"A rescue! A rescue!" I cried. "Fight, man! I be no ghost! For Mistress Nell—*amain!*"

I saw him resume, himself crying, "Amain for Whitehall!" just as I found me engaged by a short, squat fellow who was cursing most horribly, as if he had discovered a sudden particular hatred of me. He must have had some skill with the blade, for at the first pass he pricked me in the shoulder. Knowing that I could not defend myself against skill, I swung my unfamiliar weapon like the arm of a windmill, and with such rapidity that his every thrust was beaten down.

The man stepped back as if he thought it better to let me tire, as soon I must. An evil grin widened his coarse face and I heard him say:

"What foolish miscarriage have we here?"

Whether he referred to me, I took it so and swung at him with all my force. He was taken so by surprise that the flat of my blade, which I used like a cudgel rather than an edged tool, caught him full on the left ear. He fell to the ground with a groan and a wheeze for all sound and appearance like a tree before an ax.

"*Yo-ho! Amain! For Whitehall!*" I shouted, and engaged another fellow.

But this latter rascal suddenly threw down his weapon and took to his heels because there was a second rescuer also bearing upon him. I turned, expecting to see Master Lacey. Instead, I again recognized the shabby, long-haired rogue—Master Hart.

I had no time to wonder how it was that he, whom I had distinctly seen leading the ruffians, should now be fighting against them. But then I might have been mistaken, and to defend Mistress Nell was just as things naturally should be. As I say, it was no time to puzzle over little things, and all these perplexities had no doubt arisen from the rapidity of events and the general confusion.

Again I engaged one of the besiegers, my hope of saving Mistress Nell heightened by the knowledge that we were now three to perhaps six or seven, for I had accounted for two, one had fled, and I had no doubt that Lacey had acquitted himself at least to our further advantage.

Again fortune, my strength and fury favored me. I succeeded in disabling my latest antagonist with a sword-blow that, if it did not sever his arm, must have paralyzed it, for the member sank helpless at his side and he ran off cursing.

This seemed suddenly to be the turning point of the whole encounter. The remaining five or six turned tail and took to their rascally heels. Elate with victory, and conscious that I had acquitted myself in the presence of Mistress Nell as became her knight of the garter. I was for taking advantage of the rout to further punishment.

"After them!" I cried, brandishing my borrowed blade. "Let none escape! *For Nell and Whitehall!*"

With this war-cry I myself took up pursuit. But I had gone but a few paces when, to my amazement, something—it was a dagger by the glint of it—whizzed past my ear—from behind!

Turning to meet the enemy in this unexpected quarter, I discovered none, except that Master Hart was standing by the chair staring at me in no friendly manner. I thought perhaps he was over-excited. No doubt he intended the dagger for the fleeing ruffians. A little way from the chair stood Master Lacey, and with him was a third person who was talking in most angry volume, while the actor tried to excuse himself, or explain something.

I was further puzzled to note that the newcomer, whom I had certainly not seen in the fight, was Lord Buckhurst!

But Mistress Nell broke in upon my wondering. Leaning from the interior of the chair she held out her hand and cried:

"Bravo, Sir Rolfe! My thanks are due that ye did nobly. Now ye may kiss my hand, good and true knight!"

"Nay, Mistress Nell!" I said boldly, for a very demon of recklessness was still upon me, "I be too coy for such employ, but in time, an I learn not to blush like a maid, I may even remember thou hadst another kiss in thy heart."

Far from being angry, she lay back in the chair and again seemed shaken with merriment, while Milord Buckhurst, Master Lacey, and the hireling Hart, stood aside whispering ferociously and scowling on me as if I had done nothing to merit their approval.

CHAPTER VI.

DON QUINOTE.

THERE is a book which I have lately perused with a great deal of amusement, albeit a tear in my eye. It is by a Spaniard with a long name ending with Saavedra, and tells the story of an old gentleman, his mind turned by much reading and dreaming of romance, who clad him in ancient mail and, mounting an old horse called Rosinante, went forth into the world to rescue distressed maidens and a particular Lady Dulcinea.

The reading made me laugh and almost weep to think how like, in a youthful way, I was to this gallant but blundering old gentleman that time I flew to the rescue of Mistress Nell Gwynne.

I turned from the mirthful lady in the chair to find Master Lacey at my elbow.

"Dolt!" said he. "Get thee gone!"

"Marry!" said I, recovering from amazement. "Have I tarried so long in this sweet lady's presence that I have become deaf, or your natural gratitude has turned to impatience?"

"Idiot!" said Master Lacey. "Ye know not what ye say or do. But there," he broke off in a more conciliating tone, "we do, indeed, thank thee, young sir, and so good-e'en to you."

As I did not stir, the man grew most uncomfortable. I could see Milord Buckhurst, too, fidgeting and whispering to the long-haired rascal, while little rivu-

lets of laughter came from inside the chair.

"Nay," said I, puzzled almost to anger, "I will take no dismissal save from Mistress Nell, whose service brought me here."

At that Milord Buckhurst came forward impatiently, almost brushed me aside with a muttered "Fool!" and bowed to Mistress Nell.

"Sweet Nell," said he, "I pray you smile once more upon this gallant youth and bid him away to his deserved couch. The hour grows late, and we would even speed thee, good mistress, to a safer spot."

"Aye, aye," said Nell, and the laughter went from her voice. "Out of the fire ye would have me back into the frying-pan, milord. Ah, well—it must be so, but I thank Heaven for this diversion and to know there is still a lad in the world hath faith in a woman and a right chivalrous heart.

"But dismiss him I will not. Milord Buckhurst. An danger besets even the primrose path to a gilded prison, what better knight than one well-tried. Nay, sweet and gallant gentlemen! Sir Rolfe Hollywood shall walk beside me, for that there may be more dangers waylaying poor Nell."

"So be it then," said Buckhurst, while Master Hart distinctly uttered an explosive curse. "But, good milady, it were better—"

Buckhurst stopped short. Master Lacey had been whispering to the long-haired rascal, and the latter suddenly put a finger to his lips and beckoned milord. The trio drew aside and whispered together. The woman in the chair reached out in the dark and touched my arm with her hand.

"Do not leave me, good Rolfe, an ye love me!" she whispered.

"Aye, but I begin to think I do," I said, pressing the confiding hand in one of my own.

"Not that it will avail," she breathed, "but—oh, it is good to feel that there is one—near—"

"Come what may, I will stay beside thee, Nell," I whispered in return, "for, mind ye, lass, I ha' sworn to have that kiss!"

Again the little laugh. She sank back into the chair as Buckhurst came back and repeated:

"So be it, Mistress Nell, and mayhap it were better, for our fellows ha' fled and this youth may help Master Hart bear thee."

There was a burst of feminine indignation within the chair.

"By my faith!" cried Nell. "This goes beyond decency, milord. Marry indeed! He that hath defended me in peril shall bear me no chairs. Bear a hand thyself, good Buckhurst, and have that lank cutpurse Hart match his muscle with thine. Sir Rolfe walks by me!"

Lord Buckhurst drew back in a rage. Lacey settled matters by laying on to the rear of the chair while Hart took the front. Buckhurst strode ahead bearing the last of the torches, which he had rescued from the gutter.

So the procession continued toward its destination, I walking by the side of the chair, my hand resting on its edge and one of Nell's resting confidently on mine. In my other hand I carried a red-stained blade, for I had not captured its sheath and yet was not minded to throw it away.

Whither our way tended I had no idea. Up and down streets that were dark as death we went, turning and twisting until I felt that we traveled a labyrinth. There was no moon and the stars were obscured by clouds, so that when we came out upon a wide but unlighted thoroughfare I could only distinguish walls on one side and black trees upon the other.

After what seemed a long time we halted before an ivied wall. Again Buckhurst, Lacey, and Hart held a whispered conference.

"Is this the place, Nell?" I whispered.

"I know not, sweet Rolfe," she re-

plied with a tremor in her voice. "I know no more than thyself whither I am being taken, though I suspect the purpose. But I prithee, lad, abide not by thy word which I asked selfishly and ye gave rashly. Get thee gone now and think well of me sometimes—dear lad."

I protested that I would not go. She feared some danger, mayhap to herself. But as Buckhurst and Lacey returned and Master Hart opened a gate which showed grayly against the ivy wall, Nell held out her hand and said with a pretense of indifferent courtesy that did not deceive me:

"Fare thee well, young sir, and I thank thee from my heart."

"Nay," said Buckhurst, laying a hand upon my shoulder in a truly hospitable way, "'twere not fitting he should be dismissed churlishly after such valiant service. He must come within and drink a cup, at the least."

Had I not been suspicious on the instant Nell's cry would have warned me.

"No!" she protested shrilly. "Get thee gone, lad! They mean ye ill."

"Mistress Nell," I said in the folly of the night's vanity. "I am well able to defend me against any who offer me harm. Milord, I will even accept your cup of kindness."

Not another word said Nell after that. Perhaps she was glad that she would have at least one friend beyond that gray gateway. She was helped from the chair, and presently the five of us passed through the wall into what seemed a garden. A house loomed darkly ahead, but Master Hart, who went ahead, caused a light to gleam from an ivied window.

In a few moments we were inside and lights were numerous. I found me with my strange companions in a small but luxurious chamber, such as I had never seen in my humble life. There were tapestries, pictures, and little figures of shepherdesses and goddesses everywhere. At one end of the room there were heavy curtains beyond which I was to learn there was a bed-chamber.

"And now," said Lord Buckhurst, smiling at Mistress Nell, who seemed much perturbed, "the comedy is ended, sweet mistress."

"Aye, a comedy indeed," said she with a sudden, odd bitterness. "The bird is in the cage and it may as well sing, lest it discover a sad heart. I am content, Buckhurst, an ye let this lad go his way. Why is he here?"

"I but humored your whim, Mistress Nell, that would have him for escort."

"Not beyond the gate!" she cried. "What devil's design is it ye have now?"

"'Tis a little affair of mine own," said Buckhurst, laughing; "a thought that has grown upon me since I encountered him in the tavern. Methinks this lad carries the king's jewel, entrusted to him by this ancient Walton of whom I heard. And, moreover, it has come to my mind that it may be concealed within that book he carries, given him by this same fisherman. I was a fool not to think on't while the book was in my hands, but now we can make sure. Hence the cup of wine, Mistress Nell."

I started and clapped a hand to the breast of my doublet. As I did so, Lord Buckhurst laughed triumphantly.

"'Tis as I suspected!" he cried. "Good Master Dickon," turning to the long-haired rogue, "I would trouble you to run thy light fingers over this youth."

As Master Hart started forward to obey, I brought to guard the red blade which I still carried in place of my stick.

"Come a step nearer, Master Cut-throat, and I'll cleave thee like a turnip!" said I, my gorge rising at the trick.

Instantly Milord Buckhurst's light blade flashed from its sheath and I barely escaped being pricked by leaping backward. Somehow my foot caught in the heavy curtains that cut off the other chamber. I fell backward through them into the bedchamber, losing grip of my weapon as I did so.

Like a flash Hart took advantage and would have pounced in and top of me; but Nell was quicker. She blocked the

entrance, her hands gripping the curtains above and on each side of her.

"An ye enter this chamber," she said in tones she might have used on the boards of the new Theater Royal, "if Milord Buckhurst tells truth that it hath been set aside for a lady by his gallant majesty, then the Garter Jewel ye seek will but remind ye of the king's oath of chivalry. More than that, ye must first lay hands on *me*, Master Hart!"

"Nell—Peg!" Hart protested. "I never laid hands on thee save in kindness."

As I struggled to my feet I caught a glimpse of Master Hart encircling Nell with his arm and sweeping her aside. She struggled in his embrace, and Master Lacey took advantage of the breach to enter upon me. I met him with a blow of the fist that sent him spinning back whence he came. But almost instantly Hart, having freed himself from Nell, burst in and struck me heavily on the side of the head with the hilt of his sheathed sword.

I reeled, the world about me exploding into a million comets. I did not lose my senses, but was too stupefied to resist as the rascal went through my clothing in search of "The Compleat Angler." Still in the same half-swoon I dimly realized that he was disappointed in his search.

That he did not find the book caused me to wonder vaguely. Why did he not? I had it—at least—I—

My brains were too addled to think clearly. I only know that I heard Buckhurst swearing, Nell laughing and Master Lacey, who, was no doubt in pain, swearing that the whole business sickened him. Then I heard Nell ordering both Lacey and Hart from the room. I think they must have left the house, for presently I heard only the voices of Nell and Buckhurst, he apparently trying to soothe her, she answering in a tone of quiet resignation that went to my heart.

"Very well, milord," she was saying when my wits were clear enough to comprehend. "So is poor Nell's fortune

cast. Mayhap many would say, so is Nell's fortune made. Methinks his gallant majesty will make me a duchess. What think you, Milord Buckhurst?— the Duchess of Drury Lane, with a coal scuttle quiescent and a shovel rampant upon a field of gilded ashes."⁵

"But this yokel," said Buckhurst, while I did battle with something akin to profound sleepiness.

"Aye, and what of my yokel?" said Nell defiantly. "Think ye the king's majesty would be jealous of this country: St. George for that his favorite borrowed prerogative and dubbed him her garter knight? Heaven forbid! But lest the dragon spit fire, mark ye, I have another garter. I prithee, milord, convey it to his gracious majesty and say that Mistress Nell gave it with a smile."

"'Tis a gracious thought and will please him much," said Buckhurst. "But pray heaven his majesty hears naught of that other. An he did, I would tremble for the youth that shares such favor and carries its twin."

What happened after that I do not know. I fell into a sort of dream stupor in which a demon sat over me and, between blows with the hilt of a sword delivered upon my head, told me with hideous clearness that the plot to abduct Mistress Nell had been but a play arranged for effect and at the command of the king, and that Nell was a willing party to it.

If I did not believe it, the demon said with heavier a blow than usual, I should recall the abduction of Mary Queen of Scots by one Bothwell. And I was a fool for that I had rushed in and come near to spoiling as pretty an imposture as was ever intended to be carried out with bloodless uproar.

You see, this humorous demon said, there was Mistress Nell's good name to be considered!

Nell! Even in the dream my heart was heavy as iron. This was my sweet maid who had found it almost in her heart to let me kiss her! And yet—

That occasional little wistfulness, that little pressure upon my hand, that appeal to me not to leave her. Was it possible that she was more sinned against than sinning?

Then the demon went away and I dreamed sweetly. Hand in hand Nell and I walked together in a great forest. I was a knight in black armor and she was dressed in a robe of crimson. Presently rain began to patter in the leaves about us and we lifted our faces and laughed happily as it fell, cool and refreshing, upon us. The rain ceased; a ray of sunshine broke through ragged clouds; a bird called, and we turned to look upon one another.

And lo, my armor was of shining silver, and her robe was washed to the whiteness of snow!

CHAPTER VII.

THE COURSE OF LOVE.

WHEN I again opened my eyes I was in the same room, but instead of lying on the floor where I had been dropped I reclined upon a bed of immaculate whiteness. Over me was a canopy of a soothing blue shade in which were embroidered in silver and gold a moon and many stars. It was a couch where one might continue to dream, thinking it always night and the moon and stars perpetually shining.

I knew not who had placed me on this couch, nor how long I had lain there. And the change in my feelings surprised me. My head no longer throbbed and as I drew a deep breath the pleasure of living surged through my veins.

Beyond the hangings I heard some one singing softly an old love-song, the "Worship, Ye That Lovers Be" of the poetic King Jamie. The voice ceased at the sound of the slight movement of rising upon my elbow. The curtains parted and there stood Mistress Nell again, grasping the hangings in her hands, but this time with her face to me.

And what a different Nell this was! Against the dark curtains at the further end of the chamber she was a radiant figure; and even more radiant was her face. She was dressed differently, too, in a more exquisite simplicity. She stood there a moment as if to determine if I were really awake.

Discovering that I was indeed myself, she came across the room to my side, both hands extended and a glad smile playing about her lips.

"Ah, Sir Rolfe!" she said.

At the "Sir" I put a hand to my throat. It was still there—my order of the garter. I had not been robbed while I slept. And I had nothing else worthy—

Then I started, remembering the coil over the book and the kerchief bundle which I had no memory of seeing last. Nell, who had seated herself by my side and taken one of my hands in both of hers, saw the puzzlement in my eyes, no doubt, for she asked what troubled me.

"I had a kerchief and a stick," said I. "The stick I broke in the fight. The kerchief had some bread and cheese and a single red apple, besides a book. Hast seen it?"

Nell laughed softly. Mayhap it seemed a trivial matter with which to resume our converse, but she answered gravely enough.

"Nay, I have no mind on't. Ye had no book when ye came hither. 'Twas not with thee, I think, when ye appeared so valiantly by my chair. Nor had ye such a thing when we spoke together in the Mitre, save as ye did refer to it."

I thought backward. Certainly I had the book and the bundle in the crypt when I last spoke with Milord Buckhurst there. I as certainly did not have it while I walked the streets of London filled with imagining. I had swung my stick against foes imaginary and real, and I would have noticed my encumbering bundle ere possibly throwing it away for greater freedom.

"'Tis no matter," said I, suddenly

reckless of everything when I looked up into her wondrous eyes. (Ah, if any woman could be as grave over *me* as she did in that moment over my kerchief bundle!) "Yet I regret the book, for that it was given me in kind remembrance."

"And kind remembrance is a thing to treasure. Think ye not so, Sir Rolfe?" said Nell wistfully.

"Aye, indeed," said I. "But think ye Milord Buckhurst and his hirelings found it."

Her eyes widened at the word "hirelings." It revealed my understanding of everything, but she answered calmly enough.

"Nay, they did not find it when they searched, for ye had it not. And since then, all through the night and to this noon, I have watched by thee for thy safety."

"Watched by me?—night?—noon?" I stammered. "Have I lain so long?"

"Aye, and 'twas well for thee. Thy sleep was sweet, lad, and I wove spells, singing softly that no other sound should touch thine ear."

I leaned over upon my elbow and kissed the little hand that lay in mine. As I did so it seemed to me that she inclined over my head and something soft brushed my ear with a tendril touch. My heart-beat thickened at the slight contact and something chokingly sweet surged in my throat.

"I heard thee sing, Nell!" I whispered and my voice quivered strangely. "'Twas that awoke me, though 'twas in my dreams, too. We walked together in a fair wood methinks, and there you sang to me, or was it a bird by some laughing brook?"

"Ah!" said Nell, seeming pleased, but there was a tremor in her voice, too, "so my country gallant is a poet-lover, forsooth? Say on, Rolfe. It likes me!"

And I said on—not I so much as the flaming heart within me.

"Sweet Nell, there is that in thee would make poets of clods, clods of

poets, a bold lover of a coy lad, a very man of a blushing maid. I swore I would kiss thy lips, and *now I mean to, b' the rood!* Thou art so fair, so pure—"

Then, despite the bewitching droop of her lids, the word stuck in my throat, for I remembered that which had made my heart heavy. For the moment I had been under the spell of her amazing beauty and she had been to my imagining the forest maid whose robe the rain washed from crimson to snow-white. As I did not carry out my threat she lifted demure eyes.

"You frown, Master Hollywood? Wherefor?" she asked.

With her little hands in mine and my words still echoing, I found it hard to answer. I wished to believe her still the white maid, but I liked not the ache of my heart, and I would be honest with her.

"I heard what passed—yesterday, was it? I thank thee, Nell, for that you tried to save me. If I offend in that I unwelcomely tried to save thee in the street, I am sorry. How should I have known—of king's guiles and courtiers wiles?"

Her gaze fell before mine. A slow wave of color crept from under the airy little ringlets about her blue-veined temples.

"Ah!" she sighed, seeing my complete understanding of her whole situation.

The sweet humility of her in that moment, the confession of a blush betraying the pure womanliness that could still cry out from unsullied modesty, stirred me so that I could have thrown myself there and then at her feet, declared myself her slave, and asked but the boon of loving her without hope of further favor. The little hands tightened on mine and she spoke without lifting her eyes.

"Lad," she said—"dear Rolfe—I do not know—how it is. It may be thy youth calls to mine and thy belief in the goodness of love stirs in me what I thought to have forgotten—something I never knew, rather, but so often dreamed. I say—I know not how it is, but I would indeed I were—thy forest maid. But—"

"Nay—there is no *but!*" I cried, springing from the couch and laying my hands upon her shoulders. "It shall be even so, Nell. Oh, sweetheart, I care not what I am nor what thou art. I overheard nothing. 'Twas the mad jangling of voices in a cracked skull. Thou art my pure maid of the forest, and God willing, and thou, sweet maid, to the forest I shall take thee.

"When I left the Mitre my heart and soul were filled with thee—only thee, Nell. I could think of naught else. And I knew, Nell, thou didst not dislike me, but carried away a tender thought of yon country lad. And now I love thee, dearest of women, and—methinks thou lovest me, too. Is it not so, sweetheart? Say it—*say it*—thou lovest me!"

Her eyes lifted to mine in a quick, wondering flash, but she sought to cover her genuine embarrassment with a little railleury.

"Are country lovers then so impetuous? Nay, methinks, Rolfe, thou movest too swiftly. I have spoken to thee but twice."

"Aye, but thought of me a thousand times. Was not thy thought with me when ye defended me against force? And when ye watched by me all through the night—was that not speech enough, Nell? Was not that love enough and crying with a tongue that needs no speech."

Again she lifted her eyes, and in them was a light of frank amazement, yet in their brightness was a languorous softness and a little sheen of moisture. My hands slipped from her shoulders, and now I stood beside her, my arms lightly about her dear body.

"Nell," I whispered, my heart beating in my very throat, "thou saidst there was that in thy heart would let me kiss thee. Nell—"

"Nay," she said, gently drawing back from me, "not now. 'Tis more in my heart than ever. Indeed, I spoke foolishly then. Now I speak from the real heart. But—thou hast heard, Rolfe?"

It was on my tongue to carry her on

the tide that was surging upon me, but suddenly a dizziness fell upon me. I had lain so long, I had arisen so abruptly and in such a whirl of emotion. The room swam; I reeled. Next moment Nell's arms were about me, my head lay upon her bosom, and she was whispering close to me.

"Oh, lad—lad—"

The mist passed from my brain. I raised my head and lazily looked into eyes that were swimming with tears. With no impetuous desire, but tenderly, I drew her to me with reverent hands and quietly kissed her lids and felt the salt of her tears upon my lips.

"Nell," I whispered, "let us speak no more. All has been said."

But at my own breaking of the dear silence she suddenly sprang from me. For a little space she stood with her back to me, striving to control some tempest within her. She was quiet but wistful as she turned again to where I sat on the edge of the canopied couch, watching her. She came slowly forward, took up a cushion from the couch where I had lain, dropped it at my feet and herself crouched down upon it. She laid an arm across my knees and began to speak as from a far distance and in some silent place.

"Lad," she said. "this is a strange thing hath happened to us—as new and sweet to me as, mayhap, to you. How it hath happened I do not ask to know. For the moment"—her hand stole to her bosom and her eyes looked far beyond me—"I am happy—happy as I have never been.

"I have never known my veins filled with this strange thing that has come upon me, in the night as it were. All my life hath been a defense against the coming of this thing, which I feared. Yet now that it is come, I am glad, Rolfe—glad! An I dared I would yield me for all time, even as I yield me to it this moment."

She laid her head upon the arm that lay relaxed across my knees. There was

something so much of resignation, so much of content and complete surrender to the moment's joy, that I again drew her face to mine and kissed her, this time upon the lips. She did not resist; indeed, both her arms lifted and stole around my neck, and her own share of the kiss was not merely passive.

"Then why not dare, sweetheart Nell?" I whispered. "We love one another. That is all that counts. We will leave London together—"

"Aye," she said with sudden bitterness, "and hide ourselves where? You forget, good sir, that the king hath favored me with his regard. He hath lined this pretty nest for me. The bars, you may observe, are gilded. Granting that I might yet escape from it, how could a bird of my plumage find happiness in the free forests? The other birds, particularly of plumage not so fair, would peck at me. Nay, Rolfe, the caged bird is happier than its dream is never fulfilled."

She was speaking as if I understood more than I really did. She saw it and went on:

"All my life I have fought my way upward, lad. I used what weapon I had, and such fools as succumbed to it, to my own ends. Thus love—the victim of the weakness they called love—was my stepping-stone. But I was never a fool, Rolfe. Call it virtue if you will. I only knew that to err was to lose all. It was all I had, Rolfe, and knowing nothing of this sweet thing that is real love, I could laugh. It was easy to tilt my chin and pass by.

"And I won, what I sought, lad, only to find my grapes sour—the turned sourness of a great sweetness tasted too late. From a child of the gutter to a seller of flowers and fruits on the pavement. From that to the taverns where I sang and practised laughter in the face of what they called love. Then the stage and success and more worship. And still I laughed. I laughed even when I saw his gallant self sitting there with all eyes for me and a smile. I laughed when Milord Buckhurst

brought me the necklace on behalf of his royal master.

"It was only when the king himself came and bent over my hand that I ceased to laugh in my heart, though my lips still smiled. I knew then that I had won to the heights—or the depths, as I half think. And then you came, Rolfe, and made me happy—and unhappy."

"Nay! What is the king to me?" I began hotly. But she silenced me and rose to her feet, again calm and self-possessed.

She moved toward the curtains leading into the other chamber, and over her shoulder bade me follow her. Here again was that appearance of luxury.

"We forget ourselves, good Rolfe," she said coldly. "You are yourself again. The rising head-swim has passed. Now you must leave me, for one comes whose displeasure might work you ill."

She had reached the center of the other room ere she said this, and was facing me with lips firmly compressed.

"You mean—"

"That you must leave me, Rolfe. We must not meet again. You understand."

"Only what you think I ought to," said I, "but my heart is not in agreement. Yes, I will go, but you must even come with me—now!"

"Rolfe!" she pleaded. "Make my course no harder. I have said. Go, I pray you."

Again tears were sprung into her eyes and she faced me in such helpless, hopeless pleading that I was stricken speechless. She took advantage of my hesitation to press her further.

"Rolfe," she said, "I have kissed thee with my heart, which no man hath ever reached but thou. Kiss me—once more—and then—good-by!"

Again she was in my arms. Our lips were together. Her arms clung to my neck. I seemed to hear and feel the quick, fierce beat of her heart against mine, as I showered kisses upon her lips, her eyes, her hair, and upon her white throat. As she broke from my embrace

with a repressed sob, I fell upon one knee in an excess of passion and despair.

"Nell! Nell!" I pleaded. "I cannot leave thee thus! On my knee I beg—come with me! Leave this accursed city where the very name of love is profanity. Fly with me to the forest of dreams—to Worcester, where I have true friends, if simple. Or an you will, let us even to far Virginia. Somehow we can win to it, safe from the king and his hirelings. 'Tis now or never, Nell, for thee, and by my mother, lass, I swear—"

"Oh, Rolfe—Rolfe—by thy mother!" she whispered, and a great light flooded her face.

"Aye, by her I swear thou shalt be honored wife, worshiped angel—"

"Hush!" she said suddenly. Her eyes became tense, she raised a forefinger, and turned her head to a listening pose.

For a few moments there was silence in the room. In that brief interval I heard a step outside the door and a light tap upon a panel. I silently arose to my feet. Between us Nell and I uttered not a word, not a sound. We stood there, facing one another, she flashing me her message of alarm, I trying to read it.

Then the door was opened from without. In the portal appeared one dressed simply as a cavalier, but with a pride of countenance and a loftiness of bearing that were unmistakable.

He swept a courteous salute with his hat, the plume of which brushed the floor. Then his eyes moved from Mistress Nell to me and settled coldly upon my bucolic dress. I bowed stiffly, but Nell curtsied low, and I heard her murmur with a nervous catch:

"Your Christian Majesty!"

CHAPTER VIII.

I BECOME KING'S MESSENGER.

THE moment Nell greeted the visitor that which had been a surmise in my mind became conviction. The cavalier in the doorway was "The Merrie

Monarch" himself. There might have been a mistaking of that face, but never of that haughty air so oddly mingled with a good-humored smile.

Nell momentarily received the benefit of the smile, but it vanished the moment Charles looked at me. He stared for a few moments, no doubt waiting for me to retire. But I did nothing of the sort. It might not be to my advantage, or Nell's, and it might be very much to the king's displeasure did I openly recognize him. I decided upon my attitude on the spur of the moment.

"Who, sirrah, art thou?" asked the cavalier with a kind of admirable insolence.

"My name, good sir, an it be any concern of thine, is Hollywood—Rolfe Hollywood."

I do not know what it was that startled him, whether my own insolence or the name I uttered.

"Who was thy father, an ye were born in wedlock?" he asked presently and with an air of curiosity.

"Sir Rolfe Hollywood, of Hollywood, in Warwick," I replied. "And thine, good sir—an ye also were born in wedlock?"

I saw Nell's face whiten with fear—for me. The king's grew red. I do not know what he would have said or done, had not Mistress Nell burst out in a trill of laughter which sounded peculiarly unforced, considering the situation. The king understood her merriment, and smothered his anger. He smiled, then laughed openly, much pleased, I think, that his identity was unknown to me.

"Sirrah, thy tongue is sharp and shrewd," said he, "as thy father's—may have been—or mayhap thy mother's—in wedlock; for in wedlock there is opportunity of practise. But an your business be concluded, no doubt thy mistress's service will profit by thy presence elsewhere. Mark me, I like thy face—it has an honest look; but I fain would know if sight of thy back pleases me as much."

I glanced at Nell. Her eyes were

pleading me to go. I hesitated. It was not a pleasing thought to beat ignominious retreat, leaving Nell with the king. Yet what was left me other than to declare myself openly, recognize his majesty's presence and purpose, and oppose both with tongue or force. I had little hope that the former would avail, and the latter was out of the question, in respect to my father's memory, if nothing else.

I might remind him of my father and tell him of Master Walton and the jewel, thus gaining his favor then and there. It was on the tip of my tongue to do so, when Nell laid a hand familiarly upon the king's arm and said:

"Last night, milord, I was beset in the town by ruffians who sought to abduct me. But for this good youth I might now be in ill hands."

"So?" said the king, chuckling. "I heard something of it. For that I must pardon and even reward him."

Anxious to be rid of me, son of Sir Rolfe or no, he drew a purse from his waist and threw it toward me. I did not attempt to catch it, and it fell with a golden chink at my feet. His anger again swelled as I folded my arms and paid no heed to the bribe.

"Here is an insolent lout!" he exclaimed, but seeming at loss what to do with me under the circumstances. "Conceit ha' swelled him like a toad. Get ye gone, fool!"

"And pray, good sir, who art thou that orders me begone?"

"Who am I?" gasped the visitor. Then he burst out in a shout of laughter that was somehow very pleasing to the ear, so whole-hearted was it.

Again I caught Nell's eye. She had fallen a little behind the king, and was making most urgent signals that I desist and take my leave as graciously as I could. I decided that this was the only course. I felt confident that Nell could be trusted to manage her own affair, even with the king's majesty, and there was her spoken love for me to strengthen her.

I bowed again, stiffly. The king did

not even incline his head. He was staring at me—at my breast—in an odd manner. Involuntarily my hand went to the spot under close scrutiny and closed over—Nell's buckle!

I had thought it safely hidden. It may have been that Nell unloosed my collar that time I near fainted.

"Sirrah," said the king, his face now white with inward rage. "take that thing from thy rascally neck and give it to me!"

I dared not look at Nell, but I was conscious that she was standing there very still and rigid. I could not bring myself to yield that with which she had honored me.

"Nay," said I, "I will give that to none other but her who honored me with it, and not then, save as she commands."

"Your maj—" began Nell.

"Hush!" said the king, turning quickly upon her.

"Milord," she said sweetly, "must a poor maid maintain no right to a division of her favors? Hath not milord the twin of that same trifle?"

"Aye, marry! And for that very having, none shall share such favor. Dog's death! Am I to outrival a clod for the favor of any woman?"

"That is as her favor may be valued, milord," said Nell with a bewitching smile.

"Good milord," I put in, seeing that the king was thinking shrewdly, "my so great respect for this lady compels me to honor this favor even as it were that Royal George which our Christian and most gallant king gave into another's keeping at Worcester."

"What know ye of that jewel?" asked Charles, keenly.

"Naught, good sir, save as I have heard speak of it," I replied. "I but meant that, were either in my possession, I should yield it to none but its rightful possessor."

The king seemed pleased with the answer, but doubtful of my frankness.

"Naught but that ye have heard speak of it?" he echoed. "What hast heard?"

"Of what, milord?"

"The lesser George—the Jewel of the Garter, which we—our Christian king entrusted to the hand of one Sir Rolfe Hollywood, at Worcester. Belike, an thou art son to that same Hollywood, ye know more than ye say?"

"Little more, milord, save as it was passed from hand to hand until it came to one Master Walton, who fishes for pleasure and writes pleasant books and even now comes to London—if he be not here already—bearing that same jewel to the king at Whitehall."

He looked at me intently for a while, thinking deeply. Suddenly he lifted his head and said sharply:

"Methinks ye might address me otherwise, an ye dared."

"Even so, an it be *your majesty's* pleasure," I said, for I had caught a little, quick nod from the observant Nell.

"Pleasure is as needs must," said Charles humorously. "But I warn thee, son of Sir Rolfe, my pleasure may take a turn an ye speak too free of this meeting. Indeed, I make thee to my service that thy mouth may be stopped and thy head conveniently forfeit. It is our command, son of Sir Rolfe, that ye now take up our purse and forthwith leave us. Ye will then attire ye as befitting a king's messenger, arm ye with a good blade and horse and seek out this Master Walton. It shall be your duty and privilege to bring this fisherman, or the jewel, to our court at Whitehall. And fail not upon peril of our displeasure, Master Hollywood!"

At finding myself thus appointed by the king for whom my father had laid down his life, I thrilled with a pardonable pride. But I still had mind that his anxiety to be rid of me was no doubt at bottom of his favor.

"I will not fail, your majesty," I said, bowing. "I thank your majesty also for the purse, which shall be expended in service. Yet, an it please your majesty, ere I take my leave I pray that your majesty will protect this dear lady as

becomes a king who is at once both chivalrous and generous."

"Sirrah," said Charles, "you put an overstrain upon patience! By the oath of the Garter, Charles Stuart never forced upon woman unwelcome gallantry. Let that suffice thee, young sir, and get thee gone about our business."

He turned his back upon me and took Nell by the hand. There was no further excuse for lingering. But at the door I turned, at the risk of his anger, for one last look at Nell.

I was fortunate in that the king did not see me. He was bending over Nell's hand, his lips pressed upon it. Over him stood Nell with a curious expression of mirth and mischief in her eyes. She looked over his bent back at me, raised her disengaged hand, first to her heart, then to her lips, and blew me a farewell kiss.

I returned it, sending mine heartily from my lips with both hands, leaving them outspread toward her as in a last embrace. Then, as the king straightened up, I slipped through the doorway and was set out upon my mission.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT.

WHEN I found myself in the open air and again under blue heaven and God's sunshine, the various scenes through which I had passed, even that which had ended but a few moments before, seemed as a series of fanciful pictures in a night of dreaming.

The strangeness of my surroundings added to this impression, for I had no knowledge of where I was, or of the devious ways by which I had come there after the *mêlée* in the heart of the city.

Now here I was, as by magic, transported to a garden which was gay with early flowers. Little walks wound in and out among the flower-beds and made a circle around a small fountain which played most peacefully in the sunlight.

About the whole garden was a high wall mantled with ivy, which almost hid a narrow, barred gate fronting a small, weather-aged door.

It struck me then that the cage to which Nell had been brought was indeed gilded. It was, or might have been, a cloister of seclusion and calm. Behind me was the cage itself—a quaint little house, itself covered with ivy.

Whether this walled place was in the heart of London or in some outlying part I had no idea until, passing through the gate which readily opened from within—although I found myself locked out when I closed it behind me—I discovered myself in a quiet street. It was quite deserted, and the similar walls that lined its entire length suggested other and similar retreats.

Looking to my right I saw, at the end of this street, an open place of grass and trees into which the thoroughfare melted. Toward this I went, desirous of finding a quiet tree under which I might sit and collect my thoughts.

This open place, I now know, was the park of St. James, and into it I wandered. Presently I came to a pool—indeed, it was a small lake—whereon a number of swans were sailing. The pool curved like a moat around what may have been a little island, in the center of which rose a clump of tall trees that heightened the impression of a moated castle.

It was a pleasant spot, and, finding a spreading tree all rich with the greenery of May, I sat down and betook me to some thought.

Dismissing for the moment all but my present condition, I was still in my country dress. I had lost my trusty stick and my kerchief with my bread and cheese, one red apple, and a copy of Master Walton's "Compleat Angler." On the other hand, I had gained a pigeon's egg on my skull, a purse of gold, and much experience which, the purse assured me, I had not merely dreamed. And I had been in London Town less than twenty-four hours!

As for my heart—it had been light enough five minutes before, when I came out of that garden, still aglow over my encounter with the king and immensely amused that I should have carried off a kiss blown from Nell's lips over his majesty's bowed head. But then the double-dealing of it all, and what else I had learned of Mistress Nell, awoke again a thousand qualms; and then and there I fell again into gloom.

My heart ached for love of the woman, yet good sense whispered that I would be a fool an I continued to remember her. The king's word of honor that Charles Stuart never forced unwelcome gallantry upon a woman left him a loophole by which, jealousy told me, he would seek to profit. He would, no doubt, by his very charm and station, bring Nell to a point where his gallantry would be not unwelcome at least.

Poor Nell, I knew, was already resigned to that fate. And then my jealousy seized upon what Master Walton's Stratford idol called "confirmations strong as Holy Writ." I lashed myself into the belief that she had but played with me, that all her seeming sincerity and love were but tricks of her trade, feigned passions of the moment, such as she practised upon the boards of the Theater Royal. To such a pitch of jealous fury did I bring myself—blaming only Mistress Nell and not myself that left her to the king's mercy!—that I plucked the ribboned buckle from my neck and viciously threw it at one of the swans in the moat.

Then a truly ludicrous thing happened. The ribbon floated and its silken aversion to wetting upheld the half-submerged buckle. It was an omen! I at once sprang to my feet, determined to recover it even at the risk of drowning.

But one of the swans was before me. A large male creature with a serpentine neck recovered from its first fright at my violence and came back to investigate. I yelled as I dashed to the water's edge. It retreated, then with a curious, vindic-

tive hiss it lashed the water with its wings. The spray fell, wetting the ribbon.

Nell's garter began to sink. It disappeared.

The swan, with another spiteful hiss at me, coolly swam to the spot and delved its sinuous neck into the water. When its head reappeared, there was the tail of the ribbon vanishing within its beak. I could even see the outlines of the buckle as it convulsively worked down the bird's snaky throat.

At that I flung myself down under the tree and gave way to a paroxysm of something between tears and laughter. It was such a ridiculous ending to the pretty romance of my garter knighthood. I rolled on the ground, hiccoughing like an hysterical maid.

But I was precipitately brought to my senses when I suddenly found myself pinioned to the ground by several strong hands. Through eyes that were misty and stinging from tears I saw that I had been seized by two men. I recalled too late that probably I was to have been watched when I left the house where Nell was caged. And I also recalled too late that I had left the sword, which had already done me good service, in that house.

It was no surprise now to find that one of my assailants was the rascally Master Hart. The identity of the other did indeed make me open my eyes wider.

He was none other than the highwayman whom I had thrashed during my travels with the angler. It was Captain Scarlet, who, I had fondly supposed, by this time had met his deserts and was adorning some godly oak as a human acorn.

He recognized me, too, and uttered a fearful curse, at the same time drawing a knife from his belt. Master Hart, who was sitting on my feet with his whole upper weight resting upon my chest, snarled at his accomplice and bade him put up his knife.

"There be no need to ha' the town watches at our heels with a corpse to account for," said he. "Sit thee upon

his head, fool, while I search. I hired thee to obey, and not a penny further shalt have an ye do not!"

"But I have a score against this knave!" protested Captain Scarlet. "But two days ago—"

"Settle thy score as ye will, but not now. Sit on 's head, varlet!"

Scarlet put up his knife and did as he was told. Almost smothered, but somehow strangely indifferent now that robbery seemed all their aim, I could have found it in my heart to laugh outright. Especially so, when Master Hart's search of me did not reveal what I knew he sought.

"Where is the Thing you carry?" demanded Hart threateningly.

"An I carry anything of value, you may even find it by searching," said I in a muffled voice from under Scarlet's hip.

"Aye, marry! An ye have it upon you I shall even find it!" said the long-haired rogue. "Methinks that other search was in too great haste and overscant." Forthwith he tore the boots from my feet, and, finding nothing therein, proceeded to divest me of my clothing.

When I was stripped and as naked as the father of the race, Master Hart said:

"Now, Scarlet, thou may'st release him. An he seeks to escape I am no judge of young modesty."

The highwayman stood up and began to enjoy his revenge in my plight. Master Hart paid little attention, however. He borrowed Scarlet's knife, and proceeded to rip up every seam and pocket of my dress. But he did not find the hidden jewel that he sought, and only cursed when the precious-looking purse revealed a goodly quantity of gold.

"Where is the Thing?" he asked of me where I sat casting furtive glances about the park, hoping for succor, yet fearing the arrival of any human witnesses.

"I know not," said I. "I have not got it and I never had it to my knowledge."

Here Captain Scarlet, who had been

eying the purse of gold in Hart's hand, broke in with profane impatience.

"Idiot!" said he. "Let us away! Ye ha' that in your hand well repays the lay. 'Tis share and share alike, mind ye!"

Hart saw that I was telling what I believed to be the truth, that I knew no more of the King's Jewel than I had said, and that certainly I had it not in my possession any more than when they sought for it in the book. His disappointment was somewhat lessened as he counted up the gold. His eyes brightened and he shot an evil glance at the ex-highwayman.

"Share and share alike, mind ye!" repeated Scarlet, his hand reaching to his belt. Master Hart, noting this and discovering the knife in his own hand, grinned evilly, and Captain Scarlet saw his share of that gold becoming infinitely less.

With a snarl of rage he sprang at Hart. The two men closed in an engagement that left me free to gather my clothes together. This I did, and began to put the ripped and tattered garments on my nakedness, the while these two fought and bit and snarled like a pair of ravening wolves for possession of the gold which had become scattered upon the sward.

They seemed quite to have forgotten me, and I hastened with my dressing that I might make off before worse came to me. But as I was lacing my second shoe (from which Hart had ripped the heel and toe), Scarlet suddenly uttered a gurgling cry and collapsed in the long-haired villain's embrace.

Master Hart threw him off with an oath. The highwayman reeled backward, his eyes staring, his mouth open, and his hand clutching at his breast. Then he tottered on the edge of the moat and fell in with a splash.

I stared, my blood chilled with horror. Master Hart stood there with a red knife in his hand, and he was also staring at the disturbed pool. Scarlet had sunk and he did not reappear.

The swans had scattered in affright, but that same saucy male bird came swiftly back and delved its long, white neck where the highwayman had vanished. Swiftly it withdrew it, and, with a strange cry of alarm, which was taken up by the other swans, darted away, half-swimming, half-flying. It disappeared with the rest of the flock around the curve of the moat. But ere it went I saw that its neck was slightly tinged with pink.

Master Hart turned to me. His face was pallid, but he grinned when he read the horror on mine.

"Master Hollywood," said he, "'twas accident! 'Twas him or me, as ye saw. But now we had best begone. I bear thee no ill-will, save that I will keep thy gold as well-earned."

"Blood-money!" I cried. "Twice stained!"

"A man be worthy of his hire," said he, "and methinks Milord Buckhurst will pay me little for that I found not that for which I had thee set upon, and which he was still of a mind thou hadst somewhere about thee."

"Mistress Nell is happy in her friends," I said bitterly.

He looked at me in an odd way.

"Aye, that she is," said he, "and methinks you are her latest, barring the king's majesty. But I tell ye, young sir, Nell had never a better friend than Dick Hart. I have fought for her my life long, but I be no fool to oppose her fortune and the king's will. As for thee, go thy way. Thou art but an accident. Thou'rt not even a pawn in the game now thou hast not the King's Jewel."

With that he turned and walked away across the park, being almost immediately hidden by the trees. I sat there stunned to stupidity by the swiftness of circumstance. It never occurred to me that he had walked off with all whereby I might eat and reclothe me and discharge the king's mission. Then I remembered.

Now the buckle was gone and all else; my clothes were such as might suit a

scarecrow in a field of oats; and the purse—

I sprang to my feet and pursued Master Hart, but though I searched over a wide range I did not even spy him. Despondently I returned to the scene of the tragedy and again stared at the water. It was now quite placid, save for an occasional bubble that blistered the surface where the highwayman had met his end. And then, my gaze falling to the ground at my feet, I discovered a bright gold piece blinking up at me.

Here at least was the price of a meal, of which I stood in much need. I searched around and found two more pieces that had been dropped in the fray and overlooked by the thrifty long-haired villain.

Despite my extraordinary appearance, for my clothes were in ribbons and barely held together to cover my body, I left the park and walked toward the heart of the adjacent city, which I knew by the high ruins of St. Paul's.

When I passed St. Clement Danes I knew that I was near the Mitre. A few minutes later I descended into the crypt, which was all but deserted at this late hour of the afternoon and of the too early evening. As I entered I heard some one declaiming in a loud, flowery tone. I presently discovered mine fat host seated on a table and airing to a group of serving-fellows his ability to read, although I doubt if he or the scullions understood a word of what he rendered from a book.

"I confess," he read with a great flourish of accent, "'no direction can be given to make a man of a dull capacity able to make a fly well: and yet I know this, with a little practice, will help an ingenious angler in a good degree. But to see a fly made by an artist—'"

"Sirrah!" said I, boldly interrupting. "I will even trouble thee to return me my book, also such bread and cheese, and of one red apple what may survive, which I left yesternight tied in a blue kerchief."

The fat host stared at me, his face empurpling, but at sight of the gold piece

which I dived upon the table with a sharp command for beef pie, he handed me "The Compleat Angler," ordered his scullions to their kitchen cellar, and himself fell to whisking a chair for the reception of my lordly raggedness!

CHAPTER X.

THE ANGLER AGAIN.

BY courtesy of mine fat host and a portion of my second gold-piece, I slept that night in the Mitre crypt, in a cell that in other days had been that of a monk, no doubt.

But before sleep overcame me I examined the book in the half belief that mayhap it did conceal the jewel as Milord Buckhurst had suspected. All my efforts to find a clue, however, failed. I turned and twisted the volume, examined the binding, shook out the pages, and read the latter until my eyes ached and I slept, satisfied that whatever purpose, if any besides instruction, had moved Master Walton to present me with a copy of "The Compleat Angler," it did not concern the precious Royal George.

In the morning I carefully tied up the book in my kerchief and prepared for further adventuring. Mine fat host supplied me with breakfast for a consideration, and I felt like a new man, though appearing a much-worn and frayed one, as I climbed the steps from the Mitre crypt and came out upon Fleet.

I had made up my mind that there was but one course to pursue. Now that I had neither home, clothes to my back, nor the wherewithal beyond what was left of the money saved from the robbery, I must set out just as I was and find Master Walton. If I succeeded and could bring him and the jewel to his majesty, I might yet mend my sadly battered fortunes.

I started westward at a brisk pace, determined to leave the city before my resolution changed or some new misadventure diverted me. I had no idea where

Master Walton might be now. Possibly he was in London Town, but there was a better hope that between the town and Hampstead Heath his love of fishing and some small brook had intervened. I would repair back to the bridge where I left him and, if he were not there, retrace my steps to London, inquiring for him by the way.

I had gone but a few paces in the direction of the Temple gate when I was hailed by name from behind. My surprise became indignant astonishment to behold Master Richard Hart hastening after me with a most friendly grin on his rascally face.

I could hardly believe my senses. He was a robber, an abductor, a murderer, and Heaven knows what else he was not! But yestereven he had stolen my purse and fled from me; yet here he was, coming toward me as to a brother or a long-lost friend.

"Sir," said I, "an I were armed I would stop your career with less parley than you gave Master Scarlet. I have my fists. Though I have not yet had chance to wash them this morning, I would fain not foul them further. But I have a stout voice, Master Hart, and if it pleases you not to stand where you are, I will summon the watch, which no doubt might find interest in a tale."

"Nay, Master Hollywood," said he in a raucous whisper. "Let bygones be bygones. And the watch, methinks, would thank me for ridding London Town of a sorry cut-purse like Dick Scarlet, who fled here from the north road but to hide himself in the crowd. I might even claim virtue and a reward."

"What would ye, then, with me? Would ye return the king's purse that ye stole?"

"Ah, if it was the king's and not thine, then I did not rob thee, young sir," said Master Hart quite cheerfully. "As for business with thee, mayhap I have some, or it may be I but say 'good-morning-good-neighbor' in a brotherly Christian spirit. But whither away, Master Holly-

wood? Thy step carried a most urgent air."

"I leave London, sir, and the neighborhood of rogues, evil women, and philanderers. Let that suffice thee!"

Saying which, I turned upon my heel and would have proceeded but that he familiarly touched my arm. I wheeled angrily to behold a subtle smile on his face and a folded and sealed missive in his hand. From the missive I caught a faint aroma that sent the blood flying in my veins and my heart beating fiercely.

"Nay, then," said Master Hart, grinning, "which will ye have—the lady's message or the king's gold?"

For answer I took the missive and broke the seal. Master Hart withdrew a few paces and, with his back turned, whistled airily while I read the message.

It was from Nell. I was surprised that she had been able to write, for that was an accomplishment few ladies had. I myself was more of an adept at reading. But it was in keeping with her whole life, which she seemed to have spent to her every advantage and further advance.

Though it was an ill-spelled, laborious thing, I yet treasured its simplicity and sincerity. It read:

DEARE LADD:

I do beg that ye return to me that which I gave—even the buckel, for it is that One ye wot of is angered aggenst thy having itt. Give it to Dickon soe itt will not worke thee yll. And oh, deare ladd, forgett thyme unhappi Nell, who is no more worthe of thee, and must even dree her weerde as Fayte hath decrede. I doe luvve thee, sweet Rolfe, but come not anigh me agen an ye would nott mayke my mysery the greater. Farewell, deare ladd. I did see luvve thee!

NELL.

I turned with mingled feelings to Master Hart, who was now eying me keenly.

"I do advise thee to yield the trifle," he said. "That one ye wot of hath built a great coil upon it, and if the buckle's return satisfy him, thou'rt indeed lucky to keep my head."

"How should I return aught when ye robbed me of all I possessed?" I cried.

Master Hart's face fell. He thought hard, then said:

"Nay, I took it not. I do not remember thou had'st such a thing. Knowing of it, I should have noticed."

"Then let that be thy message. I cannot return that which I have not. Odds-heaven! Am I a conjurer that takes king's jewels and ladies' garters from his sleeve?"

"Tell Mistress Nell I thank her for her word. Tell her—I am sorry. I trusted her—like a fool. And tell his gallant and most Christian majesty," I added in a burst of rage, "that his word as a king and a Stuart and a gentleman and a knight of the garter is no more to be trusted than a serpent's kiss. Say so for Rolfe Hollywood—and fare thee well, Master Hart!"

I left him then. He may have followed—I do not know; for I marched blindly ahead, my eyes smarting with hot tears. Her letter told me all I needed to know; and she had but played with me, for all her sweet assurances of love and loyal memory. Loyal memory forsooth!

I shook the dust of London Town from my heels as if it burned me to tread upon it. My pace was furious as the speed of my thoughts. My anger, at first against Nell, was now turned upon myself. After all, who was I that dared to love her whom the king had made elect? What right had I to expect loyalty of her? I, who had merely intruded upon an affair which was already progressed to the point where a pretended abduction was its consummation!

I was done with it! The buckle was gone. I would forget that there ever was such a person as Nell—Mistress Eleanor Gwynne—Peg Lymcourt! What had I expected of a creature born and bred in the gutter, who, by her own confession, used the folly of mankind as rungs of a ladder leading to the heights or descending to the depths?

Thus at the age of twenty-one, after one experience of love, I found me a hater of all women—as frequently happens!

By this time I had come upon Hampstead Heath. Why I was come there and whom I sought I had completely forgotten. That I was on the service of my rival the king would have appeared as a laughable piece of irony had I happened to remember the fact. It was not until I saw a familiar figure coming toward me, but still afar off, that I came to my senses.

Then my spirits rebounded, and I knew a great delight and relief, for, and I was not mistaken, that ancient with the white head, trudging down the road with a knapsack on his back and a long rod over his shoulder, was my friend and instructor, Master Izaak Walton!

He was much nearer before I was sure it was he. Then I shouted and waved my arms. He halted and shaded his eyes again and again, as if he saw something familiar and yet unfamiliar about me.

And no wonder he found it hard to believe it was Master Hollywood, for I carried no bundle and no stick, and my clothes were a mass of ribbons fluttering madly in the breezes of the heath.

Astonishment held him rooted where he stood as I came nearer. When he had no doubt left as to my identity he seemed greatly troubled.

"Ah, poor lad!" he cried. "What mishap hath befallen thee? Why return ye in this sad plight?"

"Marry, it seems not to surprise you that I return at all," said I.

"Nay, but I expected that," said Master Walton. "Indeed, I have watched the road since morn. But 'twas my hope that you would come riding in brave show if ye had followed the instructions given thee."

"Instruction, good master? What instruction?"

"Didst study 'The Compleat Angler' even as I directed, young sir?" he asked.

"Yea and nay," said I. "Such have been my circumstances that I had little time for study. As for the book, 'tis but less than two days since ye gave it, and but half that time hath it been in my possession."

At that he showed alarm, but on my assurance that I had not lost the book, that it was even then in my breast, he looked around, and choosing a soft spot in the shade of the bushes, bade me sit beside him and relate my tale.

This I did, and I never had a better listener to a story. He shook with merriment over my adventure in the Mitre crypt; became excited over my description of the fight around Nell's chair, and I swear there came tears to his eyes when I told him of the love scenes between Nell and myself. The tears may have been for me, for as I related these things he laid a hand upon my knee and shook his head like a man of youthful understanding but mature discretion.

He was greatly amused over my relation of the swan that swallowed my garter-token, but became serious anent the killing of Captain Scarlet. As for Master Hart, he merely said:

"A hireling of this Milord Buckhurst belike. So he found not the jewel he sought?"

"How could he, sir, when I had it not?"

"True, young sir; very true," chuckled Walton. And his chuckling became deeper and more continuous when I told him of mine fat host at the Mitre reciting "The Compleat Angler" to his scullions.

"Mayhap it would ha' profited thee, lad, to be as diligent in the study of that same discourse. But there is still hope. What happened thereafter?"

This part I found hard to tell even mine ancient friend. I tried to explain my feelings on learning that Nell had seemingly chosen the king over me; how I had trusted her foolishly; how hopelessly shattered was my heart, my faith, and my belief in the goodness of womenkind. But I fear I made a muddle of it all. He laid a sympathetic hand upon mine, and at that I fairly choked up as a son might in the presence of a father who listens to his trouble.

Unable to utter another word, I just pulled Nell's missive from my breast, and handed it to him in silence. He unfolded

and read it slowly, and did not speak for a while.

"Less than forty-eight hours in London Town," he presently mused, "and here is a lad lives a lifetime of romance which, had I not sent him in place of myself, should have befallen me. Or it may be fortune loves some better and some less, and favors youth over age.

"Lad," he went on, speaking directly to me, "you are to understand that while romance hath its seeming troubles, these but make for that picture which shall linger to the end of thy days as a bright and blood-stirring memory. And methinks thou hadst best forget thy present love for Mistress Nell, but cherish as that which cannot be taken from thee the memory of what hath passed between ye.

"Judge her not too harshly, neither, for there is that in this word of hers, and in all that you have told me, that inclines me most kindly to her. She was wiser than thou, good lad, and her heartache will last the longer, for that she truly loved thee. But thy ways lie apart. So be it, good lad, and may God comfort you both!

"And now let us remake our plans."

Thus my philosopher summed and disposed of my entire affairs, as if a broken heart was but a light, everyday affair, and to be considered like the state of the weather. Yet, after so many years, I know that— But I must keep to my time and my story.

"And now, lad," said Master Walton, "before coming to our instruction hour, it is in my mind to explain a matter to you, seeing that ye have failed in your study of that which is worthy to be perused by all anglers, and that ye are even stupid when left to thine own guidance.

"You did wisely and well, however, in returning to the heath to find me, surmising, no doubt, that I should linger on the way to fish, as indeed I have done. Think not that when ye saw me I was on the road to London Town. I but bethought me of a little brook farther on, where I might equally await that coming of thine which I expected."

"Why did you expect me, good master?"

"I knew," was all he vouchsafed. "Now, good lad, ye see me that I grow old. Such favors as kings might shower upon youth and youth be joyous therefor, were but empty things to one who hath seen three score and five years of life, and hath survived unscathed through the reign of four monarchs and one lord protector.

"Therefore I bethought me that as thou wert young and the very son of that Sir Rolfe Hollywood to whom the king gave his jewel, it was but fair thou shouldst carry it to Whitehall with thine own hands, restore it, and from the king's gratitude receive that which is thy right of inheritance—thy father's forfeited title and estate—and such favors as the king might grant a deserving youth.

"Now, when I said that I considered thee too guileless for such a mission, I meant but to cover my true purpose, which was to give thee the jewel, as I did—"

"Good master, you mistake. You did not—"

"Lad, thou shouldst never contradict thy tutor. An I did not give thee the jewel then, I shall surely do so now, for in some degree thou art as stupid as a bull-head in a sluggish stream and relish not the subtleties of a fly-cast. Now, you are to make good note of what I say, and—"

"Marry and mercy!" he broke off suddenly and clutching at my sleeve in alarm; "Think ye, lad, of any reason why ye should be pursued?"

I looked where he stared across the heath. Coming over the level but winding road was a swift-moving cloud of dust. From it, as the breeze swirled the dust in another direction, burst a group of horsemen, galloping toward us, although it might be merely to pass, for they could not have seen us as yet.

"Nay," said I, "and yet—methinks that is Milord Buckhurst who leads them, and the long-haired rascal by his side is that Master Hart, who alone hath knowledge of my departure this way."

Presently I was sure of these two and convinced that, for some new reason, they sought to overtake me. I turned to Master Walton for counsel, and to further my confusion discovered that he had disappeared.

"Master Walton! Master Walton!" I cried.

"Hush, young lad, and mark me well," said a quiet voice from the bushes beside which we had sate; "whether it be the king's jewel or Nell's garter they seek, conduct thyself with a true Christian fortitude, and deliver it to no hands but his own gracious majesty's."

"But how can I when I have neither to deliver? The swan hath the buckle and—"

"And be not remiss as before in thy studies," whispered Master Walton. "Diligence is a jewel, young scholar, and be assured that I shall linger hereabouts until thy return."

"But, Master Walton! I do not understand—" I began, but I heard a warning hiss and then no further sound from the bushes.

Almost immediately thereafter Milord Buckhurst caught sight of me, or Master Hart did and pointed me out. The horsemen—six or seven of them, all by their dress gentlemen but Master Hart, who seemed hiring guide—drew rein right opposite me. Milord Buckhurst threw one leg over his saddle and surveyed me amusedly, finally bursting into laughter.

"What ho, Sir Galahad!" he cried. "The king's majesty commands that ye return with us to London Town."

"For what, pray?" I asked.

"For what?" echoed Lord Buckhurst mockingly. "I hear him, good gentlemen! The king commands his return to London. 'For what?' saith he! Ye gods! Come, my knight of somebody's garter, get thee to horse and ride with us. Master Hart, get thee down and stretch thy long legs. The king's guest hath need of a swift saddle."

Master Hart got down and held the horse ready for me. I was of mind to

protest, to refuse, to fight, if need be. I was out of sorts with kings and courtiers, but a whisper came from the bushes.

"An apt pupil heedeth his instructor. Go with them, lad!"

I obeyed, mounting the horse, which nearly threw me at the first movement. But as soon as the cavalcade dropped into a steady canter, I was less ill at ease.

I managed to turn my head as we sped across the heath toward the gates of London Town. I saw no sign of Master Walton, but in front of the bushes Master Hart stood on the road, mopping his brow. And it was my good fortune never to set eyes on this rascal again.

Then I turned my face toward St. Paul's and fell to wondering what new thing was about to befall me.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TOWER OF LONDON.

THROUGH the Aldgate I was escorted by Lord Buckhurst and his friends. The latter were not hired men, but gentlemen, who had accompanied him, no doubt, for amusement.

My return to London, therefore, was marked by a certain appearance of pomp. People in the streets stared at us. Hats were doffed, and once a group of idlers raised a faint cheer, thinking maybe that I was some foreign princeling coming to the court of Charles.

But our way presently headed southward to the riverside, where there arose the high towers of that ancient pile which has seen so much tragedy. I was taken across the moat of the Tower of London by a drawbridge, and there all pretense was dropped. I was ordered from my horse and conducted by a scurvy-looking guard at whose belt jangled a bunch of enormous keys.

Up a winding-stair he took me, Buckhurst and his friends remaining below in conversation with the governor's people. In a small room—a veritable cell—of the White Tower I was lodged, and the turn-

key rang his weapon in the lock, and left me without a single word of explanation.

When I recovered from my surprise, I looked at my surroundings. The cell was semicircular. In the middle of the concave was a small, barred window, high up. I could see nothing outside but a bit of blue sky and some birds playing on the window-ledge. The roof of the cell was very high. There was a small stool as complete furnishing. And that is a full description of my prison.

I sat down and tried to understand the reason for my being brought to the tower. It could hardly be in the matter of the jewel, unless I was to be punished for being an acquaintance of Master Walton, whose own offense was still a matter of mystery.

Milord Buckhurst must be well aware, through his hireling, Master Hart, that whatever I might know about the missing Royal George, it was certainly not in my possession.

What then? I thought of Nell's letter; her plea that I return the garter lest the king visit his jealous wrath upon me, as perhaps he was now doing. I groped in my breast for the letter, determined to study it again, and found that I had left it in Master Walton's hands.

For the moment I was much mortified. Was I to have nothing of Nell's that I might treasure in after years? It seemed my fate to lose everything that breathed of her reality. But a few minutes later I was ready to thank Heaven that I had forgotten to take back the missive from my angler friend. If it were the king's jealousy—and indeed it was precisely that—which had caused my capture and imprisonment, the finding of that broken-hearted letter of Nell's would have worked ill, both for her and me, for in it she confessed herself as truly loving me and but a victim of the king's infatuation.

The key of my prison door shrieked in the lock while I was still deploring my lost token. In walked my guard, accompanied by another who, it seemed to me in a flash of horrible presentiment, was hideous

enough to be the headsman of the block. Behind both walked Milord Buckhurst, who greeted me civilly and motioned the two men aside while he addressed me.

"Master Hollywood," said he, "I bear ye no ill-will. Thou art but a pest in the way of affairs. I would lief see thee farther on the road over which I brought thee back. But the king hath heard, somehow, of what transpired in the Mitre crypt some three nights ago, and knows that ye were honored with a certain trifle of which he possesses the twin. It irks his majesty to be rivaled by a yokel who hath but youth and good looks on his side.

"Master Hollywood," he went on, quietly and deliberately, like one who has carefully rehearsed his speech, "I seek not that jewel of which at one time methought you were possessed, but the order of a certain other garter which I saw given thee. It is the king's command that ye yield it up. An ye refuse, it will be taken from thee.

"Ye stand to lose it either way, Master Hollywood. Yield it and ye go free, though 'twill be needful, an ye gossip on the matter, to still thy tongue with a rope neatly adjusted at its root. Compel force, and not only will it be taken by force, but ye may languish here awhile for that ye still think ye hath some rights in the affections of—a certain person.

"What say ye, Master Hollywood? Will ye deliver with good grace?"

"Milord Buckhurst," said I, nettled by the conditions, "an I had that thing to give thee, before I did so of my free will, ye might have that ugly lout here hang, draw, and quarter me, lop my head off, and spike it on the Lion's Gate—"

"Seize and search him!" interrupted Buckhurst in a most casual manner, as if he had expected this.

The turnkey and his ruffianly companion laid hands upon me. I did not resist. I was unarmed. I had nothing to lose. And the headsmanlike person was little short of a giant. In a twinkling they had me down and were tearing from me my clothing which, ragged enough al-

ready forsooth, was further ripped in the hurried process.

Again I was all but stripped, yet the only thing that rewarded their search was Master Walton's copy of "The Compleat Angler." How I thanked fate for that I had not Nell's letter, and how I chuckled with inward glee to think that which the king seemed to value above his Royal George even was no doubt disturbing the stomach of a swan in the park of St. James.

"There, milord. Art satisfied?" said I, when the two fellows stood up in defeat.

Buckhurst had taken the angler's volume from the turnkey's hands, and was studying it with triumph and interest. He could read, and the name of Izaak Walton on the back seemed to reawaken a thought. He turned the book all ways: opened it, shook it out, and peered down the hollow of the back binding, even as I had done; but all to no result. He seemed still to entertain the idea that the book itself might contain Nell's garter—or even the King's Jewel, with which this same Walton seemed to be so intimately concerned.

Suddenly he lost patience and threw the "Angler" upon the floor.

"Sirrah!" said he angrily, "I believe ye are full of deceit, and have hidden not only that which I am to recover, but that other trifle which was not on your person when Master Hart met thee in the park. But there are ways of making yokels find a nimble tongue.

"Now, ye will be given but one hour—one hour, mark ye, Master Hollywood. If at the end of that time ye be not ready to declare where ye ha' hidden both these things—there is the rack in the donjon and a device for loosening teeth so that tongues may ha' more room to wag. Come your ways, good fellows!"

Presently the huge key screamed in the lock, and I was left in the twilight of that Norman cell. But for the prospect of the torture-chamber I could have laughed over my predicament, for as I tried to reclothe myself, my much-adventured gar-

ments refused to hold together, and I had neither pins nor thread with which to bind them.

And what was I to do when the hour was up? I bemoaned the fate that had brought Buckhurst and his cavalcade down upon us before Master Walton could give me the jewel. Had I that in my possession I would gladly give it up. It was the king's, and to the king, no doubt, milord would take it. I would have been deprived of reward, but better that than be robbed of life or the use of my straight limbs.

As for the buckle and garter—there was little sense in considering that. I would tell them about the swan, of course; but would Buckhurst or anybody else believe my ludicrous explanation of its loss?

I sat me down on the stool and stared at the stone floor in despair. My thoughts ran in a circle and time slipped by with agonizing rapidity. Soon it would be time—and then the rack and the thumbscrew and the forceps and the hot pincers!

I noticed the book lying on the floor, and presently bethought me to engage my mind with it. And, I reflected with bitterness, Master Walton had urged me to pursue the study of it more diligently.

I picked it up and at once became aware that something had happened to the book. The violence with which Buckhurst had thrown it upon the stone flooring had burst the binding. The back cover was hanging off, and as I stared at the thing it seemed to me that a large section of the pages had dropped out. Where they should have been was a yawning space lined with a sort of greenish cloth.

Yet this could not be, for the edges of the pages were still around this oblong hole, frayed but compact.

I tried to turn back these pages, but to my surprise a part of the book—about the last half-inch of its thickness—came over in a solid section. Absolutely at loss to account for this strange thing, I turned the pages from the front in threes and fours—running them loosely under my thumb until I came to where they were

all stuck together in this solid pretense. The last readable page concerned such fish as the gudgeon, the ruffe, and the bleak, and the chapter began:

The gudgeon is a fish reputed of very excellent taste, and to be very wholesome.

At the bottom of this page the sentence which ran over on to the supposed next was:

He is one of those leather-mouthed fish that has his teeth in his throat, and will hardly be lost off the hook if—

If—*if*—IF!

That was as far as that copy of "The Compleat Angler" went, for the page could not be turned. The rest of the book was a cleverly constructed dummy with rough paper edges concealing what was merely a shallow, hollow box topped by the back cover. Milord Buckhurst's violence had broken some hidden catch, and the lid had flown open.

But there was nothing in the little, green-lined box! For what purpose had it been designed? To hide what?

I marvel now at my slow wit, my dense stupidity. It was quite some time before it occurred to me that this had been the hiding-place of the King's Jewel, that old Izaak, entrusted with the safe carriage of the Order of the Garter, had cleverly concealed it inside a specially designed copy of one of his books.

I was convinced that I had at last hit upon the truth. This was why he had so fondly nursed this precious volume. This was why after these thoughtful fondlings he had again asked me about my father to whom the king had entrusted this very jewel at Worcester.

But the jewel was not in it! Why, then, had he given me the case? No doubt he had taken out the priceless thing and it was now in his wallet or knapsack. But why give me the empty shell and urge me to a diligent study? What had he designed that I should discover? The secret of how he had concealed the jewel, which would help me not in the least? It

was as if his sense of humor—which I had often noted as of the drollest order—had urged him to play a trick on me and on those who seized me and the book.

I felt very wroth against my friend Izaak Walton. I rose from the stool and, regardless that the better part of my clothing fell from my limbs, began to walk up and down the narrow cell in a fine rage—the indignation of a fool who has been fooled.

And it was then—I have already branded my stupidity—I caught a glimmer of something on the floor; something that refracted the little ray of light from the barred window. I fixed the spot with my eyes and then dived for it. My hand closed over something cold and hard and prickly. I dashed back to the door where the light fell best and opened my up-turned hand.

Ye gods! The sight staggered my wits, almost blinded my eyes. My heart thumped painfully and I staggered toward the stool, faint with the joy of prospective deliverance.

I feared that I was dreaming, or that my sanity had left me. To me it seemed that no human eyes could ever have looked upon a thing so magnificent—and yet real.

Again I looked at it, and now I knew from the blood which the thing's keen edges had started from my clutching palm, that what I held in my hand was really the King's Jewel!

It was a golden badge in which, outlined in rubies, diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, and other brilliants that were true to the colorings of the objects they represented, was a presentment of St. George slaying the dragon!

CHAPTER XII.

HIS MAJESTY'S PLEASURE.

MY first impulse was to rush to the door, pound it with might and main, and there and then bargain for my deliverance. But aware of my

stupidity's proneness to error in action, I downed my desire for immediate liberty and tried to collect my wits.

If I summoned Milord Buckhurst he would cheerfully relieve me of the jewel, set me loose unharmed—perhaps, but as penniless and tattered as when he brought me to the tower or as when I had come to London. And milord would then come mincing to the king and, bending his knee, win his majesty's good grace by returning that for which my father had laid down his life.

At last I decided upon a plan of action. It was fraught with some peril of the jewel being taken from me, but it was worth the trying. I picked up the angler's book from the floor and placed the shimmering jewel back in its previous hiding-place.

The catch, after all, could not have been damaged, but merely sprung open, for it snapped over the green-lined receptacle quite neatly, and in my hand I held that which had deceived more than me—as innocent looking a volume as was ever sold in St. Dunstan's Churchyard.

But for some time after that I sat eyeing the thing, and I must have taken out and put back that jewel a dozen times before I had my mind made up about my plan.

Then—and then only—did I go to the door and begin knocking to attract attention. It was not long before the turnkey heard me and opened.

"How now, young sir?" said he, civilly enough.

"Tell Milord Buckhurst I would have a word with him," I said.

The turnkey grinned, believing I had changed my mind in view of the torture prospect. He locked me in again, but presently returned with his lordship and the giant. The latter now reminded me of the chief torturer, which he may have been.

"I take it y' are ready to reveal where ye hid the garter?" said Buckhurst triumphantly.

"If ye mean that of the lady," said I,

"I can but say that I have lost it. But that other garter badge I know of and can bring it to the king's majesty."

"Ah!" said Buckhurst, who cared little for Nell's garter so the king was satisfied, yet saw infinite advantage in the recovery of the Royal George.

"But," said I, repeating my expression of indifference to torture, execution, hanging, drawing, and quartering, "ye may do all these things and the secret dies with me. But an ye bring me into the king's presence, I will answer to you, milord, that the jewel shall be returned *in your presence*."

Buckhurst thought a moment, and no doubt trusted his smooth wit to turn the occasion to the advantage he desired.

"I will even bring that word to the king," said he. "But an this is a trick to regain liberty, 'ware the king's displeasure, sirrah, for in his very presence your deceit may be revealed."

He left me again, and I had an hour in which to torture myself with possibilities of failure. At the end of that time the turnkey reappeared, bringing me a suit of fine clothes and nothing less than a light sword and a plumed bonnet.

"Here, milord," said he with a new respect. "It be not fitting that one such as ye are come into the king's presence in rags. Attire ye in haste, for Milord Buckhurst waits."

Buckhurst—if it was he—had made a shrewd guess at my size, for when I was ready and he entered the cell I cut a neat figure. I saw it in the flash of his eyes.

We exchanged few words, save that he once more warned me against waiting until I faced the king before admitting I had lied. He also suggested that, an I told the truth, I reveal to him the whereabouts of the jewel and consider myself fortunate to be able to go my way without further ado. But I held to my terms.

Again I passed through the Lion's Gate and over the drawbridge. Here a couple of horses waited, ready accoutred. Mounted on these Lord Buckhurst and I, followed at a respectful distance by

several guards on horseback, rode through the heart of London in the general direction of Whitehall.

As we went I contrasted my appearance with that when I came to the Tower, and now the head-bobbing and bowing and hat-doffing were greater than ever. No doubt the commoners took me for a lord at least, for my clothing was of the best, and new.

But we did not stop at Whitehall. We passed up a road that skirted the park of St. James and presently, to my pleasure and excitement, Buckhurst drew rein before that little door which, opening through the ivy-clad wall, led into the garden of the cottage where I had left Nell.

In response to Buckhurst's knock a serving-fellow appeared and took the horses. I followed milord into the garden after he had had a whispered colloquy with the menial. Buckhurst went straight past the fountain, then by a little winding path that led to the rear of the cottage. Here, also, were pretty gardens, and in the center a little summer bower, within which sounded quiet voices.

Buckhurst coughed discreetly, and at the same time restrained my advance.

"Is it thou, my good Buckhurst?" said a pleasant voice, which I at once recognized. "And hast brought that adventurous yokel?"

"Aye, gracious sire."

"Bring to us hither."

Buckhurst plucked my sleeve and next moment he was bowing before the open side of the bower. Not so I, for my heart and eyes forgot all but the woman who sat on a rustic bench within, the king at her side and one of her little white hands held in his jeweled fingers.

It was Nell. She looked straight at me. For a moment I fancied an eager, pleading light in her eyes, not unmingled with joy. But all at once she began to laugh as if quietly amused. At that I recovered my wits and bowed most inclusively.

"Rolfe Hollywood," said the king sharply, without removing his hand from

over Nell's, "ye are either a very brave youth or an arrant fool. Milord Buckhurst tells me ye will reveal where ye have hid two certain orders of the garter. It displeases us to have our privacy broken in upon at this time for any fool's whim. But how say ye?"

"Your majesty," I said, and I am afraid I was looking at Nell all the time and she at me, "it seemed to me but my right and duty to bring to your majesty in my own person that which his majesty in his own royal person entrusted to my father at Worcester."

"Aye, aye," said the king, seeming pleased. "Where then is the jewel—and that other?"

"I pray that your majesty will believe an honest youth," I said, "when he swears that that other thing he hath lost. In a moment of spleen, sire, I threw it into the moat in the park of St. James, and methinks it is now in the stomach of one of your majesty's swans."

"Eh, eh?" cried the king querulously. "What cock-and-bull legend is this?"

I told my story in greater detail, and I saw that the king was inclined to believe me. All at once he began to laugh hugely, and he chuckled Mistress Nell in a teasing way under the chin.

"How now, Mistress Gwynne!" he cried. "Here is a swain so disenchanted that he threw thy token into the pond. Now shall we hear a dying swan singing most sweetly. But answer me, good Rolfe," he added, turning to me: "Art so forgetful of thy passing fancy as this?"

I did not like the way Nell's hand nestled in his majesty's. I did not like the way she laughed, although I have sometimes thought since she was acting to cover her true heart. In any event I determined to test her.

"Aye, your majesty," said I, "I am well cured. With your gracious majesty's permission I would even die a bachelor!"

The king laughed uproariously. Nell's face crimsoned, but before the king turned to observe her, methought her eyes flashed me a look of unutterable reproach.

Well, if she could act a lie, so could I! And mayhap she did it for my sake, as I did it for hers.

"And now of the jewel," said the king, sobering suddenly. "That were a serious matter. Where is it? What know you of that precious badge of my honor?"

I took a step nearer, dropped on one knee, extended my arm, opened my right hand and said simply:

"Here it is, your majesty!"

I heard a gasp from Nell and a low mutter from Buckhurst behind me. The king stared at the blazing thing in my palm and suddenly said:

"By St. George! 'Tis that same gallant image!"

He rose, stretched forward and took the thing almost reverently from my hand. He examined it and found it undamaged, for all its adventuring.

"How came ye by it?" he asked, the while he curiously fingered the Royal George.

I told him my story briefly, beginning with Izaak Walton and the attempt of the highwayman. When I told him of the gift of the book he seemed to think I was wandering from the point, and more so when I described the host of the Mitre reading its contents to his fellows. But when I ended with my discovery that the volume had been the hiding place of the jewel, he was much amused, not only at the thought of the fat host unconsciously with the king's jewel in his hands, but at the expression of Milord Buckhurst's face.

And just then there came a rush of feet through the garden, and the turnkey of the Tower and his giant friend, the headsman-chief-torturer, appeared, breathless. The king flushed with anger, but the pair felt the importance of their discovery justified the intrusion. To Buckhurst the turnkey rushed and held out to him the copy of "The Compleat Angler" which I had deliberately left on the stool in the Tower cell. I had carried the jewel to the king *in the hollow of my palm* and right under Milord Buckhurst's nose!

"See, milord!" gasped the turnkey. "Roger and I examined this thing and—it is a trick, milord! See—it opens!" He touched the back of the book with his thumb and it sprang open. "'Twas in this the precious thing you sought must ha' been hid."

Buckhurst snatched the book from the turnkey's hand and vented his chagrin on the intruders.

"Get ye gone, ye donjon rats!" he snarled, while the king and Nell sounded their mirth, for the reason of Buckhurst's rage was obvious. I, too, grinned broadly.

"You may leave us, good milord," said Charles with a chuckle. "Ye seem much in need of more breathing space."

Buckhurst turned on his heel and left the garden. I never saw him again.

When he was gone the king stood in a sort of muse for a few moments. As he thoughtfully studied the jewel Nell and I gazed into one another's hearts through our eyes. Her indignation of gaze melted and again came that little touch of yearning wistfulness. But the king interrupted our silent argument.

"Methinks, son of Sir Rolfe Hollywood, that ye should return to Warwick and lay claim to that which is thine. Come hither."

I did so, and he bade me kneel. The king drew from its sheath the light sword that he wore, and beckoned Nell. He placed her hand upon the hilt and then closed his own hand over hers. Drawing her arm upward and forward he brought down the blade upon my left shoulder.

"Rise, Sir Rolfe Hollywood, Knight of the King's Garter!" said he.

I got to my feet, dazed. I managed to bow in some sort of fashion. It was a gracious forgiveness, and that loyalty which had been my father's welled up within me. My eyes were filled with tears and it was with difficulty that I could see either the king or Nell.

But that was not all. Through a blur I saw his majesty standing close to me, and his hands were at my left breast.

"And this shall be thy guerdon, Sir

Rolfe," said he, as he pinned on my doublet the long-lost jewel. "'Tis but a bauble that loses value to me since it is in proper hands, but gains value to thee. Sir Rolfe, in that it becomes the badge of thine own chivalry. We will have its twin made for ourself."

That was all. I had gained much. I had lost Nell—in a sense. But after I had kissed the king's hand, it was my privilege to kiss hers.

As I did so I felt her little hand tremble in mine, and the delicate fingers that nestled in my palm suddenly closed tightly and lingered a moment—for the last time.

That was many years ago. I have forgotten the ache of that first love of mine, but never the sweetness of it. I loved again—many times, I might confess—

and here at Hollywood in Warwick there is a sweet lady who has read these pages with much amusement and now and then a little tear. And there are children, too, about my knee.

My good friend, Master Walton, has long passed to his rest; but through many a happy day after we came back from London Town together, did I fish with him in little brooks, eat with him bread and cheese and baked trout and red apples under the greenwood tree, and listen to his gentle discoursing.

The king, too, reigns no longer, and I have heard that sweet Nell also sleeps. But I forgave the king all that was left of rancor for that he took her from me in those far-away days, because he was good to her all the remaining days of his life. Almost his last words were:

"Take care of Nell!"

(The end.)

U U U U

THE STRAW-RIDE

BY JOHN D. SWAIN

THE big pung.
 Maneuvering in the straw for partners.
 The discovery that you have drawn your own wife.
 The stabbing cold.
 The secret elation because you put on your red flannels.
 The request that Obed give one of his famous recitations.
 The impossibility of getting him to stop.
 The rising of the moon over the black hemlocks.
 The singing: "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean!"
 The stop at the tavern for hot coffee and crullers.
 It is boarded up for the season.
 A new deal, in which you draw a Normal School graduate.
 She adores Herbert Kaufman.
 Her front teeth and her work in the Choral Union are prominent.
 You doze furtively.
 The pung stops at your house. Sleepy "good nights!"
 The opening of the door, and the escape of the cat—
 Who has been waiting hours for the chance.
 The fireless stove and arctic bed.
 The usual argument about cold feet, with the usual result.
 The thrilling taunt of your Plymouth Rock rooster.
 Seven o'clock!

Bill Jenkins. Buccaneer

by George Allan England

Author of "The Fatal Gift," "The Empire in the Air," "Hypnotized," etc.

Sequel to "The Brass Check"

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

BILL JENKINS, cigar clerk and adventurer, has a grievance—worth *SORT OF*—against Malcolm Everett, millionaire, and follows him on board the yacht *Victory*—by way of the ice chute. Discovered in the hold by "Simoon Sam" Holstrom, the first mate, Bill is locked in the lazaret, from which he is rescued by Sally, with whom he is madly in love. Sally is a lady detective, and knows Bill under the name of Ed Cole. Her arrangements for Bill's escape from the yacht, which is now under way, miss fire, and, eluding his pursuers, Bill inadvertently plunges into Sally's cabin while Sally is yet in bed. There comes an imperative knocking upon the door.

CHAPTER VII.

HOPES AND FEARS.

GABRIEL'S trump itself would not have startled our adventurer more severely than that bodeful knocking. It couldn't have. Jenkins's quivering senses had already reached their limit of wo—and then some.

Rap-rap-rap! Again the summons sounded.

"Quick! There!" whispered Sally, pointing at a narrow space behind a large Saratoga trunk at the far end of the cabin. Jenkins needed no second bidding. He dived to cover like a scared rabbit, crouched on hands and knees between trunk and partition, and held his gasping breath.

"Hello! Who's there?" inquired Sally, with a splendid imitation of casual sleepiness. Jenkins even heard her imitate a

yawn — good little actress that she was. But her action was anything but sleepy. Even as she spoke she was out of bed, and had whisked a big steamer-rug clean over him and the trunk, both.

"Yo' chocolate, miss," answered an Ethiopic voice. "An' it's gittin' all cold, too, out yeah. Open de do'. missy; open de do'!"

"For Heaven's sake, Meda, is that you so early?" queried Sally, with well-feigned wonderment as the yacht's matron rapped again.

Jenkins, crouching in his dusty lair, knew she was out of the berth, and heard the *pad-pad-pad* of her bare feet on the rug. His heart began to flutter with something more than alarm.

The door swung wide.

"What time is it, anyway?" asked Sally sleepily.

"Half pas' five, missy. Yo' said las'

This story began in the *All-Story Weekly* for February 17.

night yo' wanted yo' choc'late early dis mavnin', wid all dat work to do 'fore we git to de canal. Disremember dat?"

"No, no, Meda," Sally answered, as there came a sound of clinking chinaware and a heavy-footed step in the cabin. "But I didn't think it was more than four. My watch has stopped, and it's awfully dark."

"Foggy mavnin', missy; but it's gwineter clear up, sho', an' be a lubbly day—lubbly as yo'self. How come I heered yo' talkin' in yeah, missy, ef yo' was sleepin' when I knocked?"

Black Meda's voice seemed tinged with a certain shrewd suspicion. Jenkins quaked inwardly and shrank to his smallest possible compass.

"Talking in my sleep, Meda, that's all," the girl fibbed promptly. "That's a little habit I have. Heigh-o!" she yawned. "I'm awfully sleepy yet. No, I'll put in the cream and sugar myself. That will be all. Here—can you use this?"

"What's dat, missy? Half a dolla', all fo' me? De good Lawd bless yo'! Ef all de ladies was lak yo'—"

"There, there, run along now," Sally commanded; and Jenkins, with rising hopes, thought himself already dragged from the pit of despair, when suddenly a most insistent tickling began to manifest itself in his nose. His precipitate duck into the space behind the trunk had stirred up a little cloud of dust; and now, alas, the appalling necessity of a sneeze had gripped his fear-racked being.

Not even death and the fear of death itself can at times check the sneeze that has fully determined to make itself vocal. Jenkins, in the throes of panic, made the most extraordinary facial contortions, bit his lip, held his breath, fought like a fiend against the coming explosion. All in vain. Now it was close; now it was imminently upon him—

Ker-chew!

As though it had been an echo, a second *ker-chew!* rang through the cabin.

"Lan's sake, missy!" ejaculated Meda,

turning from the door. "Hay-fever dis time o' year? Yo' sneeze loud enough fo' two! Ah'd almost said dey was somebody else in heah. Yo' sho'ly had ou'hta see de doctor 'bout dat, an'—"

"There, there, Meda," Sally interrupted. "Run along, now, or I *shall* take cold for sure. *Ker-chew!* Thank you so much for remembering about the—*ah-chew!*—the chocolate. Good-by!"

The door opened. It closed with a decisive slam, and the bolt slid home. Jenkins heard heavy feet slatting off along the deck. Then came silence, broken only by a slithering sound as of clothing being donned. A moment passed before Sally's voice whispered:

"You, Ed?"

"What is it?" quaked Jenkins, still kneeling, and with his face on the floor in the farthest corner. "You aren't mad, are you, Sally? I—never romped in here on purpose, Sally; honest I didn't."

"Get up!"

Jenkins arose, freed himself from the steamer-rug, and stood there, peering about him with alarmed eyes. He beheld the girl, now well and properly clad in a heavy bath-robe and slippers, but with her massy hair still veiling her plump shoulders, regarding him in some displeasure as she sat on the edge of the bunk.

"Honest, I never knew you were in here," he began again, but she raised a hand for silence.

"Hush!" said she in a whisper. "I believe you, you unfortunate infant! Least said now the better. What happened that you didn't get away?"

"Everything," Jenkins whispered back, advancing from behind the trunk. "The ropes got tangled, or something, and crabbed the whole game. Then Sam blew along, and I played oyster, with the boat for a shell. After that I hiked. Saw this door unlocked and—"

"All right. Nothing matters now except to get you out of this without being seen. Let me think. And here, Ed, while I'm thinking; drink this—all of it!"

She gestured at the tray which stood on a little table, with a pot of chocolate thereon, together with cream, sugar, and a dainty cup.

"I don't want to gloat it away from you, Sally," Jenkins protested, but she tapped her slippered foot on the carpet and once more pointed at the tray with a gesture that allowed no argument. Bill therefore obeyed her (as usual), and found the chocolate and cream vastly stimulating to his inner man. Its grateful warmth suffused him with renewed strength.

"Well, what's the next jiu-jit grip with old man Hard Luck?" he guardedly asked as he set down the cup with a sigh of satisfaction. Somewhat forgotten now were his previous fears. This cozy *tête-à-tête* with his adored one more than repaid him for all the terrors and sufferings of the entire trip to date.

"Give me your hat, Ed," the girl commanded suddenly.

"All right. What for?" he answered, handing her the disreputable and water-soaked wreck of what had once been a perfectly good imitation Panama. "What's the idea?"

"It's like this," said she, still speaking in whispers. "I'll put this on deck, near the stern. I'll tie a rope to the rail. I'll remove the package I left for you in the boat. I shall have to be very, very careful about all this, so as not to waken any suspicion, but I can manage it.

"Sam will be sure to think you've gone down the rope, slid into the water, and swum ashore. Meantime you'll be in the safest place on board, the trunk-room. He'll never think of looking for you there. Then, when we reach the canal, I'll get you landed some way or other. Understand?"

"Yes. But how the dev—I mean, how in the world did you ever pull that sneeze stunt? I thought it was all day with me when the dusty microbe handed me that spasm. It would ha' been, too, if you hadn't slid one over yourself. The goods, O. K.!"

"Only a little trick that's already helped me through one or two tight places," Sally answered, smiling. "No matter about that. Ed. Now for the trunk-room!"

"Where? Me for that!"

"Listen and I'll tell you. See that door back of you?"

Jenkins turned and observed a door beside the trunk.

"Surest thing you know! What next?" asked he.

"That leads into the other cabin of this suite, and through it you can reach the saloon."

"The *which*? I'm on the wagon, Sally, honest I am, and—"

"No, no, stupid! I mean, what you'd probably call the parlor if this was a house. At the front end of it a stairway leads down to a landing. You see, I'm speaking in plain terms, so you'll understand me. I have to make allowances for your personal equation. When you reach that landing, turn to the left, and you'll find still another stairway, very steep. Go down that, then turn to the right, and go straight ahead of you till you come to the trunk-room. Understand?"

"Surest thing you know!" And Jenkins repeated the directions, making only three mistakes. "What then?"

"Wait till I come. And keep still down there — and don't play with matches." She smiled oddly.

"Every match I've got is wet to the skin," answered Jenkins, "so you can can the worry-bug about *that*. I'm wise. On my way, then?"

"Yes, just as quick as you're properly disguised."

"Huh?"

"Of course you can't be wandering round the boat in those disgraceful rags," Sally explained. "You might be seen, and that would mean recognition and disaster. No; you've got to pass *incog*. Here's the very thing!"

Getting up, she took from one of the hooks a pink silk kimono and a boudoir cap of robin's-egg blue pongee.

"I think," she murmured contemptuously, as she surveyed these with a critical eye in the half-light of the cabin—"I think, Ed, you'll be a dream in these!"

Jenkins blushed, but submitted as she put the robe and cap upon him, deftly adjusting them with pulls and pats till they concealed his disreputable rags and tousled hair. Only the problem of how to cover up his boots and the bottoms of his trousers now remained, and in spite of all her cleverness Sally had here to admit herself beaten.

"It's perfectly obvious," she commented, surveying his feet, "that none of my No. 3 slippers will go on to those No. 8 or No. 9 tootsies of yours, Ed. So you'll just have to chance that part of it. But in the gloom, I don't think you're running much risk. Now, then, all ready for the trunk-room?"

With unquestioning obedience, and beautiful to behold in the pink kimono and blue boudoir-cap, Jenkins passed through the door she opened for him. He wanted to take Sally in his arms and kiss her again as he had once on a time done at the insane asylum, but this was no occasion for courtship. He sensed that, clad as he was, he wouldn't stand much show. All he did, therefore, was give her hand a little squeeze before the door closed again; and with a sigh as ardent as the look he cast upon her, prepared for further explorations of the yacht.

He had to muster all his nerve for the attempt to pass through the saloon under false colors. Gingerly he opened the door that led to it, peered out, and with only too keen a realization that Sally and he were of two very different sizes, and that he had his work cut out for him in trying to pass for her, made his desperate sortie.

Fate was kind. No eye beheld him as he kept his perilous course to the trunk-room. Save for a first-class scare when a voice sounded down a lateral corridor, and palpitation of the heart due to catching his boot-heel on the second stairway and just missing a noisy plunge to the bottom, he arrived safely, soundly, and

in his right mind. Thereafter he retired behind baggage, in the dim-lighted place, and resigned himself to waiting for the arrival of his divinity.

Many thoughts and wonders occupied his mind as he sat there, now divested of his gaudy raiment, and once more clad in his wet rags. Even to record a half of them would fill pages. But one must be made known; one that presented itself something like this:

"If she didn't fall for me pretty strong, why should she frame all these stunts for me? I'm either 'it' with her, or I don't know the symptoms!"

Vastly heartened—for nothing mattered, if only he could win her love—Jenkins waited, determined to put a leading question to her just as soon as she should come, and sound the truth regarding her affections. The wait was long, interminably long; but everything on earth has an end, and so did that.

Just as Jenkins was making up his mind that eternity must be all over, he heard her light step along the passageway, and a moment later, rising to his feet, beheld her in the half-light of the trunk-room.

"All right, Ed?" asked she. "Everything all right?"

"Fine and dandy, Sally," he smiled, trying to take her hand once more, but this time failing. "Everything all to the mustard, except just one thing."

"What's that?"

"Something I want to get hep to, and you're the only one can wise me."

"I hope you're not going to talk nonsense, Ed," she reproved him, "at a critical time like this?"

"Nonsense nothing!" he indignantly retorted. "This is the kingpin of importance, Sally. Say, slip me the right dope on this proposition, will you? A girl wouldn't put the pedal on hard luck for a fellow, now would she, and do it all the time, unless he stood pretty much ace-high with her?"

"There, there, Ed, don't get personal," she warned. "You've got too

much ahead of you yet to be bothering about anything of *that* sort!"

"I'm on, Sally," he persisted: "but *would* she? You know you're the only sweepstake that's keeping me on this trouble speedway. If it wasn't for you I'd be tickled to death to call the whole game a bunch of Gorgonzola and blow. Everett and Sam are double-crossing me; Mrs. Trouble beans me every time I peek out, and the whole thing seems stamped with the nix-brand, all but you. *You* keep skating in and putting everything in the right vibration, Sally. Tell me, now, do you think you could ever learn to—"

"Hush, Ed! There's no time now for anything but practical details." She produced a paper bag from beneath a loose gray cloak she was now wearing. "Here are some provisions, enough to last you till we get to the canal. All you have to do now is keep quiet."

Jenkins, half starved, eyed the bag with keen interest. Decidedly, the prospect was brightening. Simoon Sam was squelched; Sally was kind; and, moreover, Jenkins now had some definite idea of the whereabouts of the *Victory*. The canal so often mentioned could, of course, be none other than the Panama Canal. Jenkins felt that he would yet live to make the stay-at-homes green with envy.

"I get you," he answered, leaning against a trunk and gazing at his divinity with an adoration which even his discolored right eye could not conceal. "What you say goes. Only don't throw me, Sally. Without you I've got no more chance of being happy than a crab has to sing. And the eats look good, believe *me*. What are you slipping me, anyhow? Cold chicken, I suppose, and quail, and patty de foy grass, with a quart or two of champagne on the side?"

The girl laughed quietly as she shook her head in negation.

"I'm sorry, Ed," she answered; "but the best I could get you for now is five raisin buns, two bananas, and a bottle of milk. You see, things aren't fully organized on board yet. It's lucky they aren't.

The crew, or most of it, won't come aboard till we reach the canal, so—"

"No crew?" Jenkins demanded, astonished. "How's that?"

"We're towing, of course. Didn't you hear the tug?"

"Oh, that puffing noise? I thought that was the yacht's engines."

Sally laughed again, whereat Jenkins blushed.

"I never knew they towed boats as far as this," he offered in explanation. "But it cuts no ice, anyhow. The only dope that matters now is whether you hand me the glad smile or the frozen mitt. I'll do everything as you've framed it for me, Sally. I'll blow back home and stick around till the kale shows up. But I can't lose track of you again, and won't! No more fox-and-hare hunts for you all over the map. Slide me your address while there's a chance, and put the joy-frills round my heart!"

"Not yet, Ed; not quite yet," she denied him. "One thing at a time. Do as I tell you, and nothing else, if you want to please me. Will you?"

"Some!" he vigorously affirmed. "I'm on!"

"That's the way I like to hear you talk," she answered, with one of her luminous smiles. Then, having exacted his most solemn promise not to stir from his place of concealment till she should come to liberate him—and also having very deftly blocked his most artful subterfuges to get an arm about her waist—she gathered up the blue boudoir-cap and pink kimono that had disguised him, and once more withdrew, leaving his soul suspended betwixt black chasms of despair and roseate heights of hope.

CHAPTER VIII.

STARTLING REVELATIONS.

THE insistent demands of a gnawing hunger, however, very soon outweighed even the most romantic of dreams, and Jenkins presently abandoned

his visionings for the practical matter of the paper bag. He spread out his frugal meal on a trunk, sat on another, and fell to with an appetite so hearty as to disprove entirely the popular notion that a man can't be in love and hungry at one and the same time.

Prudence dictated that he should not make an end of his total commissary supplies at one sitting. Some time might elapse before he could get any more. Therefore he consumed only three of the buns and one of the bananas, and drank hardly more than half the milk. The rest he put back carefully in the bag, ready for all contingencies.

The hardships of the many sleepless hours he had passed the night before, joined to the food and warmth, inclined his senses all to slumber. Making himself as comfortable as he could—which wasn't very comfortable, after all—he once more slept upon the floor.

A trifle like this was now of no consequence whatever. Time passed—a habit that time has, as Mark Twain well observes. How long a time, he could not tell. He knew only that he awakened to find Sally bending over him again, shaking him a little by the shoulder.

"Get up now, Ed," she was commanding. "It's time for you to leave the yacht. We're in the canal basin. Get up!"

Jenkins rubbed his eyes, blinked, yawned, and arose.

"Huh?" he inquired. "The canal, you say?"

"Yes. Come along."

"Not before you slip me your address, Sally!"

"Oh, Ed, Ed!" she exclaimed with some annoyance. "How *can* you, when you're in such danger?"

"For your sake I'd umpire an eleven-inning tie game before twenty thousand people and strike the home team out! Won't you tell me where you—"

"Shhh! Come!" she commanded in a tone that left no slightest room for any further argument. "There's not a minute to lose!"

Obediently Jenkins followed her as she led the way. There was, in fact, nothing else he *could* do. One hand over his heart tried to stay its fevered throbbing; the other clutched the paper bag containing the banana, the two buns, and the pint of milk. Noiselessly, and with an air of cautious assurance, Sally conducted him on deck once more.

A reeking fog, even whiter and thicker than that which had until now veiled the sea from Jenkins's eyes, still hung over the surface of the deep—a fog smelling somewhat of smoke; a pallid morning fog that beaded itself in tiny drops on every thread of clothing. As Sally conducted him along the narrow runway between the deck-house and the rail, our adventurer thought he could just barely make out, off to the right, something like the dim outlines of a city.

The yacht, he perceived, was now quite motionless, and the puffing of the tug had entirely ceased. Other sounds of man's activity, however, reached his ears—a muffled roar of traffic over cobblestones, a clank of metal, the whistle of an engine. Somewhere, a dog was barking stridently.

Jenkins shuddered a little at thought of now being thrown out, lacking all resources but his native wit, in this strange foreign city on an unknown coast.

Suddenly the idea of funds occurred to him. His forty-seven cents, he knew, would make a mighty poor showing so far from the old U. S. A. Never in his life had he asked any woman for money, since he had quit begging his mother for a nickel to buy "peewees" with.

Now the idea of requesting pecuniary assistance from the idol of his soul filled him with revulsion. Should he, or shouldn't he? Rent with the most torturing indecision, he hesitated on the brink of the choice whether to suffer untold hardship or confess his plight to Sally.

As the girl paused, peering keenly along the deck in fear of trouble, Jenkins paused, too, and once more gazed over-

side, as though to find some solution to his quandary in the elements. The prospect puzzled him, in spite of all his perturbation. He had expected to see jungles, mountains, palm-trees, the luxuriance of a far, tropic shore. But all he could seem to make out was a vague jumble of far-away buildings through the now lightening fog.

"Gee," murmured Jenkins. "this don't square up very close with what the magazines and movies dope out, about these chocolate-eclair spiggoty climes. What the—"

Boom!—a-room—a-room!

Echoing, round as an O, the thunderous report of a cannon rolled over the reaches of the water, and died in the offing.

"That's the morning gun from Water-vliet Arsenal," explained Sally, turning toward her protégé. "So you see you've reached the canal, all right, just as I said you would. We've made good time from Rhinebeck, where they put on another tug."

"Rhinebeck?" stammered Jenkins, with a sudden fear at his heart. "What do you mean—Rhinebeck?"

"Why, just what I said. What about it?" asked Sally, astonished.

"Rhinebeck -- the Rhine -- arsenals -- cannons!" Jenkins gasped, clutching the clamp, cold rail with both hands. "Holy suffering mackerel!"

"What on earth is the matter with you now?" demanded the girl, staring with wide eyes. "What are you turning pale for? Have you lost your senses?"

Jenkins could find no words, a moment, to voice his panic-stricken indignation. Then, making a supreme effort, he gulped:

"Why—why didn't you tell me the truth?"

"What truth?"

"About where you were taking me? Why didn't you wise me you—you were —headed for Germany, and the Kiel Canal, and the war zone? And not—not shanghai me into—*this*?"

"Into what?" Sally still persisted, quite unable to believe her ears. "What *in* the world has happened to you, Ed? Are you going crazy, or what? You said you were, in my cabin. Want me to believe it now?"

Jenkins peered at her with blinking eyes, his clutch still tight upon the rail.

"Well, if I was, it 'd only be handing you what you deserve, and you'd be to blame," he managed to articulate. "You sail for the tropics, and now here we are, with the Kaiser's guns giving us the once-over! If that's not raw—"

"Kaiser's guns? War zone? Kiel Canal?" repeated Sally, in a slow, wondering voice. Then, as though comprehension had suddenly dawned, she laughed a little wildly, and cried:

"Oh, lovely!"

"What's lovely?" demanded Jenkins with ire. "Next thing we know, a forty-two centimeter will be playing ping-pong with our livers, and you call it lovely! What's lovely round here?"

"You are, Ed," the girl asserted. "See here, now. Do you know what you're really looking at now?" And she extended a very shapely hand in the misty morning light toward the half-seen city across the water.

"What am I looking at?" asked Jenkins, in amaze and fear. "Just what you said, of course. Germany!"

"Ha-ha! Excuse me, but I really can't help it. Listen, Ed. This river here is the Hudson, and—"

"The *Hud*-son? Stop kidding, Sally; stop kidding!"

"It is, Ed, really and truly. The Hudson, and nothing else. We've been towing up this river two days and a half. The Rhinebeck I referred to just a minute ago was Rhinebeck, Dutchess County, New York. That city over there is Troy, where they make all the collars and cuffs. You are now about a hundred and fifty miles from New York City, almost due north; and the canal in question is the Erie Canal. Well, now, do you or don't you understand me?"

It seemed rather obvious that Jenkins did not—that is, not very clearly. For at the sound of these words, which in one minute had fired a chain-shot through all his conclusively proved theorizings, he collapsed heavily into a steamer-chair beside the deck-house.

Limply he drooped there, and from lackluster eyes peered at his goddess, with blank amazement in his heart, and in his hands a paper bag containing only one banana, two raisin buns, and half a bottle of milk now rapidly turning sour.

For a long minute after these perfectly astounding revelations had crashed into his dazed brain, Jenkins sat there completely paralyzed in thought, speech, and action.

He had as firmly believed himself in foreign lands as you believe you are reading this truthful record of his adventures; but now he found himself only a few paltry miles from New York, Henderson, Harry, Clara, Mrs. Spriggs, and all the rest of it back in commonplace, everyday America. Do you wonder that the springs of his entire being seemed for the moment to shut up, like a weak-backed jack-knife, and leave him utterly stunned? No, and neither do I.

But Sally's eyes upon him, and the stimulus of Sally's smile, almost at once brought him out of his daze, as cold water thrown on a sufferer from nightmare will free him from his terrors.

"Gee!" he made shift to murmur, standing up again rather weakly. "All right. If you say so, it's the goods. As a goat-grabber, it's some grabber, but never mind. I'm wise. What next?"

"Next?" asked she. "Go ashore, take the first train for New York, and wait there, as agreed. Nothing simpler."

"Back up, back up!" exclaimed Jenkins with hauteur. "That's all off now. Nothing to it, Sally. I've scratched that program, from overture to curtain-call!"

"What for?" the girl demanded. It was her turn now to feel amazement. "You've got to go, Ed, and go quick, I tell you! Any minute Mr. Everett or

Sam or somebody is liable to find you here. And if they *do*—"

"I should worry! That's nothing to me, beside the fact that I've been strung to a finish, and that this whole bunch here has handed me a bunch of wallops not yet paid for. If I'd really had that foreign trip stuff, I'd have blown back as you said, and waited. But now when even *that* was a 'phony, and I'm still in the U. S. A. with these Everett guys, I'm going to stick around till they hand me what's coming! Get me?"

"Now, now, Ed," the girl essayed to soothe him. "Listen to reason, can't you? And—"

"Nix on that, Sally," Jenkins firmly interrupted, clutching his paper bag with a hand that now no longer trembled. "They thought they had me all elected to the In-Bad Club, didn't they? But I'm still on the job, believe *me!* They tried to—"

"Don't be a fool, Ed!" Sally ejaculated, with an anxious glance along the still deserted deck. "Nobody wants to cheat you, in any way. Their intentions are the very best toward you."

"Fat chance to make me stand for that!" he retorted. "After the way Malcolm Everett frisked that nine hundred and twenty-one dollars and seventeen cents off me and beat it, and then all of them flew the coop to Italy, or Europe, or somewhere—"

"That was all a mistake," Sally endeavored to explain. "Malcolm thought, of course, you were the right man, and would know what to do next. And after he'd escaped, naturally they all had to get out of the country, right away. We've been just dying to know the inside of the whole mystery—who you really are, how you got hold of that suit-case, and—and no end of other things. So—"

"All that cuts no ice now," affirmed Jenkins. "That's dead and gone. Where I live is what I'm going to get out of the present and future. Put me hep to this proposition here, and then I'll tell you what I'm going to frame up next."

"Now, see here, Ed," the girl protested, "we simply can't stand here talking this way. The situation is critical. You're apt to be discovered any time, and yet you insist on discussion. You *must* leave the yacht this minute!"

And, taking him by the sleeve, she tried to drag him round the deck-house in a direction which—to judge from a sound of voices and a rattle of machinery there—seemed to give promise of the dock where the Victory was lying moored.

"Leave it?" ejaculated Jenkins, resisting. "Blow, now? Nix on that! I'm going to stick tighter than a porous-plaster till I'm wise to the whole game, and cop off my share of justice!"

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" the girl exclaimed in very great agitation. "Was there *ever* such a man in all this world? Listen, Ed, and I'll give you an outline of what you want to know, since there's no other possible way of stirring you. The man you rescued from the asylum is now on board. His father, Henry J. Everett, is going to rejoin him here to-day, coming up by train from New York, where he's been detained on business. Understand?"

"Sure. What next? How about that nine hundred and twenty-one dollars and seventeen cents and—"

"Cornelius Everett, the old gentleman who employed you by mistake, is now at Detroit. This yacht is going through the Erie Canal, with its masts lowered, to Buffalo. Then it will proceed down Lake Erie, pick him up, and go along to Georgian Bay, where the Everetts have a hunting-lodge and intend to pass the fall. Nothing simpler! What are you making all this mystery about?"

"It may frame up simple to you," Jenkins returned, still resisting the girl's every effort to impel him toward the dock. "But I'm not the E. Z. Mutt I was when I first connected with this bunch. It takes a bigger needle to jab me now than it did then, and nobody can slip anything over on me at all!"

"Nobody *wants* to, Ed!" Sally ve-

hemently protested, obviously scared blue at the prospect that the obstinate Jenkins might be found on board. "If you won't go, as I advise you, hide somewhere out of Sam's way, anyhow, until Malcolm Everett has had his breakfast, and then let me present you to him. Tell him your story, explain who you are, and ask him to—"

"Never!" Jenkins rejected the proposition, striking the rail with his fist, while his usually mild blue eyes blinked savagely. "Fate first switched that malefactor onto my main track. Fate came back strong, and steered him into Henderson's cigar-stand on Sixth Avenue, where I work. And all the time he was double-crossing! Now, think I'm going to prance up and put him wise to who's trailing him, or slide him any clues? Nay, Pauline!"

"But, Ed—"

"Forget it! He's got to hand me the recognition himself, come across with the right thing, and do me justice. If you think I'm going to pull the beggar stunt, or the kind-sir-please-slip-me-a-dime line of chatter, you're in the wrong pew. Get me?"

In silence, the silence of despair, Sally looked at him a long moment. Her lips moved, but without making any sound. One would have said, however, they were framing the words: "Nobody home—they're always out!"

But now, of a sudden, the voice of Simoon, roaring some inchoate order, startled her into action.

"He's coming, Ed," she whispered, going rather pale. "Oh, dear, he's coming! He weighs two hundred, and he's got a fist like a ham—and this is one of his ugly mornings. He'll kill you, Ed—he'll surely kill you. Come, come, *come!*"

Violently she pulled him from the rail and toward the forward companionway. Half yielding to her strength, half to a sudden pang of apprehension that despite him now pierced his heart, Jenkins followed her.

"Back to the hold," she commanded

with tense imperativeness. "Back to the trunk-room, and wait till I come! Quick, Ed, before he sees you—quick, quick, quick!"

CHAPTER IX.

JENKINS PROPOSES.

JENKINS would have indignantly denied, had you asked him, that he was now fleeing in rout from the imminent peril of discovery by Simoon Sam. At most he would have admitted "strategic retirement to a previously prepared position."

But the effect was the same, in any case. With great celerity he scuttled down the ladder, still clutching his paper bag, and ran along the passageway at the bottom.

He took the wrong direction, however, and in a moment came to another opening, quite unfamiliar, but obviously leading down toward safety. Here a deep gloom shrouded all. Hastily Jenkins descended a few rounds of a ladder, then jumped—and landed almost up to his waist in an open barrel of what engineers know as "heavy steam oil."

Now, heavy steam oil is a dark-green grease of a peculiarly disagreeable quality, also it holds like quicksand any object immersed therein. Jenkins was panting with exertion, and his brow was dewed with sweat, by the time he had got himself clear and had started—trailing grease at every step—in search of the trunk-room once more.

"Holy cuttlefish!" he exclaimed, surveying his plight. "If this hasn't got the limit skun till it bleeds, what has? Hard luck has certainly come to board at my house, that's no pipe."

Ruefully he contemplated the oleaginous wreck of what still remained of his clothing, under the dim light in the trunk-room, reflecting meanwhile that unless he could find a change of raiment his chances of appearing to any advantage at all in Sally's eyes were now reduced to zero.

The proximity of so many trunks, doubtless filled with the very finest of apparel, all at once struck him as an extremely fortunate circumstance.

After what Malcolm Everett had handed him he reasoned—and after all the woes therefrom resulting, these miscreants positively owed him at least one suit. He certainly seemed to have backed into the right stall this time. His hookers were out to hook something real in the dolling-up line.

The whimsical twist in his brain convinced him that a good omen had befallen. Had not his first adventure begun with a suit-case full of clothing, and was not the circle now completed? Yea, verily. So Jenkins prepared for loot.

The task of opening any of the trunks would have outclassed him had he not still possessed his key-ring, with half a dozen keys thereon. This he dredged out of a trouser pocket almost completely filled with steam-oil. After trying all the keys in vain on seven trunks, at last he found one with which he jubilantly opened the eighth.

"Hot stuff!" murmured Jenkins, surveying the contents. Exultation filled his breast at sight of much apparel, all the very best quality. But, alas! not one suit came within a mile of fitting him. They all, as he tried them one by one, draped themselves about his none too ample frame more loosely than an elephant's skin on that familiar pachyderm.

Jenkins realized the absolute impossibility of appearing anywhere at all, much less before Sally, in any such attire, and therefore rejected everything. Perplexed, he stood there in the retirement of the trunk-room, clad only in his B. V. D.'s and a frown of perplexity.

At this critical juncture his eye fell upon another suit, of plain black stuff, that his first search had overlooked. Dragging this out, he discovered it to be a costly dress-suit, which must have belonged to some other person altogether than the owner of the other clothes, for its size came close to his own.

True, it measured two inches too short in the sleeves and three in the trousers, and fitted with most uncomfortable snugness under the arms, but anyhow it would do—it would have to. And weren't tight clothes all the style, anyhow?

This suit, then, Jenkins decided to annex. Hobson's choice renders the best of us uncritical.

On a pinch, he reflected, he might pass himself off as a valet, a butler, or something of that kind, even though his negligee shirt, with black and purple stripes, was far from the appropriate thing under the circumstances.

He effectively disposed of his ruined clothing by doing it up in a neat bundle and depositing it in the trunk. Here, safely locked up, it was sure to escape observation much longer than as though he had tried to conceal it elsewhere. Jenkins now sat down to take stock of the situation, and felt very greatly relieved.

Things were coming pretty slick and speedy, after all—so his cogitations ran. What though fate had already handed him a few wallops? He was still on the job, was wise to the Everetts' lay, and had made progress with Sally, who had shown a real interest in him. There seemed to be kippy doings in store for him, ending with a pile of frog-skins and no doubt a jangle of wedding-bells—who could say?

"The pie I'm scheduled to cut," he concluded, "is so juicy that the custard is just on the point of leaking out. I should worry!"

Thus encouraged, and realizing that he might have to wait a long time before Sally could get speech with him again, he bethought him of how best to carry on the courtship so cavalierly begun. Sally had already written him a letter—why should he not respond with a poem?

Poetry, he knew, was the "open sesame" to every woman's heart. Poetry, therefore, he would write. His correspondence course in literature and familiar quotations, he realized, would prove invaluable. All he needed, now, was a lit-

tle paper, to enable him to burst into song.

Jenkins cast about him for paper, but found none at all, save the bag holding the remains of his lunch. He therefore devoured everything, and drank the milk—not very sour—as a preliminary to getting down to literary work.

He opened the trunk again that held his bundle of rags, hid the empty milk-bottle there also, locked the trunk again, and sat down to labor with the Muse. First spreading out the paper bag on a trunk, he sat down on another, found the bit of pencil Sally had given him, and fell to with a will.

As he wrote his quixotic heart began to beat high with the most rosy of hopes. Not even bruises, kicks, prunes, rain, grease, or the fact that he and his safety-razor had now been strangers for some time, could quell the ardor in his breast. His love transcended all such trivialities. Nothing, he felt, but death itself, could ever play the extinguisher on that immortal flame.

Jenkins had never written a line of poetry in his life, but he had long been a great magazine-verse fan, and knew rime when he saw it. Therefore, with entire confidence, he put the pencil into his mouth, bent to his task, and wrote boldly on the paper bag—which was not *too* greasy on one side:

SONNET TO SALLY.

More precious to me than gold or silver
Art thou, oh pearl of the—

Jenkins stopped, facing a sudden difficulty. The hurdle right before him seemed almost too high to jump over. What the devil would rime with "silver"?

"Bilver, dilver, filver, gilver," murmured he. "No, that won't do. Nothing to it. Hilver, jilver, kilver, lilver? Rotten! Milver, nilver, pilver, quilver, rilver? Punk! Tilver, vilver, wilver, yilver, zilver? Damn!"

Puzzled, he scratched his head. Then

all at once "Wilbur" occurred to him. Fine! The sonnet began again:

More precious to me than gold or silver,
Sweeter than chocolate made by Wilbur,
Art thou, oh pearl of all the girls
That I have known in the whole wide world!

Jenkins was well away from the post, now, and going strong. Swiftly he continued:

No pearl ever shone in Oman's pure depths
Like thou. Thy image I always have kept
Oh, true love of mine, you are divine,
Like roses for sunshine for thou I pine,
Until you speak one word that will make you
mine!

Day and night, in all my dreams,
I have dreamed of you, my matchless queen.
All others forsaking, the vow I have taken
To forever be true, though my heart be aching.

Came a pause. The Pierian Spring seemed to be running dry. Jenkins felt that if he only had his pipe, or even one of Henderson's "twofers," he could make a quick drive over the last bunker and put in on the green of Hesperides. But somehow the words wouldn't come. Never before had he realized just what the production of literature really meant. However, with determination he bent to his task and perspiringly concluded:

So say me not nay, oh fairest of maidens,
But speak the fond word with happiness laden,
In fact, the sweet Yes that will thrill my heart
and soul.

Awaiting your favor, yours respectfully, Ed Cole.

Having completed this masterpiece to his entire satisfaction, Jenkins felt that, in spite of some shortcomings, it was positively a bear. His heart beat a little fast as he reflected that it constituted a regular proposal, the first he had ever dared make her.

Never again could Sally feign ignorance of his intentions. He had done his part; now nothing remained but for her to say one little word, and all his dearest dreams would come to full fruition. The fire of youth burned in his veins; he

pressed a tremulous kiss upon the paper bag, and with abandon murmured:

"Oh, if she'd only slip me the high-sign, now, and come across with a 'Yes,' wouldn't it be all to the strawberries and cream?"

"Ed, Ed! Are you there?"

The words, half-whispered, brought him to his feet with an exclamation of joy.

"Here, Sally!" he answered, clutching the bag that bore his roundelay. "You told me to stick around, and I did. What's doing?"

"Shhh!" the girl cautioned, as she appeared at the doorway of the trunk-room. Then suddenly she stopped, blankly amazed at sight of his attire. A laugh that made Bill's cheeks burn rose to her lips.

"Ed Cole!" she exclaimed. "Where on earth did you ever get that absurdity?"

"In there, of course," and Jenkins pointed at the trunk. "Why?"

"I might have known," she murmured. "It's characteristic of you. But when Mr. Everett finds it out—"

"Forget it!" Jenkins replied indignantly. "What's the idea, giving me the merry ha-ha and trying to throw a scare into me? I did the best I could, Sally, and what more can any man do? You ought to hand me a medal, instead of—"

"Hush, Ed!" she warned, coming closer. "No matter, anyhow. I'll manage to get you away in spite of it."

"Get me away? What d' you mean, get me away? I told you, before, I was here to the finish, and that goes. I've copped the decision so far, haven't I? No fear-microbes in my make-up, Sally!" And Jenkins somewhat expanded his chest, under the black-and-purple stripes of the negligee that showed up prominently through his low-cut waistcoat. "If Everett, or Sam, or anybody else is hunting trouble, right here is where they can corner her!"

"Please go, Ed! Please!"

"What? Hit the grit back home, just

after I've kicked into the liveliest fun-fest ever? Never!"

"Listen, Ed. You must! There's trouble on board. Forces are at work, even now, to drag Malcolm Everett back to the asylum, and the Everetts are trying not only to prevent it, but also to turn the tables on that plot. If they find you here they'll take you for a spy, and—"

"But I'm the guy that put over his escape!" ejaculated Bill, amazed.

"No matter. The way you've acted will justify any suspicions. They'll treat you as a detective who, hired on that first case to help them, has now been bought over to the other side to harm them. The results will be very, *very* serious to you—"

"Yes, but just a little while ago you wanted to take me to this Everett guy," interrupted Jenkins, peering at her with wonder. "How about that?"

"I wasn't going to tell him you'd been aboard ever since we started. I only-intended to say I just happened to see you on the dock, this morning. But in this rig it's a rank impossibility, so now—"

"None of that cuts the least ice with me!" Jenkins declared, waving all the girl's objections aside. "The one and only proposition, now, is *you!*"

His breath was coming a little fast, and he felt strange, unknown quivers; but bravely he held his ground, despite the paper-on-the-wall tightness of the dress-suit, and eyed her with eager affection.

"All these other things are minus nix, to me, Sally. Stamp our romance with the hap-brand, and I'll fall for any orders you've got going; but till then, nothing doing on this run-away-home stuff. Can't you see me as the husband of Mrs. Sally Jenkins?"

"What do you mean, Ed?" the girl inquired, her eyes widening. "It can't be possible that you, *you*, are asking me to—"

"Sure I am! Why not? That's why I refuse to slam into this Everett bunch

with a degrading holler for mere kale," said Jenkins, advancing a little as though to take her in his arms, while she recoiled, staring in amazement. "That's not what I'm engaged in a grapple-fest with fate for, but *you!* Get me?"

"But, Ed—I—I'm a busy woman. I—I've got endless work to do, and really—" she stammered, very much agitated.

"No matter," Jenkins replied. "You're the only bead in the necklace for this kid. Ever since I first lamped you on Purington's farm, and you slid that pie onto my thatch, nobody has had a look-in with me. That's the straight dope, Sally, and no misplay. Any time you switch the matrimony-sign to 'clear,' I'm your huckle-berry. What say?"

She only peered at him with the most peculiar expression imaginable. Her lips moved, but no words came, save a feeble:

"Don't, Ed! Don't!"

"Why not? I admit I look pretty punk, Sally, but under this wrinkled shirt there beats a heart forever true. Can your business, kid, come into this world's series game of love with me, and we'll slam a pill of eternal bliss clean over right-field fence. Are you on, and is it yes?"

Sally turned aside, as though completely overcome by this impassioned wooing, and for a moment could not speak. Jenkins now saw her shoulders moving a little, as though possibly she might be giving way to tears. His heart was melted to pity. Laying a hand on her back he went on in a soothing tone:

"Dry the weeps, kid, and try to see me as the right guy. I admit I'm no financial bruin, but if I connect right with this Everett gag I'll soon have a bank-account with the O. K. stamp on it. And meantime, Mr. Henderson is punbling out \$12.75 a week to me, soon to be boosted to \$13.00. With that, and love, we can get by, can't we? So, taking my heart, head, and pocketbook all together, come across with the favorable decision, and we'll breeze under the wire the swiftest team that ever pranced!"

Entreatingly he held out his arms to gather her to his full-dress waistcoat, but she still held him back. Chokingly she answered:

"Don't ask me this, Ed—please!" She turned to him, her lips twitching a very little. Where, he wondered, were the tears she had just shed? Certainly traces of none were now visible.

"Why not?"

"The fact is, I—I'm not in the matrimonial market, at all."

"Who is it?" groaned Jenkins, sinking into black despair.

"Who's *who*?" she asked, astonished.

"Him! The lucky guy?"

"Oh! Why, nobody. There's no 'lucky guy,' Ed. See here?" And she held out her left hand, its strong white fingers quite destitute of rings. "What I mean is that I'm not even thinking of marriage at all. I'm just now up to my eyes in a matter that may possibly put Mr. Everett's persecutors where they belong, in the pen. How can I give marriage even a single thought?"

"No, Ed, don't be foolish, there's a good boy. Go back home, wait at Henderson's for Mr. Everett's representative to call, and you'll come out with flying colors, richer than you ever dreamed of being. Won't you, Ed—won't you, now, to please me, try just this once to use a *little* common sense?"

Firmly Jenkins shook his head in absolute negation.

"It's you or nothing, Sally!" he doggedly persisted. "Can that, once for all, my love. What? When I've located *you* again, you want me to slide back home to the smokes and wait till some legal duck paddles up with a wad and throws it to me, disdainful, like a bone to a dog? Forget it!"

"But, Ed—"

"And leave you all alone and unprotected on the bosom of the deep? The canal, I mean? Back up, Sally; you're dabbling with the wrong yeast! Rather than do that I'd make good on what Simon Sam says I am, seize this yacht by

force, raise the black flag and go to it, strong!"

Sally considered thoughtfully a moment. Then she asked:

"Ed, is that your final word on the subject? You won't go, unless there's a disturbance and Sam has to drag you out?"

"I'd like to see him!" Jenkins defied authority.

"Are you firmly determined not to listen to reason?"

"Sure I am—no, no, I don't mean that, Sally. I mean that I'm going to stick like glue, wherever you are. That's on the level, kid; no if's, and's, or but's!"

Silently the girl regarded him in the vague light, trying to fathom his sincerity. At length, convinced that she could not alter his decision by any argument whatsoever, she bowed her head as though with deep regret.

"Here!" Jenkins suddenly exclaimed, holding out the paper bag with the sonnet thereon. "Take a slant at this, Sally. It's poetry. A sonnet, written all by me, on the best materials I had. I framed it from tap of the gong to final count, just for you. Read it, and then put the proposition to yourself whether a man that can turn out such smooth ones as that, in his poetry-works, would ever beat it away from his one best love-bet, for any old reward whatever, even including the \$921.17?"

Sally took the sonnet in silence, and let her eyes drift over the lines. Once more her mouth began twitching, and for the second time she turned away as though to hide some deep emotion.

"Sally, my lady-bird, is it—yes?" demanded Jenkins, yearning to crush her to him in both arms. "It is, it *is*, isn't it?"

He tried to seize her hand, to draw her to him; but Sally slid away, and—still keeping her face averted—almost ran out of the trunk-room. Jenkins heard her breathing most unsteadily, as if suppressing herself with the greatest difficulty.

"There, there, Sally!" he ventured to

call after her, "don't take it so rough; don't cry, kid, don't cry!" Anxiously he peered after her, from the door of his concealment, a worried, troubled figure as he stood there trembling and dry-lipped, in the very snug dress-suit.

"Wait till I come back, Ed!" he heard her voice, faintly echoing along the passageway to him. "I'll be back, soon. Be very sure to wait!"

"For your 'yes,' my one and only?" he exclaimed with quivering eagerness; but beyond a faint reverberation of his words from the metallic corridor, he got no answer to his plea of passionate hope.

CHAPTER X.

SALLY DISPOSES. /

AFTER a few minutes, which seemed a veritable eternity to his anxious and palpitant heart, the peerless Sally returned. Tremblingly Jenkins faced her, his soul shaken by alternate hopes and fears; for now, he felt, the crucial moment was at hand, and the answer was about to be delivered which should raise him to empyrean heights of bliss or plunge him below the nadir of despair.

As a matter of fact, however, Sally brought — instead of her answer — only four ham sandwiches, a piece of squash pie, and a small pot of coffee.

"Here, Ed," she smiled, seeming to have quite forgotten all about his proposal, "here's a little bite for you. I know you must be starving. You can stay on board, and I'll feed you, if you'll promise me one thing—just one, Ed—and keep your promise. Is it a go?"

"Anything in the world," he exclaimed, "just so you don't back me into a siding, lock the switch and lose the key, my angel!"

"All right, then. What I want you to promise me is this, that—"

"How about your answer to that poem, Sally?"

"One thing at a time, please. As I was saying, you must promise to stay

right here in this trunk-room till I give you permission to leave it, and not wander up on deck, or anywhere at all. Is that a bargain?"

"Anything you say, goes," he answered, "except 'no.' I'm stone-deaf to that word, Sally." And he began with a good appetite to demolish one of the sandwiches, for though replete with affection, he was still inwardly hollow. "I'll do anything you say, if you won't turn me down. I admit I'm not much on looks, Sally, in these glad rags and with a crop of bushes growing, but my heart's got the O. K. brand stamped all over it. Just slide me a few smokes from Everett's humidor, and I'll stick around here till there's ice in Vesuvius. Only don't stay away too long at a time, or I'll mildew for lack of the sunshine of your lamps!"

The girl smiled adorably and promised to come often to the trunk-room, but denied him the boon of tobacco.

"You can't smoke here, Ed," she told him. "You might be discovered, if you did, and that would upset all our plans."

"Ours—yours and mine?" asked Jenkins.

"Of course! And now—*au revoir*."

Jenkins waved a half-eaten sandwich to detain her.

"Wait a minute!" he mumbled thickly, by reason of a big bite he had just taken.

"Well?"

"What do you think of that sonnet I slipped you?"

"Some sonnet, Ed!"

"That so? Hit you O. K., did it?"

"It's immense," declared Sally, with a smile of pure delight. "I don't know when I've enjoyed anything half so much. And you mean it?"

"Every letter! See here, now, what's the use of stalling any longer? I know you're on a job you can't kick out of, till it's buttoned up, but after that will you be my turtle-dove, till death us do part?"

"Why anticipate?" she inquired demurely. "One thing at a time, Ed, as I

told you before. It strikes me you're awfully impatient! Wait a little while, Ed—and meantime, I wish you'd write me another poem. Won't you, to please me?"

"Surest thing you know, kid, if my think-motor don't get stalled. But I'll sure do my darndest."

"How delicious," the girl murmured. "Do you know, Ed, you're a positive genius?"

"Nix on that genius stuff!" he resented. "But when it comes to being sincere, I'm it. After all this rough-house is over, *won't* you slip me the signal to come out of the block onto the main line for Happyville?"

"Don't tease, Ed. Finish up your coffee, all of it—that's a good fellow. Fine! Now," she added, her voice more businesslike. "now I'm going to bring you some blankets, so you can make a bed in that corner and have a good, long sleep. And after that—"

"You'll ring the go-ahead bell?"

"Wait and see!" she whispered, with a most peculiar smile, which set Jenkins's heart beating wildly again. Then she departed for blankets. Coming back in a few minutes with a good supply, she made Jenkins's lowly bed for him: while he, seated debonairely in his dress-suit on the edge of a trunk with his hands in his trouser-pockets, looked on her with unspeakable longing and whistled "You're the Only Chicken I Can See!" gently through his front teeth. Then, giving him her hand, she said:

"Good-by, now, and the best of good luck go with you, whatever happens. In my journey through life, Ed, few personalities have ever cheered and entertained me as you have done. Again, good luck and—good-by!"

"What do you mean, good-by?" demanded Jenkins, perplexed. "Aw revaw is the correct dope now, isn't it?"

She gave no answer, but withdrew her hand—which Jenkins vainly tried to kiss—and without another word departed. Deeply puzzled, and just a little bit wor-

ried, Jenkins stared at the blankets on the floor. Hadn't he slept enough, already, without being put to bed again, so soon? Nothing to this sleep proposition at all. He would sit down and try to frame another sonnet. Surely, since the first had made so deep an impression, the second would clinch matters and infallibly win him Sally's heart and hand.

Jenkins therefore once again applied himself to literature, but somehow or other the thoughts wouldn't come. He yawned and stretched, tried again, yawned more compellingly than before, and now with some astonishment realized that he was growing downright sleepy.

"Gee, that's funny," said he. "My thinkery is sure on the fritz. Me for a little nap, and I'll feel better. Must be this close air, down here, that's got a collar-and-elbow on my bean."

With the idea that a few minutes' slumber would clear his now half-dazed senses, he lay down, fully dressed, on the pile of blankets, yawned again, stretched wearily—and almost on the instant fell into a black and dreamless sleep.

The environment that greeted his returning consciousness, after a period of time he had no possible way of estimating, was so extraordinarily surprising that for a few minutes he could not believe the evidence of his own eyes.

Blinking about him, mute with astonishment, he lay there on a bed—a real bed now, though a poor one—and wondered that any dream could be as realistic as this.

But gradually, after having pinched himself a couple of times, he became convinced it was no dream at all, but that he was confronted by a hard, cold, and alarming reality. The appalling truth was borne in upon him that he no longer lay concealed in his hiding-place on board the Victory, but that he was actually in a cheap, mean room of some house about which he knew nothing whatsoever.

Stabbed with wo and filled with agonizing fears that now, after all his pains

and hardships. Sally and the reward—never forgetting the \$921.17—had once more escaped his grasp, he scrambled off the bed. To his surprise, he found himself in his stocking-feet. His boots were nowhere visible, though his imitation Panama with the green and purple band, that he had given Sally, lay beside the bed.

There he stood in the middle of the floor a moment, dazed, wild-eyed, and unshaven, with an aching head, a most peculiar taste in his mouth, his hair all tousled up, his dress-suit badly wrinkled, and the dregs of despair trickling through his chilled heart.

All about him he stared, gasping like a fish out of water. Then his fists clenched, his lips moved, and in a voice of wild protest he ejaculated, voicing a supreme anguish:

“Holy suffering pickere! Stung again!”

Jenkins was well justified in this opinion. Do you blame him for being alarmed? He had gone to sleep on the yacht, fully confident of justice and Sally. Now, all his roseate hopes had evaporated like wraiths before the sun, everything seemed lost, and the depths of despair yawned.

Transfixed, and moving as in a trance—he still felt very dopy, very queer—the unfortunate young man stared at the rickety bed, bureau, and chairs, which plainly conveyed the information that he was in some low-grade lodging-house, even far beneath the none too elegant standard set by Mrs. Elvira Spriggs.

Lurching unsteadily toward the wavy mirror, he stared into his own pale, distressed countenance; covered with bruises and scandalously in need of a shave and wash; and as he looked, something very like a tear welled in his good eye—not the black-and-blue one.

“If this don’t cop my en-tire herd of goats, what does?” he whispered tensely as he turned toward the only window of the miserable room. He let the roller-shade run up with a clattering bang.

A most dispiriting sight met his gaze. Four stories below him extended a scene of “niggard poverty’s sad disarray,” consisting largely of an alley cumbered with ash-barrels—one tipped over and strewing its contents into a puddle of scummy water—also several clothes-lines decked with disgraceful raiment, and a variety of tin cans; the whole lying under a fine and chilly drizzle of rain.

An ell of the building, at his left, supported a rickety iron fire-escape, one gallery of which ran in front of the window where he was standing.

A moment’s consideration of this spectacle told Jenkins only too clearly the bitter truth.

“*Shanghaied ashore!*” he ejaculated, with a heart-broken groan.

The situation, as now developing, seemed both painful and peculiar. Jenkins had often read stories about innocent men being carried to sea, while drugged, and subjected to fearful hardships and abuses. But this was the first instance he remembered when a man, desirous of remaining on a boat, had been invertedly shanghaied.

As the full misery of his predicament dawned on him he grasped his aching head in both hands, clutched his hair, and groaned:

“Good night! What will Sally say now?”

No ray of consolation lightened his exceeding gloom as he stood there gazing out at the dejected wetness of the scene. The blues-bug, he pondered, had bitten him again and bitten deep. Fate had once more turned the fishy optic on him, and all was lost.

His principal cause of wo lay in the fact that now Sally must infallibly think him a coward and a quitter. After all his promises of undying fidelity, what other construction could she put on his disappearance save that the threats of Simoon Sam and the danger of being taken for a spy by Malcolm Everett had brought out a yellow streak in him and made him desert the yacht?

The words "dastardly poltroon" rose up before him, from some forgotten tale; and as he imagined Sally applying them to him with bitter scorn he groaned once more and wiped his forehead, which had become unpleasantly moist.

All hopes of winning his heart's idol now seemed lost. How he had come to this unpleasant place he could not imagine, rack his wits as he would; but the fact that he *was* there and that Sally must think herself abandoned could not fail to wreck his chances for all time.

Only one faint gleam of comfort remained. He might possibly—just possibly—be able to convince her of his loyalty and prove to her that Malcolm Everett or Simoon or some other miscreant had wrought this outrage. A sense of wounded dignity and injured justice boiled within his veins. Yes, surely Everett or the unspeakable Sam must be the villain at the bottom of this plot.

Jenkins saw it all clearly now. Through motives of niggardly cowardice, or perhaps because he, too, aspired to Sally's hand and found in Jenkins a dreaded rival, Everett had conspired with Sam to work this infamy on him, defenseless and asleep.

He had discovered Jenkins in the trunk-room, of course, had caused his minions to drug and bind him and carry him away; and then, still in possession of liberty, wealth, and Sally, had sailed proudly on along the canal! By way of crowning insult, and also to keep Jenkins from pursuit, he had mockingly restored the imitation Panama, but had robbed his victim of his shoes. Could villainy stoop lower?

As Jenkins realized all this, and saw how foully he had been tricked and made a mock of, he ground his teeth and waved his fists in black rage. Greatly he desired to drink the heart's blood of Sam and Everett.

"Judas!" he spat. "Benedict Arnold! The guy that hit Billy Patterson! They were all white men, white clear through, 'side of *you!*"

And a fierce passion for revenge leaped in his blood. His manhood reasserted itself, despite his bizarre apparel, his headache, and the odd taste in his mouth. Yes, though Jenkins had always been mild-mannered, inoffensive, and law-abiding, he felt that at that moment he could gladly have torn Malcolm Everett limb from limb, hurled him to the lions, or, at the very least, have denounced him to the authorities, and without a quiver of remorse have seen him sentenced to ninety days on the rock-pile.

Assuredly, he decided while he began pacing the floor of the dingy room in his stocking-feet, this man should not hand him anything like this and get away with it. No wallop of this character should pass unavenged.

"Up and after him!" he exclaimed. "Though he's still several laps in the lead, so was the hare at one time of the race, but the tortoise breezed under the wire first, after all. With any kind of going I'll hand him his, yet, and cop all the prizes, or my name's not W. H. Jenkins, of New York."

This decision now fully taken, he saw that he must act quickly. His first task was to examine his financial resources and get a line on the sinews of war in his possession. He therefore turned out the contents of his pockets on the bed, viz.: his keys, a penknife, a partly punched meal-ticket good only at the Busy Wasp, and the same old forty-seven cents that he had started the adventure with.

No amount of counting and recounting could make those funds any larger. Jenkins realized the total inadequacy of the sum, and bitterly regretted the fact that his watch was hung up—as usual—at Rosenkatz's. Perhaps the pockets of the dress-suit had not been thoroughly explored? He decided to frisk them once more. Whatever he should find, he intended to keep, as his by every right.

"Gee!" he exclaimed with surprise, as his questing fingers dipped into the inside waistcoat pocket, a place he had till now overlooked. "Envelope, eh?"

It was indeed an envelope, securely fastened with a safety-pin to the satin lining of the garment. With trembling fingers he boggled it out and felt it over. Surely, something of value lay within, for it contained papers. More astonishing still, it was addressed with his name, in a firm feminine hand which he recognized in a second as the same which had penned the letter Sally had thrust under the door of the lazaret.

Jenkins's heart began to pound with joy and exultation, despite the fact that his wet clothes and stocking-feet had given him the makings of a cold, and his nose was already running. When one's lady-love smiles, what is a cold in the head? And Sally, after all, was true to him!

Unable to prevent the villainous outrage that Simoon and Everett had perpetrated, or to communicate with him in any other way, she had taken this means of assuring him not to lose hope. What else could the letter contain but directions how to outwit the malefactors and rejoin her? Might it not, more than probably, even contain the longed-for "Yes" he was so eagerly expecting?

With fingers that shook so that he could scarcely tear open the stiff and heavy envelope, Jenkins extracted his beloved one's communication, unfolded it, and read the following incredible letter:

CHAPTER XI.

FLIGHT.

Aboard the Victory,
Thursday Night.

DEAR ED:

When you read this, I suppose you'll be terribly upset, but you must believe me when I say I've acted for the best—done, in fact, the only possible thing, and put you in the way of fortune without letting you run any of the risks that would have been fatal to all your hopes of ever getting that reward.

You see, Ed, it was this way. Sooner or later you were bound to have been discovered, and the fact that you were stowing away would have terribly enraged Mr. Everett, senior, and his brother, to say nothing of Malcolm. They'd

have surely taken you for a spy, as I explained last night. Also, Sam is furious about you, particularly because you outwitted him in getting aboard and in escaping—as he thinks. He has sworn to "cut your heart out" for having looted the ship's stores, and particularly for having written on his white paint. If he'd found you on board, the consequences would have been terrible.

You wouldn't take my advice and go, Ed, so I simply *had* to do this. Just how I managed it doesn't matter; but I did. I decided to put your shoes at the stern of the yacht instead of your Panama, as more surely indicating that you'd swum ashore, and so I returned the hat.

After you'd drunk that blessed coffee and gone to sleep, I had you carried ashore and left where you wouldn't be apt to be found. It was awfully hard to do, Ed, and cost like sin; and of course I hated to do it. But I've saved you, anyhow, and that's my justification, because really and truly you're a peculiarly likeable young man, and I couldn't bear to see you come to grief.

Now, Ed, take the fifty dollars enclosed, get yourself shoes and a suit, and go back to New York. Wait there for the reward. I'll arrange everything, and nobody will ever know that you've been aboard the Victory. The damage done will be passed off as the work of some drunken rough, and everything will come out smiling for you.

Don't misjudge me, Ed. I've only acted for your own safety and welfare, because of the womanly sympathy I can't help feeling for a man of your delightful temperament. Be reasonable, just for once, and obey me. And remember that whatever befalls, or by what strange paths your lofty though bizarre ideals lead you, you will always and forever have a firm friend and interested spectator in me.

With real regret at this parting, and hopes that sometime our paths may cross once more, I am,

Ever most sincerely yours,

SALLY.

"Jerusalem!" Bill ejaculated, with heart-wrung anguish, as he pressed a trembling hand over his eyes and staggered backward. "This—this is certainly dragging on the bottom, and then some!"

Torn with grief, he slumped down on the bed and with lack-luster eyes stared at this amazing epistle. Outrageous, was it not? His idol, his pearl of price, thus to have betrayed him—thus to have canned him with a pinch of white powder, shoved him into a cheap joint, flung him

a fifty-bean note, and skiddooed! It was too much, much too much. Heart could not endure it; soul turned sick.

"Gee," he quavered, with welling tears, "I wish to gosh I could kick off and end this grilling, P.D.Q.!"

After a few minutes of poignant grief, with his damaged and unshaven face buried in both palms as he sat on the edge of the bed, Jenkins's sense of justice began once more to assert itself. A just and righteous indignation began to burn in his breast.

"By the nine gods" he swore that though Sally had again escaped him, with mockery and derision, he would follow her, follow her and demand his rights, forever and forever—or, at least, as far as the end of the Canal.

This determination calmed his troubled spirit. He read the letter over once more, hoping to fathom its inner meaning and by the powers of his reason extract its true essence, as a bee "despoils the inmost treasure of the bloom."

His second perusal convinced him it must bear some double significance. Its very openness and its appearance of guileless truth were proof positive, to him, that it could not possibly mean just what it said. A quotation from Byron flitted across his fevered brain. "Never believe a woman or an epitaph." Yes, surely the letter must have some hidden intent.

Either Sally was now under Malcolm Everett's complete domination, he decided, and was trying to play him false, or else she loved him and dared not make it plain, for fear of Everett. Some of her phrases inclined him to one view, some to the other.

But even then he failed to understand her boldness. The whole thing had wrapped him in its toils, like a proverbial fly in a spider's web. In the end he gave a judgment of "thumbs down" against her, decided she was as false as she was fair, and vowed he would right the wrong done him if it took every drop of his heart's warmest blood.

The question of the necessary funds

to carry out this determination now again rose in his mind, and he examined the envelope for the fifty dollars that should have been enclosed. Nothing there.

"More raw work!" muttered Jenkins angrily. "As a rough toss, this takes the dust from none!"

All at once the idea occurred to him to look on the floor. See! There lay a yellow-back, gladdening his sight with its welcome hue. It was coyly nestling in a corner by the wash-stand, where he had evidently jerked it when he had ripped open the envelope. Now it beckoned him, even as that fatal brass baggage-check, months ago, had beckoned him on Sixth Avenue, at the beginning of all his perils, woes, and hardships.

With an exclamation of joy, he snatched up the money. Yes, there it was—a fresh, new fifty-dollar bill; a mere picayune, true, compared with what was rightfully due him, but still quite worth while. The touch of the fifty stimulated Jenkins's ambition, and once more fired his hopes. You can do a lot with fifty beans, judiciously expended—and Jenkins knew he was judicious, if any man ever was. Over to the window he carried it, examined it closely to make sure it was genuine, and then stood a moment undecided what to do.

Should he obey the deceiver, return to Henderson—if Hendy would take him back—and wait for the reward, which probably would never come? Or should he pursue the Victory, by fair means or foul wreak vengeance on all who had conspired against him, carry off the recalcitrant maiden, and claim his own with bold determination, like the brave and fearless buccaneers of the good old roaring days?

While this hotly contested mental debate was forward, it numbed his sense of pride to such an extent that he could not fully perceive the shame involved in taking money from this woman. But all at once a tide of revulsion swept over his chivalric soul.

What? Would *Don Quixote* have

taken his scornful *Dulcinea's* gold? Huh! I guess not! How, then, should William H. Jenkins stoop to Sally's fifty bucks, after having been thus spurned, humiliated, and made mock of?

His face began to burn at the mere thought, and with a sudden exclamation of "She's in the wrong stall this time! Nix on the fifty!" he angrily threw the offending and contaminating legal tender out of the open window!

A rash act? Some! For Jenkins's financial condition was now desperate in the extreme. He was a hundred and fifty miles from even the slight imitation of home afforded by Mrs. Elvira Spriggs's domicile, he was hungry, dirty, sore, tired, and thirsty; he had only the tight dress-suit to his back, and his total cash, as per last balance, was still only forty seven cents.

Nevertheless Jenkins felt a lofty and ennobling joy as the treasury note, still closely folded, sailed down through the drizzle, fell on the fire-escape of the ell, dropped through, and finally came to rest on a window-sill two stories below.

"Take back your gold!" cried Jenkins, peering down at the little slip of yellow paper now coyly nestling beyond his reach with a peculiarly tantalizing invitation. "Nobody can put the sleep-powder on me, the way you did, and then expect me to mitt their coin, not even you!"

I regret to state, but a strict adherence to the truth compels me to, that inside of three minutes by the clock Jenkins was bitterly regretting the undoubted folly of his conduct. Because now, for the first time, the idea had just occurred to him that he was not obliged to consider this most essential cash as a humiliating gift from the fair and false one.

On the contrary, whether he should return to New York or still pursue the yacht, he could accept it as merely a temporary loan, a debt of honor infallibly to be repaid at the earliest possible moment.

A weekly stipend of twelve dollars and seventy-five cents in Manhattan makes

the repayment of fifty dollars something of a lengthy task, but still Jenkins knew he could accomplish it in time—that is, if he could ever find Sally's address. Thus his conscience would be set entirely at ease, and he could purchase viands, raiment, and transportation, without which all his plans were null and void.

Surveying the folded bill, so near and yet so far, he indulged in vain self-reproaches of his folly.

"Some ivory bean, all right," he murmured. "Had the mazu right in my fin, and then canned it, just like that. And now I'm stacking into a frost that makes the north pole look like Mexico with the lid off. Oh, raw, raw!"

Jenkins's despair took on an ultramarine hue. He suddenly realized that he couldn't move from that room without probably getting pinched and sent up as a common thief. A young man without a hat or shoes, and wearing a dress-suit three sizes too small, cannot roam the streets of a rainy morning without exciting suspicion.

Our adventurer perceived that he was now firmly caught in a trap of unconquerable difficulties, unless he could lay hands on that fifty once more. He decided, therefore, to risk all in the attempt. Once he had it in his pocket, the other details would be easy, and the remainder of his campaign could be worked out at leisure.

He could undress and go to bed, wait for somebody to come, and then send out for boots and clothes, or—or fix it some way. The first essential was to get the coin.

His mind made up, Jenkins acted at once. He put on the gauzy-banded Panama, and quietly stepped out on the dripping fire-escape, in his stocking-feet. Up and down he peered in the gray morning light, to make quite sure nobody was observing him. Then silently and quickly he walked along the shaking iron slats, turned the corner of the ell, and began to clamber down the first of the two ladders that would bring him to his goal.

"Cinch!" he murmured as he descended. "Nothing to it, after all!"

A profound gratitude lay upon him that the hour was yet early, and that, so far, he had laid eyes on no sign of life in the back-alley, save a cadaverous feline. Even though guilty of no wrong-doing, he knew his appearance would infallibly condemn him on sight.

Unnoted, however, he went on down the ladder, walked along the next level of the fire-escape—it shook and rattled alarmingly—and he was about to descend the second ladder when all at once a childish treble from below exclaimed in startled accents:

"Hully gee!"

Looking down, with something of dismay, he perceived a dirty and objectionable ragamuffin standing in the wet alley with staring eyes, open mouth, and an expression of intense amaze. This child held a long string in its unclean fist, hitched to the tail of a defunct rat, which it had been artlessly dragging around through the mud.

Suddenly the little innocent turned and called loudly to some unseen companion:

"Hey, Chimmie! Look wot's loose!"

With presence of mind Jenkins fished a penny from the pocket of his decolleté vest, tossed it down, and sternly commanded:

"Beat it! Take that, and blow!"

Just as the first boy was picking up the coin, another artless creature of similar aspect appeared, also staring.

"Say, who does it belong to?" he inquired in an awed voice, pointing upward at Jenkins.

"Search *me!*" answered the first, "but it's got its pockets full o' cents. Lookit!" The young precious held out a penny on a palm awful to contemplate. "It's jus' now trun one down, 'fore you got here."

"Hey! Go on now, skate!" ejaculated our adventurer, in mortal trepidation lest this colloquy might bring others to the scene. "Here! Here's a jitney. Now, can that, and fade!"

This time he threw down a nickel. The little dears scuffled for it, in a sodden ash-pile, and the second comer grabbed the hush-money. By this time Jenkins was half-way down the ladder that would bring him to the level where the bill was lying. But all at once he heard again the voice of the first cherub, louder than ever:

"Ooooh, lookit! It's got nickels, too. Maybe it's got dimes! If we stick around, maybe it' ll trun us down a dime!"

"Gee!" commented the other, gazing up longingly. "If we only had it on your string, 'stead o' that no-good rat, an' had a hand-organ to go wit' it, we ---we'd be *rich!*"

Blushing hotly, and in deadly panic, Jenkins hastened his way down the ladder, and had already reached the level of the bill, when a sudden harsh shout thrilled him with alarm.

"Hey, you! What you doin', up there?"

Startled almost off his balance, and with an expression of guilt that would certainly have hanged him if murder had been involved, Jenkins whirled round and peered down the two remaining stories. To his inexpressible chagrin and horror, he perceived an officer of the law, in uniform, staring up at him with the most menacing of expressions.

Jenkins understood it all. Of course the officer, whom bad fortune had sent past the end of the alley at this supremely critical instant, had noted the amaze of the cherubim, and had come down to investigate it for himself. Now, seeing our hero in the most extraordinary apparel and compromising situation that can well be imagined, he very naturally assumed the worst. Raising his club, he shouted again:

"Hey, you nut! Come on down out o' there, or—"

"But I—I'm only getting my money back!" Jenkins protested, as honestly and earnestly as he could. "I guess I've got a right to climb around this fire-escape looking for my own money, haven't I?"

"You're in wrong, kiddo," the officer heartlessly derided him. It was quite obvious he declined to accept Jenkins's view of the situation. "Up a tree for yours, 'o, not skippin' an' chipperin' up an' down fire-escapes in the rain in a dress-suit an' stockings, an' with that scream of a lid! Come along, now, come along out o' that! They're waitin' breakfast ter you, up at the Home, on the hill. *Tssst, tssst!*" he chirped, as one calls squirrels in the park. "I've got a nice pocketful o' nuts here, an' a lump o' sugar, too. Come, birdy, come!"

"See here, you big stiff!" retorted Jenkins, with blood in his eye, as he leaned over the railing and shook an infuriated fist at the base minion of the law. "I get you, O. K. You think the shingles on my roof are loose, and my attic's to let, don't you? Well, guess again, lobster! They thought the same thing for a while at Hamilton Asylum, till I got away from 'em. Back up, you kettle-bellied mutt!"

The officer's only answer was a coarse, heartless laugh, and a move in the direction of the building.

"One o' you kids beat it down to the corner an' tell 'em to send the wagon," he remarked to the seraphs; whereupon both departed at top speed, with the rat still dragging—bounding and ricocheting in wide arcs—till they vanished from sight along the alley.

Jenkins now perceived that the good old motto of "haste makes waste" never would apply in this crisis. At all hazards he must grab his fifty and scuttle up the ladder to his room again, before reenforcements should arrive.

Therefore, without paying the officer any further heed, he proceeded rapidly along the fire-escape, with his dress-coat tails blowing in the morning breeze. Now he was only ten or twelve feet away from the window-sill where the fugitive fifty was still coily reposing.

"Never mind," thought he. "It 'll all

come out in the wash. Hither, my beauty!"

Already he seemed to feel the bill in his grasp, when very suddenly a window opened, a fat hand and arm—clad in a greasy, red kimono—was thrust out from between dirty lace curtains, the bill vanished; the window banged down and was locked, and a shade was drawn, all happening in a trifle less time than it takes to tell it.

"Suffering cuttlefish!" wailed Jenkins in accents of the wildest anguish and despair. Toward the window he darted, entirely in vain. Only the blank yellow shade presented its impassive face to his horror-stricken gaze. His frantic knocking on the glass evoked not the slightest response whatever.

Sick with wo, despoiled of his all, wet and cold, and now surely branded with the stigma of lunacy, our adventurer did the one and only possible thing remaining to do—turned, and in all the singular eccentricity of his involuntary full-dress, began running up the ladder toward the upper stories with an agility of which he had never even suspected himself capable.

Above him a window opened with a slam. One agonized glance told Jenkins this window lay between him and his own. In it he clearly perceived the figure of a man in shirtsleeves, observing him with hostility and gesturing to the officer on the ground, who was now shouting vain commands of:

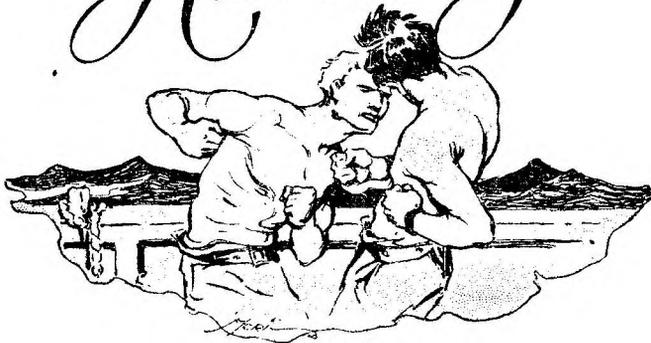
"Hey, you bug, you nut! Come down out o' that! Come down!"

Somewhere, not far off, Jenkins heard a sudden clangor—a gong! Came the swift rattle of wheels over rough cobblestones.

"The roof for mine!" he panted—a strange place for a buccaneer, but the only one left—as now, practically penniless, an outcast, and a fugitive from the law, he scrambled in his stockings up the shaking ladders in a wild attempt at freedom.

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.

Hard Fists and Hard Feelings



by

William
Slavens
McNutt

THE mate's step on the dock was unsteady. We heard the clack of his heels on the poop of the old bark as he jumped down from the gangplank and immediately after the softer thud of his body as he stumbled and fell headlong. Old Captain Watson winked at me, shifted his heels from the cabin table and assumed a magisterial attitude.

"Watch me make him jump," he whispered mischievously.

The mate staggered into the cabin and stood swaying before the door of his room, peering stupidly at us. Both eyes were black and swollen, his prominent nose bore abundant evidence of ill usage, his lips were puffed, one cheek was adorned with a jagged cut and his shore clothes were awry and torn.

"Carter, you're drunk," Captain Watson reproved him sternly.

"Yes, sir, sorry, sir," Carter mumbled, and bent unsteadily to search for the keyhole.

"You been fightin'," the captain further accused him.

"Yes, sir," Carter again admitted,

meekly, accommodatingly. He straightened up and made a grimace that was as near to a grin as his battered features could be coerced.

"Martin Flaherty o' the Fanny Doom," he explained thickly, "him that I had the row with when we was layin' off Hong-Kong that time—him an' me—we met."

"Did you lick him?"

"It was some fight," the mate evaded, and then: "He's a good man."

"An' after it was over you blew up-town together an' got stewed, huh?"

The mate studied his bruised and swollen knuckles with a shamefaced air.

"Yes, sir," he admitted. "Sorry, sir. G'night."

He made a lucky stab at the keyhole and reeled into his room. We heard the thump of his body as he rolled into his berth and a moment later a wholesome, hearty snore.

"Good man—Carter," the captain said earnestly. "Been bad blood between him an' Flaherty for ten years. They never had a chance to get together before."

"Chance!" I echoed. "If this fellow Flaherty looks anything like your mate I'd call it mutual bad luck."

"I said 'chance!' Son, they can law till the tides quit ebbin', an' make it a penitentiary offense to slam a shirkin' sailor on the jaw when he won't do his work at sea; the lily fingers can yell about brutality an' start trouble in Congress over a bloody nose, but I'll tell you this: There's hard feelin's that nothin' on earth but hard fists 'll melt, an' tough knuckles well used have brought many a ship safe to port, stood off many a killin' an' saved many a friendship.

"Mind, I don't stand for any bucko mates. None of my ships have ever been called blood boats.

"I've seen things done by masters an' mates that make my blood boil when I think of 'em. I don't hold for ridin' sailormen for nothin' as some do. But I tell you you can hammer hate out of a man with your Lare fists sometimes when it can't be got out no other way; an' likewise you can rid yourself of your hard feelin's by playin' a tattoo with your knuckles on the man you hate when you couldn't get it out of your system any other way. Lick a man with a gun, a knife, a belayin' pin—any kind of a weapon—an' if he's a man an' gets well he'll come back harder than ever. But get two white men with a grouch together barehanded, and if they are white they'll part with the hate hammered clean out of 'em. I see it proved once on a whalerman down in the South Seas."

He filled his pipe from a big tobacco jar on the cabin table, lit it carefully, and took up the story:

I was mate with Captain Jack Castle then in the Sunrise out o' New Bedford. We was whalin' down in the South Pacific with a checkerboard crew, one watch white—shipped at home—an' the other a black one picked up at the Cape De Verde Islands on the way out. We'd picked up five hundred barrels off the

Patagonia coast an' was rollin' down before the wind on the edge o' the off-shore grounds, with the mastheads manned when we sighted the Maxwell.

"We'll have a gam with her, Mr. Watson," Cap'n Castle says as soon as we made her out. "You know Cap'n O'Brien don't you?"

"I do," says I, grinnin', "an' your old shipmate, Danny O'Brien, his son, an' likewise Danny's sister, Mary O'Brien."

He got red in the face an' leaned his elbows on the rail, starin' away at the topsails of the Maxwell that we could see from the deck.

"She's a mighty fine girl," he says after a minute, real soft an' kind o' scared like. "She's the finest little woman in the world an' I'm the luckiest man alive. We're goin' to be married as soon as we fetch home again. She'll be—along with us next trip."

He turned an' looked down through the skylight o' his cabin, the cabin that 'd be theirs next trip, an' I had the sense to walk off an' leave him alone.

I liked the lad better for the meek sort o' way he talked o' the girl. Them handsome boys is liable to take women too much for granted. Handsome? Say! He was only twenty-five an' the Sunrise was his first ship. He stood six foot in his socks, weighed a hundred an' ninety an' he had a face like them you see on statues. He had one o' these creamy lookin', tough skins that you couldn't burn with anything short of fire. Come wind or weather an' blazin' sun he'd bronze up a wee mite, but he never blistered or got red or swarthy like most will. His hair was thick an' glossy black, and the lashes around his big gray eyes was the longest an' thickest I ever see on a man.

Him an' Danny O'Brien had been shipmates their first trip before the mast, an' from then on it had been a race between 'em to see which got a master's ticket first. Jack beat him to it 'cause Danny was too much of a bucko. He

was rough with his men an' always in trouble. The company turned him down on that account, an' he had to shipmate with his old man again after Jack got his ship. He didn't squeal, but everybody knew it burned him.

"Steer in ahead o' the Maxwell an' let me know when he hauls aback," Cap'n Jack says to me. "Stop all work an' have the decks swept down."

He hustled below an' a minute later I hear him yellin' for the boy to bring him his gammin' togs. When the Maxwell hauled up her fores'l an' backed her mainyards a couple o' hours later an' I called him on deck he was all fixed up for church in his silk hat, frock coat an' all the trimmin's.

We was runnin' down on the Maxwell with the wind on our port quarter an' was only about a mile off when down from the mizzen top comes the song we'd all been listenin' for ever since we struck the feedin' grounds.

"Blo-o-o-ows," the lookout yells. "There blo-o-ows."

Forgot was the girl he hadn't seen since he left New Bedford, forgot was everything except that a whale was in sight an' there was another vessel nigh to race him for the prize. An' they'd seen the whale aboard the Maxwell. We see her mainyard swing for'a'd, her courses dropped an' she gathered headway.

"Where away?" Cap'n sings out.

"Dead ahead o' the Maxwell, sir," the lookout calls down.

"Starboard your helm," Cap'n Jack yells. If he was thinkin' about any girl then I'm a liar. "We've got the weather gage on her," he laughs at me. "I'll have that whale or may I never sight Cape Cod again."

An' away we flew on a race with the Maxwell an' the O'Briens for that sperm bull. A whale is worth money an' a race like that is mighty apt to breed hard feelin's between boats' crews. I thought of Mary an' how her old man and Danny might take it if we beat 'em to it. an' I smelt trouble ahead. O'Brien, he was

a cautious sort of a dog an' when it come to a chance o' winnin' all or losin' all I knowed that he was always glad to make sure of at least a half by splittin'—matin', we called it—with another ship.

I reminded Cap'n Jack o' this. "O'Brien, he'll mate with any man in a close race," I tells him. "He'd always rather take half than run the risk o' losin' it all."

"Mate be damned!" he barked at me. "Crack on everything an' drive her."

An' drive her we sure did. The Maxwell was hoppin' along awful close hauled, so we was makin' three feet to her one.

Then he sounded, an' we hove the Sunrise to. Cap'n Jack, all dressed as he was in his silk hat an' frock coat jumped into the stern sheets of the starboard quarter boat as we let her go over the side, an' away he went. The Maxwell cleared away her boats same time we did an' the race was on, four boats from each ship crackin' away over the waves for the spot a mile an' a half away where five thousand dollars' worth o' sperm whale had sounded. Cap'n Jack was the first to reach the spot where the whale sounded an' he hove to waitin' for him to break water. Danny O'Brien, headin' the leadin' boat from the Maxwell with his black crew come scuddin' up next an' lay to on Jack's weather quarter.

"Want to mate, Jack?" he sings out.

"I do not," Jack tells him, blunt. "If you're good enough to get him, take him all."

An' just then Mr. Whale breaks water about ten ships' length away on the lee bow. Jack had the jump on Danny, but layin' to windward o' him, as O'Brien was, he had the weather gage an' come flyin' up two feet to Jack's one. But Jack was alongside an' luffed to first. But Danny, comin' up with a good shoot gouged in sailin' right fair over them great flukes an' in between Jack an' that hundred an' fifty ton o' livin' bone an'

blood an' blubber rollin' to the swell, before ever an iron was tossed.

It looked like Danny's whale all right, but just then big Kanaka Tom, Jack's harpooner, showed cause for why we rated him the best man with an iron in all the South Seas. He stood there in the headsheets a good forty foot from his mark an' slams that heavy iron clean over O'Brien's bows; throws her in a perfect arc over the other boat, an' she spansks into the hump chock to the hitches! Man, but that was a beautiful throw. O'Brien's harpooner had his arm raised to strike when Kanaka Tom's iron whizzed past his head. Cap'n Jack's iron was home first an' by all the laws o' the whalers the bull belonged to him. O'Brien's black harpooner cussed an' dropped his arm—but Danny had no mind to bide by laws.

"Nail him you dirty black scamp, nail him!" he yells out, an' his harpooner lets fly the iron. Both boats swung off as the whale started to roll an' kick, an' so they were layin' close together when the bull sounded an' the lines begun smokin' out over the chocks.

"Cut that line. Dan O'Brien," Jack yelled. "My iron was into him first?"

"Cut nothin'!" Danny yells back. "I'll mate with you."

"Cut that line or I'll cut it for you," says Jack.

Black hate for his old shipmate who 'd beat him to a master's ticket had been simmerin' in Danny all the while, I suppose. It come boilin' to the surface then, an' he stood ready for murder.

"Slack off an' come to it," he raved. "There ain't any coddlin' owners out here to play favorite with you. Come to it!"

An' then the two boats come together an' the fight begun. An' what a fight! As the boats touched gunnels Danny jumped for Jack, an' the two of 'em went down together in the headsheets o' the boat sluggin' an' kickin', right over that line smokin' out o' the tubs full forty foot a second.

The two crews was at it with anything they could lay their hands to, oars an' paddles an' sheath knives an' boat hatchets. It was nip an' tuck 'twixt the blacks an' whites an' the blood flyin' free when the line in our boat got fouled somehow. Wow! Whang! Swoosh! A hundred an' fifty ton o' soundin' whale is some weight! Then two boats was upside down an' gone to hell 'fore a man could blink his eye. One second there was just the two boats lyin' together, the men hackin' an' slashin' away, an' the next there was just a fountain o' spray where they'd been snapped under—an' men an' gear flyin' on the air an' floatin' on the water! My, she come quick!

We run down an' started pickin' our men up. They were a bloody, gashed up lot, but for a wonder nobody 'd been killed. When one o' the Maxwell's boats hauled Danny out o' the water he was ragin' ravin' crazy.

"If you ever speak to my sister I'll kill you," he yelled at Cap'n Jack. "I'll fix you with her. You're done with us, an' don't forget it. You're done, hear me?"

That part of it had just struck Jack. He was awful quiet all the way back to the ship, an' the first thing when we got aboard he had the blue flag set at the mizzen peak, the signal for a gam.

But Cap'n O'Brien wasn't for gammin' with Jack that day. He fair worshiped that son o' his, an' the Lord only knows what kind of a faked up tale Danny told him. He ignored our signal an' stood away on the port tack, an' poor Jack stood abaft the wheel an' watched all his hope an' love sail away from him.

It sure looked like the finish for Jack an' Mary, but—queer things happen at sea. Three months later on the off-shore grounds two thousan' miles out to sea we raised a small boat an' when we run down on it there was Cap'n O'Brien an' Dan an' Mary. Dan he'd got too rough with that black watch o' Cape De Verde niggers an' they 'd set fire to the ship an' got away in the boats. We

wasn't any too soon pickin' 'em up, for they was out o' grub an' most to the end o' their water, but father an' son, they fought like wildcats to keep Jack from savin' 'em.

"You got a right to throw your own life away if you like," Jack tells the old man at last. "But you've got no right to let your hate of me murder Mary."

"I'd rather see her dead here in the bottom o' this boat right now than beholden to you for one minute o' her life," the old codger raves. An' he meant it. He was a tough old shellback!

We took 'em by main force in the end, an' when the old man see Jack wouldn't leave him, he says: "I'll go aboard o' you with my family, but don't you think I'm grateful, 'cause I ain't. An' don't you never try to talk to my girl." Then he turned on her. "You heard what I said, Mary?" he asks her. "You're never to speak to this dog again."

An' that's how things stood when we took 'em aboard. Oh, but that Sunrise was a proper hell-ship aft from then on! There was Jack an' Mary sweatin' their hearts out for each other an' never speakin'; an' the old man an' Dan gloomin' together, hatin' Jack more every day—an' him hatin' 'em back. Fine! There was all the makin' of a dirty murder there in that cabin, an' I was lookin' for it to happen any day.

But Jack had sense past his years. Cap'n O'Brien's leanin' over the taffrail one mornin' gloomin' off astern an' nursin' the black hate in him to make it taste bitterer, when Jack come up the companion an' tapped him on the shoulder.

"I suppose Danny told you some lie about that fight over the whale," he says, short an' insultin'. "I suppose he said I took some unfair advantage o' him an' you were fool enough to believe it. Why should I use any underhand ways to beat him? I'm a better man at anything you can name. I can take my two fists right now an' lick the daylight out o' him in fair fight."

The old man turned on him tremblin'

an' twitchin'. "You're a liar," he croaked. "Danny can lick you with one hand tied. You wouldn't make that boast if you didn't have us aboard your own ship."

Jack leaned on the taffrail an' laughed. "You think Danny can lick me?" he asks. "You don't—an' you lie when you say you do."

The old man jumped for him at that, but Jack sidestepped an' backed away up the poop. "I'm not lookin' for you," he says. "But if you're so sure Danny can lick me—if you believe what you say—call him up an' we'll go to it. I'll fight him for Mary! If he licks me I'll knock off the whalin', put you ashore at Payta an' give you my word never to see her again. If I win I take her, an' you smile when I do it. Is that a go?"

"It is not," the old man raves. "You'll never have my girl."

"I knew you lied," Jack sneered at him. "Talk's cheap. It's easy for you to say that Danny could lick me, but you wouldn't risk anything on it. It's a poor son his own father won't back."

He had the old man foul. O'Brien tried to talk, but there wasn't anything to say. He steps to the companion an' bellered for Danny. Dan come boilin' on deck, an' the old man grabbed him by the shoulders an' shook him like a grouchy old dog shakin' a young pup.

"Go lick him," he says, pointin' at Jack. "Lick him or I'll disown you. I've passed my word to him he's to have Mary if he down you. If you knuckle under now I'll lick you myself for every day o' the rest o' my life. Lick him. Danny, boy, go lick him."

Dan's crazy for just that chance. Every muscle in him was achin' to get at the feller he'd been hatin' for so long. They went for'ard onto the fo'c's'le head an' stripped to their trousers.

"What about rules?" the old man says. "How you goin' to fight?"

"With everything we was born with," Jack says. "An' nothin' else."

There wasn't a cloud in the sky that

day an' we was loafin' along with all plain sail set, rollin' easy to the sou'west swell. An' there on that fo'c's'le head, with the sun, nigh straight overhead, a pourin' the hot light down over everything till the shadow of a stay was marked plain on deck, them two big, hard young fellows squared off an' went to it.

There wasn't a lot o' science to that fight, maybe, not the kind they make use of in a padded ring with gloves on their hands, but what was lackin' in science was made up in strength an' grit an' fightin' fury. The old man was scrooched down on the port cathead talkin' away to himself an' slammin' away at the air with his own fists while he watched the fight. I was kneelin' halfway up the ladder when I heard a funny noise behind me an' turned around to see Mary standin' on tiptoe peekin' over my shoulder an' takin' it all in.

It was funny to watch her. She'd groan an' look sad when Danny was gettin' an awful pummelin', but when Jack was gettin' the worst o' the game there was nothin' sad about her. No, sir. She was just scared, then, and mad. Wow! But wasn't she mad when he was gettin' beat! She'd twist her hands an' sway back an' forth an' mumble to herself. She was prayin' for Jack to win.

An' he was. They fought all over the head an' rolled on the deck an' smashed against the capstan an' stood breast to breast an' slugged each other for minutes on end. Jack was an awful lookin' sight, but to anybody who knew men an' fightin' it was plain that nothin' short of an accident would save Danny. Finally Jack caught him flush under the ear with a right swing that started from his knees, an' Danny dropped. He lay still for seven or eight seconds an' then staggered to his feet. Jack swung for him, an' he fell into a clinch. Jack was heavin' on' strainin' to pry him loose when over they go together against the capstan. I heard Jack yell when he fell, an' I knew he was hurt somehow. He rolled loose from Danny, an' when he got

up I went sick all over. I've seen too many busted arms not to know the meanin' o' the way that right wing o' his was hangin'.

A clinch after that would have finished Jack, but he kept free, backin' away from Danny's rushes an' hittin' with his left. He knocked Danny down with a straight jab to the mouth, an' when he got to his feet again he was reelin' groggy. I see Jack gather himself together for his chance, an' he sure made the most of it. That left o' his whanged fair under the butt o' the ear, an' when Danny dropped I wondered whether he was dead or not.

He wasn't. I slushed a couple o' buckets o' water over him, an' he give a gasp an' opened his eyes as far as he could—both of 'em bein' pretty well swelled shut. He was the first to take note o' Jack. We'd all forgot him while he was workin' to bring Danny back. Jack stood leanin' on the capstan pantin'.

"You licked me," Danny says, grinnin' at him. "But I made you look like you'd been in a fight with a man."

All the hate an' bitterness was gone out o' his voice. Old man O'Brien looked at Jack an' see that arm hangin' limp. "Come aft, here," he says, "an' let me set that afore you cool out."

"I'll take my wife aft when I go," Jack says. "You're a shipmaster, so stand up here an' marry us."

He held out his good left arm an' Mary run cryin' into the lovin' crook of it. O'Brien cussed some an' grumbled an' then he grinned an' married 'em there on the fo'c's'le head.

Dan lay on deck propped on one elbow an' watched the man he'd hated made his Lrother-in-law.

"Well," he says, when the weddin's over. "I'm glad that the only man in the whalin' fleet that can lick me's a member o' the family."

"I'm no slave driver, son," concluded Captain Watson, "an' I don't hold for brutality, but hard fists— There's need of 'em at times."

The Sin That Was His

by Frank L. Packard

Author of "The Miracle Man," "The Iron-Rider," "The Beloved Traitor," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

THREE-ACE ARTIE, otherwise Arthur Leroy, otherwise and really Raymond Chapelle, renegade descendant of one of the oldest families in French Canada, after cleaning out the Kid in Ton-Nugget camp in the Yukon and returning his winnings secretly—the only decent thing he could remember doing—is driven out of camp by the better element, headed by Murdock Shaw. Full of bitterness, he starts for the village of St. Marleau in Lower Canada to give the dying message of Canuck John (his only friend) to his parents. On the train he meets Father Aubert, a young priest who is to be *curé* of the village temporarily. The latter is supposedly killed by a falling branch in a storm as they approach the village. Raymond, who is going by the name of Henri Mentone, goes for help, intercepts the drunken son of excommunicated Mother Blondin in the act of robbing his mother, and in a furious battle the son is killed with his own revolver. Mother Blondin runs for help yelling "Thief!" and "Murder!" and Raymond swiftly changes clothes with the priest in order to escape. Just as he announces himself as "Father Aubert" to a girl with a lantern, he fancies he sees the real priest's body move.

The wounded priest is taken to the presbytery, where Raymond is assisted by Valérie Lafleur, the girl with the lantern, and her mother in making him comfortable. Raymond all but kills him that night to close his lips, but something holds him back. Then, three days later, as he returns from holding a burial service over Théophile Blondin, Valérie tells him that the supposed murderer has recovered his speech.

CHAPTER XI.

"HENRI MENTONE."

VALÉRIE'S flushed face was lifted eagerly to his. She had caught impetuously at the sleeve of his *soutane*, and was urging him forward. And yet he was walking with deliberate, measured tread across the green toward the *presbytère*. Strange how the blood seemed to be hammering feverishly at his temples!

Every impulse prompted him to run, as a man running for his life, to reach the *presbytère*, to reach that room, to shut the door upon himself and that man

whose return to consciousness meant—*what?*

But it was too late to run now. Too late! Already the news seemed to have spread. Those who had been the last to linger at the grave of Théophile Blondin were gathering, on their way out from the little burying ground, around the door of the *presbytère*. It would appear bizarre, perhaps, that the *curé* should come tearing across the green with vestments flying simply because a man had regained consciousness!

Ha, ha! Yes, very bizarre! Why should their *curé* run like one demented just because a man had regained con-

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sciousness? If the man were at his last gasp, now, were just about to die—that would be different!

He found a bitter mirth in that. Yes, decidedly, they would understand that! But as it was, they would think their *curé* had gone suddenly mad, perhaps, or they would think, perhaps—something else.

The dice were thrown, the card was turned—against him. His luck was out. To walk toward those gaping people clustered about the door, to walk into the *presbytère*, was like walking tamely to where a noose dangled and awaited his neck. But it was his only chance.

Yes, there was a chance—one chance left. If he could hold out until evening, until darkness!

Until evening, until darkness—with the night before him in which to attempt his escape! But there were still eight hours or more to evening. There were only a few more steps to go before he reached the *presbytère*. The distance was pitifully short. In those few steps he must plan everything; plan that that accursed noose swaying before his eyes should—

“*Dies illa, dies irae*—that day, a day of wrath.”

What brought those words flashing through his mind? He had said them once that morning—but a little while ago—in church—as a priest—at Théophile Blondin’s funeral. Damn it, they were not meant for *him*! They did not mean to-day. They were not premonitory. He was not beaten yet!

In the shed behind the *presbytère* there was a pair of the old sacristan’s overalls, an old coat, and an old hat. He had noticed them yesterday. They would serve his purpose—a man in a pair of overalls and a dirty, torn coat would not look much like a priest. Yes, yes; that would do, it was the way—when night came. He would have the darkness, and he would hide the next day, and the day after, and travel only by night. It invited pursuit, of course, the one thing

that next to capture itself he had struggled and plotted to avoid; but it was the only chance now, and, if luck turned again, he might succeed in making his way out of the country—when night came.

But until then! What until then? That was where his danger lay now—in those hours until darkness.

“Yes!” whispered Raymond fiercely to himself. “Yes—if only you keep your head!”

What was the matter with him? Had he forgotten? It was what he had been prepared to face that night when he had brought the priest to the *presbytère*, should the man then have recovered sufficiently to speak. It should be still easier now to make any one believe that the man was wandering in his mind, was not yet lucid or coherent after so long a lapse from consciousness. And the very story that the man would tell must sound like the ravings of a still disordered mind!

He, Raymond, would insist that the man be kept very quiet during the day; he would stay beside the other’s bed. Was he not the *curé*? Would they not obey him, show deference to his judgment and his wishes—until night came?

They were close to the *presbytère* now, close to the little gaping crowd that surrounded the door; and, as though conscious for the first time that she was clinging to his arm, Valérie, in sudden embarrassment at her own eagerness, hurriedly dropped her hand to her side. And, at the act, Raymond looked at her quickly, in an almost startled way.

Strange! But then his brain was in turmoil. Strange that extraneous things, things that had nothing to do with the one grim purpose of saving his neck, should even for an instant assert themselves!

But then they—no, *she*—had done that before. He remembered now—when they were putting on that bandage—when that crucifix had tangled up his hands, and she had seemed to stand before him to save him from himself—those

dark eyes, that pure, sweet face, the tender, womanly sympathy—the antithesis of himself! And to-night, when the night he longed for came, the night that meant his only chance for life, he—what was this—this sudden pang of yearning that ignored, with a most curious authority, as though it had the right to ignore the desperate, almost hopeless peril that was closing down upon him, that seemed to make the coming of the night now a thing he would put off, a thing to regret and to dread, that bade him search for some other way, some other plan that would not necessitate—

“A fool and a pretty face!”—it was the gibe and sneer and prod of that inward monitor. “See all these people who are so reverently making way for you, and eying you with affection and simple humility, see the rest of them coming back from all directions because the *murderer* is about to tell his story—well, see how they will make way for you, and with what affection and humility they will eye you when you come out of that house again, if all the wits the devil ever gave you are not about you now!”

He spoke to her quietly, controlling his voice.

“You have not told me yet what he said, *mademoiselle*?”

She shook her head. “He did not say much—only to ask where he was, and for a drink of water.”

He had no time to ask more. They had reached the group before the *presbytère* now, and the buzz of conversation, the eager, excited exchange of question and answer, was hushed, as, with one accord, men and women made way for their *curé*. And Raymond, lifting his hand in a kindly, yet authoritative gesture, cautioning patience and order, mounted the steps of the *presbytère*.

And then, inside the doorway, Raymond quickened his step. From the closed door at the end of the short hallway came the low murmur of voices. It was Mme. Lafleur, probably, who was there with the other now. How much,

how little had the man said—since Valérie had left the room?

Raymond’s lips tightened grimly. It was fortunate that Mme. Lafleur had so great a respect for the cloth! He had nothing to fear from her. He could make her believe anything. He could twist her around his finger, and—he opened the door softly—and stood, as though suddenly rigid, incapable of movement, upon the threshold—and his hand upon the doorknob closed tighter and tighter in a vise-like grip.

Across the room stood, not Mme. Lafleur, but M. Dupont, the assistant chief of the Tournayville police, and in M. Dupont’s hand was a notebook, and upon M. Dupont’s lips, as he turned and glanced quickly toward the door, there played an enigmatical smile!

“Ah! It is *monsieur le curé*!” observed M. Dupont smoothly. “Well, come in *monsieur le curé*—come in, and shut the door. I promise you, you will find it interesting. What? Yes, very interesting!”

“Oh, M. Dupont is here!” the words seemed to come to Raymond as from some great distance behind him.

He turned. It was Valérie. Of course it was Valérie! He had forgotten. She had naturally followed him along the hall to the door. What did this Dupont mean by what he had said? What had Dupont already learned—that was so *interesting*? It would not do to have Valérie here, if— if he and Dupont—

“Perhaps, Mlle. Valérie,” he said gravely, “it would be as well if you did not come in. M. Dupont appears to be officially engaged.”

“But, of course!” she agreed readily. “I did not know that any one was here. I left the man alone when I ran out to find you. I will come back when M. Dupont has gone.”

And Raymond smiled and stepped inside the room, and closed the door and leaned with his back against it.

“Well, *monsieur le curé*”—M. Dupont tapped with his pencil on the notebook—

"I have it all down here. All! Everything that he has said."

Raymond had not even glanced toward the bed—his eyes, cool, steady now, were on the officer, watching the other like a hawk.

"Yes?" he prompted calmly.

"And"—M. Dupont made that infernal clucking noise with his tongue—"I have—*nothing!* Did I not tell you it was interesting? Yes, very interesting! Very!"

Was the man playing with him? How clever was this Dupont? No fool, at any rate! He had already shown that, in spite of his absurd mannerisms. Raymond's hand began to toy with the crucifix on his breast, while his fingers surreptitiously loosened several buttons of his *soutane*.

"Nothing?" — Raymond's eyebrows were raised in mild surprise. "But Mlle. Valérie told me he had regained consciousness."

"Yes," said M. Dupont, "I heard her say so to some one as she left the house. I was keeping an eye on that *vielle sauzageuse*, Mother Blondin. But this—ah! Quite a more significant matter! Yes—quite! You will understand, *monsieur le curé*, that I lost no time in reaching here?"

And now for the first time Raymond looked swiftly toward the bed. It was only for the barest fraction of a second that he permitted his eyes to leave the police officer; but in that glance he had met coal black eyes, all pupils they seemed, fixed in a sort of intense penetration upon him.

The man was still lying on his back. He had noticed that—but it was the eyes, disconcerting, full of something he could not define, boring into him, that dominated all else. He stepped nonchalantly toward M. Dupont.

"It is astonishing that he has said nothing," he murmured softly. "Will you permit me, M. Dupont"—he held out his hand—"to see your book?"

"The book? H-m! Well, why not?"

M. Dupont shrugged his shoulders as he placed the notebook in Raymond's hand.

"It is not customary—but, why not!"

And then upon Raymond came relief. It surged upon him until he could have laughed out hysterically, laughed like a fool in this M. Dupont's face—this M. Dupont who was the assistant chief of the police force of Tournayville. It was true! Dupont had at least told the truth. So far Dupont had learned nothing.

Raymond's face was impassive as he scrutinized the page before him. Written with a flourish on the upper line, presumably to serve as a caption, were the words:

The Murderer, Henri Mentone.

and beneath:

Evades direct answers. Hardened type—knows his way about. Pretends ignorance. Stubborn. Wily rascal—yes, very!

Raymond handed the notebook back.

"It is perhaps not so strange after all. M. Dupont," he remarked with a thoughtful air. "We must not forget that the poor fellow has but just recovered consciousness. He is hardly likely to be either lucid or rational."

"Bah!" ejaculated Dupont grimly. "He is as lucid as I am. But I am not through with him yet. He is not the first of his kind I have had upon my hook." He leaned toward the bed. "Now then, my little apache, you will answer my questions! Do you understand? No more evasions! None at all! They will do you no good, and—"

Raymond's hand fell upon M. Dupont's shoulder. Though he had not looked again until now, he was conscious that those eyes from the bed had never for an instant swerved from his face. Now he met them steadily. He addressed Dupont, but he spoke to the man on the bed.

"Have you warned him, M. Dupont," he said soberly, "that anything he says will be used against him? And have you

told him that he is not obliged to answer? He is weak yet, and at a disadvantage. He would be quite justified in waiting until he was stronger, and entirely competent to weigh his own words."

M. Dupont was possessed of an inconsistency all his own. "*Tonnerre!*" he snapped. "And what is the use of warning him when he will not answer at all?"

"You appear not quite to have given up hope," observed Raymond dryly.

"H-m!" M. Dupont scowled. "Very well, then"—he leaned once more over the bed and addressed the man—"you understand? It is as *monsieur le curé* says. I warn you. You are not obliged to answer. Now, then—your name, your age, your birthplace?"

Raymond shifted his position to the foot of the bed. Damn those eyes! Move where he would they never left his face. The man had paid no attention to Dupont. Why, in God's name, why did the man keep on staring and gazing so fixedly at him—and why had he refused to answer Dupont's questions—and why had he not with his first words poured out his story eagerly?

"Well, well!" prodded M. Dupont. "Did you not hear—eh? Your name?"

The man's eyes followed Raymond.

"Where am I?" he asked faintly.

It was too querulous, that tone, too genuinely weak and peevish to smack of trickery—and suddenly upon Raymond there came again that nervous impulse to laugh out aloud. So that was the secret of it, was it? There was a sort of sardonic humor then in the situation! The suggestion, the belief he had planned to convey to shield himself—that the man was still irrational—was, in fact, the truth! But how long would that condition last? He must put an end to this—get this cursed Dupont away!

"Where am I?" muttered the man again.

"*Tiens!*" clucked Dupont. "You see *monsieur le curé!* You see? Yes, you see. He plays the game well—with finesse, eh?" He turned to the man.

"Where are you, eh? Well, you are better off where you are now than where you will be in a few days! I promise you that! Now, again—your name?"

The man shook his head.

"M. Dupont," said Raymond, a little severely. "You will arrive at nothing like this. The man is not himself. Tomorrow he will be stronger."

"Bah! Nonsense! Stronger!" jerked out Dupont derisively. "Our fox is quite strong enough! *Monsieur le curé*, you are not a police officer—do not let your pity deceive you. And permit me to continue!" He slipped his hand into his pocket, and adroitly flashed a visiting-card suddenly before the man's eyes. "Well, since you cannot recall your name, this will perhaps be of assistance. You see, M. Henri Mentone, that you get yourself nowhere by refusing to answer!"

Once more the man shook his head.

"So!" Dupont complacently returned the card to his pocket. "Now we will continue. You see now where you stand. Your age?"

Again the man shook his head.

"He does not know!" remarked Dupont caustically. "Very convenient memory! Yes—very! Well, will you tell us where you came from?"

For the fourth time the man shook his head—and at that instant Raymond edged close to Dupont's side. What was that in those eyes now—that something that was creeping into them—that *dawning* light, as they searched his face?

"He does not know that, either!" complained the police official sarcastically. "Magnificent! Yes—very! He knows nothing at all! He—"

With a low cry the man struggled to his elbow, propping himself up in bed.

"Yes, I know!" his voice, high pitched, rang through the room. "I know now!" He raised his hand and pointed at Raymond. "*I know you!*"

Raymond's hand was thrust into the breast of his *soutane*, where he had unbuttoned it beneath the crucifix—and Raymond's fingers closed upon the stock

of an automatic in his upper left-hand vest-pocket.

"Poor fellow!" murmured Raymond pityingly. "You see, M. Dupont"—he moved still a little closer—"you have gone too far. You have excited him. He is incoherent. He does not know what he is saying."

Dupont was clucking with his tongue as he eyed the man speculatively.

"Yes, yes; I know you now!" cried the priest again. "Oh, *monsieur, monsieur!*"—both hands were suddenly thrust out to Raymond, and there was a smile on the trembling lips, an eager flush dyeing the pale cheeks. "It is you, *monsieur!* I have been very sick, have I not? It—it was like a dream. I—I was trying to remember—your face. It is your face that I have seen so often bending over me. Was that not it, *monsieur—monsieur*, you who have been so good—was that not it? You would lift me upon my pillow, and give me something cool to drink. And was it not you, *monsieur*, who sat there in that chair for long, long hours? It seems as though I saw you there always—many, many times."

It was like a shock, a revulsion so strong that for the moment it unnerved him. Raymond scarcely heard his own voice.

"Yes," he said—his forehead was damp as he brushed his hand across it.

M. Dupont blew out his cheeks.

"*Nom d'un nom!*" he exploded. "Ah, your pardon, *monsieur le curé!* But it is mild, a very mild oath, is it not—under the circumstances? Yes—very! I admire cleverness—yes, I do! The man has a head! What an appeal to the emotions! Poignant! Yes, that's the word—poignant. Looking for sympathy! Trying to make an ally of you, *monsieur le curé!*"

"Get rid of the fool! Get rid of the fool!" prompted that inward monitor impatiently.

Raymond, with a significant look, plucked at M. Dupont's sleeve and led him across the room away from the bed.

"Do you think so?" he asked in a lowered voice.

"Eh? Think what?"

"What you just said—that he is trying to make an ally of me."

"Oh, that—*zut!*" sniffed M. Dupont. "But what else?"

"Then suppose"—Raymond dropped his voice still lower—"then suppose you leave him with me until to-morrow. And meanwhile—you understand?"

Dupont pondered the suggestion.

"Well, very well—why not?" he decided. "Perhaps not a bad idea—perhaps not. And if it does not succeed"—shrugged his shoulders—"well, we know everything anyhow; and I will make him pay through the nose for his tricks! But he is under arrest, *monsieur le curé*, you understand that? There is a cell in the jail at Tournayville that—"

"Naturally—when he is able to be moved," agreed Raymond readily. "We will speak to the doctor about that. In the mean time, he probably could not walk across this room. He is quite safe here. I will be responsible for him."

"And I will put a flea in the doctor's ear!" announced Dupont, moving toward the door. "The assizes are next week, and after the assizes, say, another six weeks and"—his tongue clucked eloquently several times against the roof of his mouth. "We will not keep him waiting long!"

He opened the door, and, standing on the threshold where he was hidden from the bed, laid his forefinger along the side of his nose.

"You are wrong, *monsieur le curé!*"—he had raised his voice to carry through the room. "But still you may be right. You are too soft-hearted; yes, that is it—soft-hearted. Well, he has you to thank for it. I would not otherwise consider it—it is against my best judgment. I bid you good-by, *monsieur le curé!*"

Raymond closed the door—but it was a moment, standing there with his back to the bed, before he moved. His face was set, the square jaws clamped, a cyn-

ical smile flickering on his lips. It had been close—but of the two, between Dupont against himself and the gallows, Dupont had been the nearer to death!

He saw the man in his mind's eye sprawled on the floor. It would not have been difficult to have stopped forever any outcry from that weak thing upon the bed. And then the window; and after that—God knew!

And it would have been God's affair. It was God who had instituted that primal law that lay upon every human soul, the law of self-preservation; and it was God's choosing, not his, that he was here! Who was to quarrel with him if he stopped at nothing in his fight for life?

Well, Dupont was gone now. That danger was past. He had only to reckon now with Valérie and her mother—until night came.

He raised his hand heavily to his forehead and pushed back his hair. Valérie? Until night came? Fool! What was Valérie to him? And yet—he jeered at himself in a sort of grim derision—and yet, if it were not his one chance for life, he would not go to-night.

He could call himself a fool, if he would; that ubiquitous and caustic other self, that was the cool, calculating, unemotional personification of Three-Ace Artie, could call him a fool, if it would—those dark eyes of Valérie's—no, not that—it was not eyes, nor hair, nor lips, they were only part of Valérie—it was Valérie, like some rare fragrance, fresh and pure and sweet in her young womanhood, that—

"*Monsieur!*"—the man was calling from the bed.

Raymond turned, walked back across the room, drew a chair to the bedside, and sat down. And Raymond smiled—but not at the bandaged, outstretched form before him. A fool? Well, so be it! The fool would sit here for the rest of the morning, and the rest of the afternoon, and listen to the babbling wanderings of another fool who had not had sense enough to die; and he would play

this cursed rôle of saint, and fumble with his crucifix, and mumble his Latin, and keep this Mlle. Valérie (who meant nothing to him), from the room—until to-night.

And—what was this other fool saying?

"*Monsieur—monsieur*, who was that man who just went out?"

Raymond answered mechanically:

"It was M. Dupont, the assistant chief of the Tournayville police."

"What was he doing here?" asked the priest slowly, as though trying to puzzle out the answer to his own question. "Why was he asking me all those questions?"

Raymond, tight-lipped, looked him in the eyes.

"We've had enough of this, haven't we?" he challenged evenly. "I thought at first you were still irrational. You're not—that is now quite evident. Well—we are alone—what is your object? You had a chance to tell Dupont your story!"

A pitiful, stunned look crept into the priest's face. He stretched out his hand over the coverlet toward Raymond.

"You—you, too, *monsieur!*" he said numbly. "What does it mean? What does it mean?"

It startled Raymond. There was trickery here, it could be nothing else—and yet there was sincerity too genuine to be assumed in the man's words and acts. Raymond sat back in his chair, and for a long minute, brows knitted, studied him.

It was possible, of course, that he might not have recognized him—they had only been together for a few moments in the smoking compartment of the train, and, dressed now as a priest, that might well be the case—but why not the story, then?—why not the simple statement that he was the new *curé* coming to the village, that he had been struck down and—bah! What was the man's game? Well, he would force the issue, that was all!

He leaned over the bed, and, his hand upon the other's, his fingers closed around

the man's wrist until, beneath their tips, they could gage the throb of the pulse. And his eyes, steel-hard, were on him.

"I am the *curé*," he said in a low, level tone, "of St. Marleau—while Father Allard is away. My name is—*François Aubert*."

"And mine," said François Aubert, "is—" He shook his head. "Mine is—" His face grew piteously troubled—"it is strange—I do not remember that, either."

There had been no tell-tale nervous flutter of the man's pulse. Raymond's hand fell away from his wrist. What was this curious, almost uncanny presentiment that was creeping upon him? Was it possible that the man was telling the truth? Was it possible that—his own brain was whirling now—he steadied himself, forcing himself to speak.

"Did you not read the card that Dupont showed you?"

"Yes," said the priest. "Henri Mentone—is that my name?"

"Do you not know?" Raymond's tone was suddenly sharp, incisive.

"No," the other answered. "No, I—I cannot remember." He reached out his arms imploringly to Raymond again. "Oh, *monsieur*, what does it mean? I do not know where I am—I do not know how I came here."

"You are in the *presbytère* at St. Marleau," said Raymond, still sharply. Was it true, or was the man simply magnificent in duplicity? No—there could be no reason, no valid reason, for the man to play a part—no reason why he should have withheld his story from Dupont. It was not logical. He, Raymond, who alone knew all the story, knew that.

It must be true—but he dared not yet drop his guard. He must be sure—his life depended on his being sure. He was speaking again—uncompromisingly:

"You were picked up unconscious in the road by the tavern during the storm three nights ago—you remember the storm, of course?"

Again that piteously troubled look was on the other's face.

"No, *monsieur*, I do not remember," he said tremulously.

"Well, then," persisted Raymond, "before the storm—you surely remember that! Where you came from? Where you lived? Your people?"

"Where I came from, my—my people"—the man repeated the words automatically. He swept his hand across his bandaged head. "It is gone," he whispered miserably. "I— it is gone. There—there is nothing. I do not remember anything except a girl in this room saying she would run for the *curé*, and then that man came in." A new trouble came into his eyes. "That man—you said he was a police officer—why was he here? And—you have not told me yet—why should he ask me questions?"

There was still a card to play. Raymond leaned again over the man.

"All this will not help you," he said sternly. "Far better that you should confide in me! The proof against you is overwhelming. You are already condemned. You murdered Théophile Blondin that night, and stole Mother Blondin's money. Mother Blondin struck you that blow upon the head as you ran from the house. You were found in the road; and in your pockets was Mother Blondin's money—and her son's revolver, with which you shot him. In a word, you are under arrest for murder."

"Murder!"—the man, wide-eyed, horror-stricken, was staring at Raymond—and then he was clawing himself frantically into an upright position in the bed. "No, no! Not that! It cannot be true! Not—*murder!*" His voice rose into a piercing cry, and rang, and rang again through the room. He reached out his arms. "You are a priest, *monsieur*—by that holy crucifix, by the dear Christ's love, tell me that it is not so! Tell me! Murder? It is not true! It cannot be true! No, no—no! *Monsieur*—father—do you not hear me crying to you, do you not—" His voice choked and was still. His face was buried in his hands, and great sobs shook his shoulders.

And Raymond turned his head away—and Raymond's face was gray and drawn. There was no longer room for doubt. That blow upon the skull had blotted out the man's memory, left it a blank.

CHAPTER XII.

HIS BROTHER'S KEEPER.

FATHER ALLARD'S desk had been moved into the front room. Raymond, on a very thin piece of paper, was tracing the signature inscribed on the fly-leaf of the prayer-book—François Aubert. Before him lay a number of letters written that morning by Valérie—parish letters, a letter to the bishop—awaiting his signature. Valérie, who had been private secretary to her uncle, was now private secretary to—François Aubert!

The day before yesterday he had signed a letter in this manner, and Valérie, who was acquainted with the signature from her uncle's correspondence, had had no suspicions. Raymond placed his tracing over the bottom of one of the letters, and, bearing down heavily as he wrote, obtained an impression on the letter itself. The impression served as a guide, and he signed—François Aubert.

It was simple enough, this expedient in lieu of a piece of carbon paper that he had no opportunity to buy, and for which, from the notary perhaps, Valérie's other uncle, who alone in the village might be expected to have such a thing, he had not dared to make the request; but it was tedious and laborious—and besides, for the moment, his mind was not upon his task.

He signed another, and still another, his face deeply lined as he worked, wrinkles nesting in strained little puckers around the corners of his eyes—and suddenly, while there were yet two of the letters to be signed, he sat back in his chair, staring unseeingly before him.

From the rear room came that footstep, slow, irregular, uncertain. It was "Henri

Mentone." Dupont's "flea" in the doctor's ear had had its effect. Henri Mentone was taking his exercise—from the bed to the window, from the window to the door, from the door to the bed, and over again. In the three days since the man had recovered consciousness he had made rapid strides toward recovering his strength as well, though he still spent part of the day in bed—this afternoon, for instance, he was to be allowed out for a little while in the open air.

Raymond's eyes fixed on the open window where the morning sunlight streamed into the room. Yes, the man was getting on his feet rapidly enough to suit even M. Dupont. The criminal assizes began at Tournayville the day after to-morrow. And then Henri Mentone was to stand his trial for the murder of Théophile Blondin!

Raymond's fingers tightened upon the penholder until it cracked warningly, recalling him to himself. He had not gone that night. Gone? He laughed mockingly. The man had lost his memory! Who would have thought of that—and what it meant? If the man had died, or even if he had talked and so *forced* him to accept flight as his one and only chance, the issue would have been clean-cut. But, curse him, he had not died; nor had he told his story—and to all appearances at least, except for still being naturally a little weak, was as well as any one. Gone! Gone—that night! Great God, they would *hang* the fool for this!

The sweat-beads crept out on Raymond's forehead. No, no—not that! They thought the man was shamming now, but they would surely realize before it was too late that he was not. They would convict him, of course; the evidence was damning, overwhelming, final—but they would not hang a man who could not remember. No, they wouldn't hang him. But what they would do was horrible enough—they would sentence him for life, and keep him in the infirmary perhaps of some penitentiary.

For life—that was all!

The square jaw was suddenly out-thrust. Well, what of it? He, Raymond, was safe as it was. It was his life, or the other's. In either case it would be an innocent man who suffered. As far as actual murder was concerned, he was no more guilty than this priest who had had nothing to do with it.

Besides, they would hang him, Raymond, and they wouldn't hang the other. Of course, they didn't believe the man now! Why should they? They did not know what he, Raymond, knew; they had only the evidence before them that was conclusive enough to convict a saint from heaven!

Ha, ha! Why, even the man himself was beginning to believe in his own guilt! Sometimes he was as a caged beast in an impotent fury; and—and sometimes he would cling like a frightened child with his arms around Raymond's neck.

It was warm here in the room, warm with the bright, glorious sunlight of the summer morning. Why did he shiver like that? And this—why *this*? The smell of incense; those organ notes rising and swelling through the church; the voices of the choir; the bowed heads everywhere! He surged up from his chair and rocked on his feet, his hands clenched upon the edge of the desk. Before what dread tribunal was this that he was being called suddenly to account?

Yesterday—yesterday had been Sunday—and yesterday he had celebrated mass. His own voice seemed to sound again in his ears: "*Introibo ad altare Dei* (I will go in unto the Altar of God). *Ab homine iniquo et doloso erue me* (Deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man). *In quorum manibus iniquitates sunt* (In whose hands are iniquities). *Hic est enim Calix Sanguinis Mei novi et aeterni testamenti: mysterium fidei* (For this is the Chalice of My Blood of the new and eternal testament: the mystery of faith)."

No—no, no! He had not profaned those holy things, those holy vessels. He

had not done it! It was a lie! He had fooled even Gauthier Beaulieu, the altar boy.

He sank back into his chair like a man exhausted, and drew his hand across his eyes. It was nothing! He was quite calm again. Those words, the church, those holy things had nothing to do with Henri Mentone. If any one should think otherwise, that one was a fool! Had Three-Ace Artie ever been swayed by "mystery of faith"—or been called a coward?

Yes, that was it—a coward! It was true that he had as much right to life as that pitiful thing in the back room, but it was he who had put that other's life in jeopardy! That creed—that creed of his, born of the far north land where men were men, fearing neither God nor devil, nor man nor beast—it was better than those trembling words which had just been upon his lips.

True, he was safe now, if he let them dispose of this Henri Mentone—but to desert the other would be a coward's act.

Well, what then—what? Confess—and with meek, uplifted eyes, like some saintly martyr, stand upon the gibbet and fasten the noose around his own neck? *No!*

Well, then, what—*what*?

The tormented look was back in Raymond's eyes. There was a way, a way by which he could give the man a chance, a way by which they both might have their chance, only the difficulties so far had seemed insurmountable—a problem that he had not yet been able to solve—and the time was short. Yes, the way was there, if only—

With a swift movement, incredibly swift, alert in an instant, his hand swept toward the desk. Some one was knocking at the door. His fingers closed on the thin piece of paper that had served him in tracing the signature of François Aubert, and crushed it into a little ball in the palm of his hand.

The door opened. There were dark eyes there, dark hair, a slim figure. a

sweet, quiet smile, a calm, an untroubled peace, a pervading radiance. It was unreal. It could not exist. There was only a ghastly turmoil, agony, dismay, and strife everywhere—his soul told him so!

This was Valérie. God, how tired he was, how weary! Once he had seen those arms supporting that wounded man's head so tenderly—like a soothing caress. If he might, just for a moment, know that too, it would bring him—rest.

She came lightly across the room and stood before the desk.

"It is for the letters, *monsieur le curé*," she smiled. "I am going down to the post-office." She picked up the little pile of correspondence; and, very prettily businesslike, began to run through it.

Impulsively Raymond reached out to take the letters from her—and, instead, his hand slipped inside his *soutane* and dropped the crushed ball of paper into one of his pockets. It was too late, of course! She would already have noticed the omission of the two signatures.

"There are two there that I have not yet signed," observed Raymond casually.

"Yes; so I see!" she answered brightly. "I was just going to tell you how terribly careless you were, *monsieur le curé*! Well, you can sign them now, while I am putting the others in their envelopes. Here they are."

He took the two letters from her hand—and laid them deliberately aside upon the desk.

"It was not carelessness," he said laughingly; "except that I should have allowed them to get mixed up with the others. There are some changes that I think I should like to make before they go. They are not important—to-morrow will do."

"Of course!" she said. Then in pretended consternation: "I hope the mistakes weren't mine?"

"No—not yours"; he spoke abstractedly now. He was watching her as she folded the letters and sealed the envelopes. How quickly she worked! In a minute now she would go and leave him

alone again to listen to those footfalls from the other room. He wanted rest for his stumbling brain; and, yes—he wanted her.

He could have reached out and caught her hands and drawn that dark head bending over the desk closer to him, and held her there—a prisoner. He brushed his hands hurriedly over his forehead. A prisoner! What did he mean by that? Oh, yes, the thought was born of the idea that he was already a jailer. He had been a jailer for three days now—of that man there, who was too weak to get away. He had appointed himself jailer—and M. Dupont had confirmed the appointment.

What had that to do with Valérie? He only wanted her to stay because—a fool was he!—because he wanted to torture himself a little more. Well, it was exquisite torture, then, her presence, her voice, her smile!

Love? Well, what if he loved? Days and days their lives had been spent together now. How long was it? A week—no, it must be more than a week—it seemed as though it had been as long as he could remember.

Yes, he loved her! He knew that now—scoff, sneer, and gibe if that inner voice would, he loved her! He loved Valérie! Madness? Well, what of that, too? Did he dispute it? Yes, it was madness—and in more ways than one!

He was fighting for his life in this devil's masquerade, and he might win; but he could not fight for or win her love. That was just dangled before his eyes as the final Satanic touch to this hell-born conspiracy that engulfed him!

He was in the garb of a priest! How those hell demons must shake their very souls out with laughter in their damnable glee! He could not even touch her; he could say no word, his tongue was tied; he was in the garb of a priest!

He—what was this! A fire seemed in his veins. Her hand in his! Across the desk her hand had crept softly into his!

"*Monsieur—monsieur le curé*—you are ill!" she cried anxiously.

And then Raymond found himself upon his feet, his other hand laid over hers—and he forced a smile.

“I—no”—Raymond shook his head; “no, Mlle. Valérie, I am not ill.”

“You are worn out, then!” she insisted tremulously. “And it is our fault. We should have made you let us help you more. You have been up night after night with that man, and in the daytime there was the parish work, and you have never had any rest. And yesterday in the church you looked so tired—and—and—”

The dark eyes were misty; the sweet face was very close to his. If he might bend a little, just a very little, that glad wealth of hair would brush his cheek.

“A little tired, perhaps—yes—*mademoiselle*,” he said in a low voice. “But it is nothing!” He released her hand, and, turning abruptly from the desk, walked to the window.

She had followed him with her eyes, turned to look after him—he sensed that. There was silence in the room. He did not speak. He did not dare to speak until—ah!—this should bring him to his senses quickly enough!

He was staring out through the window. A buckboard had turned in from the road, and was coming across the green toward the *presbytère*. Dupont and Dr. Arnaud! They were coming for Henri Mentone now—*now!* He had let the time slip by until it was too late—because he had not been able to fight his way through the odds against him.

And then there came a wan smile to Raymond’s lips. No! His fears were groundless. Three-Ace Artie would have seen that at once. The buckboard was single-seated; there was room only for two—and M. Dupont could be well trusted to look after his own comfort when he took the man away.

He drew back from the window, and faced around—and the thrill that had come from the touch of her hand was back again as he caught her gaze upon him. What was it that was in those eyes, that was in her face? She had been look-

ing at him like that, he knew, all the time that he had been standing at the window. They were still misty, those eyes—she could not hide that, though she lowered them hurriedly now. And that faint flush tinged her cheeks! Did it mean that she—

Fool! He knew what it meant! It meant that if he cared to seek for any added self-torture with his madman’s imaginings, he could find it readily to hand. She—to have any thought but that prompted by her woman’s sympathy, her tender anxiety for another’s trouble! She—who thought him a priest, and, pure in her faith as in her soul, would have recoiled in horror from—

He steadied his voice.

“M. Dupont and the doctor have just arrived,” he said.

“They have come for Henri Mentone?”

“No, not yet, I imagine,” he answered; “since they have only a one-seated buckboard.”

“I will be glad when he has gone!” she exclaimed impulsively.

“Glad?”

“Yes—for your sake,” she said. “He has brought you up to the very verge of illness yourself.” She was looking down again, shuffling the sealed envelopes abstractedly. “And it is not only I who say so—it is all St. Marleau. St. Marleau loves you for it, for your care of him, *monsieur le curé*—but also St. Marleau thinks more of its *curé* than it does of one who has taken another’s life.”

Raymond did not reply—he was listening now to the footsteps of Dupont and the doctor, as they passed by along the hallway outside. Came then a sharp, angry voice raised querulously from the rear room. That was Henri Mentone.

Dupont’s voice snapped in reply; and then the voices merged into a confused buzz and murmur. He glanced quickly at Valérie. She, too, was listening. Her head was turned toward the door, he could not see her face. He walked slowly across the room to her side by the desk.

"You do not think, *mademoiselle*," he asked gravely, "that it is possible the man is telling the truth, that he really cannot remember anything that happened that night—and before?"

"Every one knows he is guilty," she said thoughtfully. "The evidence proves it absolutely. Why, then, should one believe him? If there was even a little doubt of his guilt, no matter how little, it might be different, and one might wonder then; but as it is—no."

"And it is not only you who say so"—he smiled, using her own words—"it is all St. Marleau?"

"Yes, all St. Marleau—and every one else, including *monsieur le curé*, even if he has sacrificed himself for the man," she smiled in return. Her brows puckered suddenly. "Sometimes I am afraid of him," she said nervously. "Yesterday I ran from the room. He was in a fury."

Raymond's face grew grave.

"Ah! You did not tell me that, *mademoiselle*," he said soberly.

"And I am sorry I have told you now, if it is going to worry you," she said quickly. "You must not say anything to him. The next time I went in he was so sorry that it was pitiful."

In a fury—at times! Was it strange? Was it strange if one did not sit unmoved to watch, fettered, bound, impotent, a horrible doom creeping inexorably upon one? Was it strange if at times, all recollection blotted out, conscious only that one was powerless to avert that creeping terror, one should experience a paroxysm of rage that rocked one to the very soul—and at times in anguish left one like a helpless child?

He had seen the man like that—many times in the last few days. And he, too, had seen that same terror creep like a dread thing out of the night upon himself to hover over him; and he could see it now lurking there, ever present . . . but he, Raymond, could fight!

The door of the rear room opened and closed; and M. Dupont's voice resounded from the hall.

"Where is *monsieur le curé*? Ho, *monsieur le curé*!"

Valérie looked toward him inquiringly. "Shall I tell them you are here?" she asked.

Raymond nodded mechanically. "Yes—if you will, please."

He leaned against the desk, his hands gripping its edge behind his back. What was it now that this M. Dupont wanted? He was never sure of Dupont! And this morning his brain was fagged, and he did not want to cope with this infernal Dupont! He watched Valérie walk across the room and disappear outside in the hall.

"*Monsieur le curé* is here," he heard her say. "Will you walk in?" And then, at some remark in the doctor's voice which he did not catch: "No; he is not busy. I was just going to take his letters to the post-office. He heard you call."

And then, as the two men stepped in through the doorway, Raymond spoke quietly:

"Good morning, M. Dupont! Good morning, Dr. Arnaud!"

"Hah! *Monsieur le curé*," Dupont wagged his head vigorously. "He is in a very pretty temper this morning, our friend in there, eh? Yes, very pretty! You have noticed it? Yes, you have noticed it. It would seem that he is beginning to realize at last that his little tricks are going to do him no good!"

Raymond waved his hand toward chairs.

"You will sit down?" he invited courteously.

"No"—Dr. Arnaud smiled, as he answered for them both. "No, not this morning, *monsieur le curé*. We are returning at once to Tournayville. I have an important case there, and M. Dupont has promised to have me back before noon."

"Yes," said Dupont; "we stopped only to tell you"—he jerked his hand in the direction of the rear room—"that we will take him away to-morrow morning.

Dr. Arnaud says he will be quite able to go. We will see what the taste of a day in jail will do for him before he goes into the dock—what? He is very fortunate! Yes, very! There are not many who have only one day in jail before they are tried. Yes—to-morrow morning! You look surprised, *monsieur le curé*, that it should be so soon. Yes, you look surprised!”

“On the contrary,” observed Raymond impassively, “when I saw you drive up a few minutes ago, I thought you had come to take him away at once.”

“But, not at all!” Dupont indulged in a significant smile. “No—not at all! I take not even that chance of cheating the court out of his appearance—I do not wish to house him for months until the next assizes. I take no chances on a relapse. He has been quite safe here. Yes—quite! He will be quite safe for another twenty-four hours in your excellent keeping, *monsieur le curé*—since he is still too weak to run far enough to have it do him any good!”

“You pay a high compliment to my vigilance, M. Dupont,” said Raymond with a faint smile.

“Hah!” cried Dupont. “Hah!”—he began to chuckle. “Do you hear that, *monsieur le docteur*? I thought it had escaped him. He has a sense of humor, our estimable *curé*! You see, do you not? Yes, you see. Well, we will go now!” He pushed the doctor from the room. “*Au revoir, monsieur le curé*! It is understood then? To-morrow morning! *Au revoir*—till to-morrow!”

Dupont bowed, and whisked himself out of sight. Raymond went to the door, closed it, and mechanically began to pace up and down the room. He heard Dupont and the doctor clamber into the buckboard and the buckboard drive off. There was moisture upon his forehead again. He swept it away.

To-morrow morning! He had until to-morrow morning in which to act—if he was to act at all. But the way! He could not see the way. It was full of peril. The risk was too great to be over-

come. He dared not even approach that man in there with any plan. There was something horribly sardonic in that! If he was to act, he must act now, at once—there was only the afternoon and the night left.

“You are safe as it is,” whispered that inner voice insidiously. “The man’s condemnation by the law will dispose of the killing of Théophile Blondin forever. It will be as a closed book. And then—have you forgotten?—there is your own plan for getting away after a little while. It cannot fail, that plan. Besides they will not sentence the man to hang; they will be sure to see that his memory is really gone; whereas they will surely hang you if you are caught—as you will be, if you are fool enough to attempt the impossible now. What did you ever get out of being quixotic? Do you remember that little affair in Ton-Nugget Camp?”

“My God, what shall I do?” Raymond cried out aloud. “If—if only I could see the way!”

“But you can’t!” sneered the voice viciously. “Haven’t you tried hard enough to satisfy even that remarkably tender conscience that you seem to have picked up somewhere so suddenly? You—who were going to kill the man with your own hands! Let well enough alone!”

It was silent now in the rear room. Raymond halted in the center of the floor and listened. There were no footsteps; no sound of a voice—only silence. He laughed a little harshly. What was the man doing? Planning his *own* escape?

Again Raymond laughed in bitter mirth. Godspeed to the man in any such plans—only, as Dupont had most sagaciously suggested, he would not get very far alone. But still it would be humorous, would it not, if the man should succeed alone, where he, Raymond, had utterly failed so far to work out any plan that would accomplish the same end?

There was the open window to begin with. The man had been told now, probably, that he was to be taken away to-morrow morning, and— Why was there

such absolute stillness from that other room?

The partitions were very thin, and—Raymond, as mechanically as he had set to pacing up and down the room, turned to the door, passed out into the hall, and walked softly along to the door of the rear room.

He listened there again. There was still silence. He opened the door, stepped across the threshold—and a strange white look crept into his face, and he stood still.

Upon the floor at the bedside knelt Henri Mentone, and at the opening of the door the man did not look up. There was no fury now; it was the child, helpless in despair and grief. His hands were out-flung across the coverlet, his head was buried in his arms—and there was no movement, save only a convulsive tremor that shook the thin shoulders. And there was no sound.

And the whiteness deepened in Raymond's face—and, as he looked, suddenly the scene was blurred before his eyes. And then Raymond stepped back into the hall, and closed the door again; and on Raymond's lips was a queer, twisted smile.

"To-morrow morning, I think you said, M. Dupont," he whispered. "Well, to-morrow morning, M. Dupont—he will be gone."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONFEDERATE.

THERE had been a caller; there had been parish matters; there had been endless things through endless hours which he had been unable to avoid—except in mind. He had attended to them subconsciously, as it were; his mind had never for an instant left Henri Mentone. And it was beginning to take form now, a plan whereby he might effect the other's escape.

Sitting at his desk, he looked at his watch as he heard Valérie and her mother go up-stairs. It was a quarter past three.

Later on in the afternoon, in another hour or thereabouts, Mme. Lafleur would take Henri Mentone for a few steps here and there about the green, or sit with him for a little fresh air on the porch of the *presbytère*.

Raymond smiled ironically. As jailor, he had delegated the task to Mme. Lafleur—since, as he had told both Valérie and her mother at the noonday meal, he was going out to make pastoral visits that afternoon. Meanwhile—he had just looked into Henri Mentone's room—the man was lying on his bed, asleep. If he worked quickly now—while Valérie and her mother were up-stairs, and the man was lying on his bed!

He picked up a pen and drew a piece of paper toward him. Everything hinged on his being able to procure a confederate. He, the *curé* of St. Marleau, must procure a confederate by some means, and naturally without the confederate knowing that *monsieur le curé* was doing so—and, almost as essential, a confederate who had no love for *monsieur le curé*! It was not a very simple matter!

That was the problem with which he had racked his brains for the last three days. Not that the minor details were lacking in difficulties, either; he, as the *curé*, must not appear even remotely in the plan; he, as the *curé*, dared not even suggest escape to Henri Mentone; but he could overcome all that if only he could secure a confederate.

That was the point upon which everything depended.

His pen poised in his hand, he stared across the room. Yes, he saw it now—a gambler's chance. But the time was short now, short enough to make him welcome any chance. He would go to Mother Blondin's. He might find a man there such as he sought, one of those who already had offended the law by frequenting the dissolute old hag's illicit still.

He could ask, of course, who these men were without exciting any suspicion; and if luck failed him that afternoon he would do so, and it would be like a shot still

left in his locker; but if, in his rôle of *curé*, he could actually trap one of them drinking there, and incense the man, even fight with him, it would make success almost certain.

Yes, yes—he could see it all now—clearly—afterward, when it grew dark he would go to the man in a far different rôle from that of a *curé*, and the man would be at his disposal. Yes, if he could trap one of them there—but before anything else Henri Mentone must be prepared for the attempt.

Raymond began to write slowly, in a tentative sort of way, upon the paper before him. Henri Mentone, remembering nothing of the events of that night, must be left in no doubt as to the genuineness and good faith of the note, or of the vital necessity of acting upon its instructions.

At the expiration of a few minutes, Raymond read over what he had written. He scored out a word here and there; and then, on another sheet of paper, in a scrawling, illiterate hand, he wrote out a slangy, ungrammatical version of the original draft. He read it again now:

The memory game won't go, Henri. They've got you cold, but they don't know there was two of us in it at the old woman's that night, so keep up your nerve, for I ain't for laying down on a pal. I got it fixed for a get-away for you to-night. Keep the back window open, and be ready at any time after dark—see? Leave the rest to me.

If that mealy-mouthed priest gets in the road, so much the worse for him. I'll take care of him so he won't be any trouble to any one except a doctor, and maybe not much to a doctor—get me? I'd have been back sooner, only I had to beat it for you know where to get the necessary coin.

Here's some to keep you going in case we have to separate in a hurry to-night.

PIERRE.

Raymond nodded to himself. Henri Mentone might not relish the suggestion of any violence offered to the "mealy-mouthed priest," for he had come to look upon Father François Aubert as his only friend, and, except in his fits of fury, to cling dependently upon him; but then there would be no violence offered to

Father François Aubert, and the suggestion supplied a final touch of authenticity to the note, since Henri Mentone would realize that escape was impossible, unless in some way the *curé* could be got out of the road.

Raymond destroyed the original draft and took out his pocketbook. He smiled curiously as he examined its contents. It was the gold of the Yukon, the gold of Ton-Nugget Camp, that he had changed into bank-notes of large denominations.

He selected two fifty-dollar bills. It was not enough to carry the man far, or to take care of him until he was on his feet, nor were fifty-dollar bills the most convenient denomination for a man under the present circumstances; but that was not their purpose—they would act as a guarantee of one "Pierre" and "Pierre's" plan, and to-night he would give the man more without stint, and supplement it with some small bills from his roll of "petty cash."

He folded the money in the note, found a small piece of string in one of the drawers of the desk, took his hat, tiptoed softly across the room, out into the hall, and from the hall to the front porch.

Here he stood quietly for a moment, looking about him; and then, satisfied that he was unobserved, that neither Valérie nor her mother had noticed his exit, he walked quickly around to the back of the house—and paused again, this time beneath the open window of Henri Mentone's room. Here, too, but even more sharply now, he looked about him—then stooped and picked up a small stone. He tied the note around this and, crouching low by the window, called softly:

"Henri! Henri!"

He heard a rustle, the creak of the bed, as though the man, startled and suddenly roused, were jerking himself up into an upright position.

"It is Pierre!" Raymond called again. "*Courage, mon vieux!* Have no fear! All is arranged for to-night. But do not come to the window—we must be careful.

Here—*voici!*” He tossed the note in over the sill. “Until dark—*tu comprends*, Henri? I will be back then. Be ready!”

He heard the man cry out in a low voice, and the creak of the bed again, and the man’s step on the floor—and, stooping low, Raymond darted around the corner of the house.

A moment later he was standing again in the hallway of the *presbytère*.

“Oh, Mme. Lafleur!” he called up the stairs. “It is only to tell you that I am going out now.”

“Yes, *monsieur le curé*—yes. Very well, *monsieur le curé*,” she answered.

Raymond closed the front door behind him, and walking sedately across the green and past the church, gained the road. It was Mother Blondin’s now, but he would not go by the station road; further along the village street, where the houses thinned out and were scattered more apart, he could climb up the little hill without being seen, and by walking through the woods would come out on the path whose existence had once already done him such excellent service.

And the path, as an approach to Mother Blondin’s this afternoon, offered certain very important strategical advantages.

But now for the moment he was in the heart of the village, and from the doorways and garden-patches of the little, squat, curved-roof, whitewashed houses of rough-squared logs that flanked the road on either side, voices called out to him cheerily as he walked along. He answered them—all of them. He was even conscious, in spite of the worry of his mind, of a curious and not altogether unwelcome wonder.

They were simple folk, these people, big-hearted and kindly, free and open-handed with the little they had; and they appeared to have grown fond of him in the few days he had been in St. Marleau, to look up to him, to trust him, to have faith in him, and to accept him as a friend, offering a frank friendship in return.

His hands were clasped behind his back as he walked along, and suddenly his fingers laced tightly over one another. The pleasurable wonder of it was gone. He was playing well this rôle of saint! He was a gambler—Three-Ace Artie, of Ton-Nugget Camp; a gambler—too unclean even for the Yukon. But he was no hypocrite!

He would have liked to have torn these saintly trappings from his body, wrenched off his *soutane* and hurled it in the faces of these people, and bade them keep their friendship and their trust—tell them that he asked for nothing that they gave because they believed him other than he was. He was no hypocrite; he was a man fighting desperately for that for which every one had a right to fight, for which instinct bade even an insect fight—his life!

He did not despise this proffered friendship, the smile of eye and lip, the ring of genuine sincerity in the voices that called to him; but they were not his; they were not meant for Three-Ace Artie; they were not meant for Raymond Chapelle. Somehow—it was a grotesque thought—he envied himself in the rôle of *curé* for these things.

But they were not his. It was strange even that he, in whose life there had been naught but riot and ruin, should still be able to simulate so well the better things, to carry through, not the rôle of priest—that was a matter of ritual, a matter of keeping his head and his nerve—but the far kindlier and intimate rôle of *father* to the parish! Yes, it was very strange, and—

“*Bon jour, monsieur le curé!*”

Raymond halted. It was Mme. Bouchard, the carpenter’s wife. With a sort of long-handled wooden paddle she was removing huge loaves of bread from the queer-looking outdoor oven which, though built of a mixture of stone and brick, resembled very much, through being rounded over at the top, an exaggerated beehive. A few yards farther in from the edge of the road Bouchard himself was at

work upon a boat in front of his shop. Above the shop were the living quarters of the family, and here, on a narrow veranda, peering over, a half-dozen scantily clad and very small children clung to the railings.

Raymond sniffed the air luxuriously.

"*Tiens*, Mme. Bouchard!" he cried. "Your husband is to be envied! The smell of the bread is enough to make one hungry!"

The carpenter laid down his tools and looked up, laughing.

"*Salut, monsieur le curé!*" he called.

"If *monsieur le curé* would like one"—Mme. Bouchard's cheeks had grown a little rosy—"I—I will send one to the *presbytère* for him."

Raymond had eaten of St. Marleau bread before. The taste was sour, and it required little short of a deftly wielded ax to make any impression upon the crust.

"You are too good, too generous, Mme. Bouchard," he said, shaking his forefinger at her chidingly. "And yet"—he smiled broadly—"if there is enough to spare, there is nothing I know of that would delight me more."

"Of course she can spare it!" declared the carpenter heartily, coming forward. "Stanislaus will carry you two presently. And, *tiens, monsieur le curé*, you like to row a boat—eh?"

Raymond, on the point of shaking his head, checked himself. A boat! One of these days—soon, if this devil's trap would only open a little—there was his own escape to be managed. He had planned that carefully—a boating accident—the boat recovered—the *curé's* body swept out somewhere in those twenty-five miles of river-breadth that stretched away before him now, and from there—who could doubt it?—to the sea.

"Yes," he said, "I am very fond of it, but as yet I have not found time."

"Good!" exclaimed the carpenter. "Well, in two or three days it will be finished—the best boat in St. Marleau—and *monsieur le curé* will be welcome to it as

much as he likes. It is a nice row to the islands out there—three miles—to gather the sea-gull eggs—and the islands themselves are very pretty. It is a great place for a picnic, *monsieur le curé.*"

"Excellent!" said Raymond enthusiastically. "That is exactly what I shall do." He clapped the carpenter playfully upon the shoulder. "So—eh, M. Bouchard—you will lose no time in finishing the boat?" He turned to Mme. Bouchard. "*Au revoir, madame*—and very many thanks to you. I shall think of you at supper to-night, I promise you!" He waved his hand to the children on the veranda and once more started along the road.

Mme. Bouchard's voice, speaking to her husband, reached him. The words were not intended for his ears, and he did not catch them all. It was something about—"the good young Father Aubert."

A wan smile crept to Raymond's lips. For the moment at least he was in a softened, chastened mood. "The good young Father Aubert"—well, let it be so! They would never know, these people of St. Marleau. Somehow, he was relieved at that. He did not want them to know. Somehow he, too, wanted for himself just what they would have—a memory—the memory of a good young Father Aubert.

At a bend in the road, where the road edged in against the slope of the hill, hiding him from view, Raymond clambered up the short ascent. In a clump of small cedars at the top, he paused and looked back.

The great sweep of river, widening into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, with no breath of air to stir its surface, shimmered like a mirror under the afternoon sun. A big liner, outward bound, and perhaps ten miles from shore, seemed as though it were painted there. To the right, close in, was the little group of islands, with bare, rounded, rocky peaks, to which the carpenter had referred.

About him, from distant fields, came the occasional voice of a man calling to his horses, the faint whir of a reaper, and

a sort of pervading, drowsy murmur of insect life. Below him, nestled along the winding road, were the little whitewashed houses, quiet, secure, tranquil, they seemed to lie there; and high above them all, as though to typify the scene, to set its seal upon it, from the steeple of the church there gleamed in the sunlight a golden cross, a symbol of peace—such as he wore upon his breast!

With a quick intake of his breath, a snarl smothered in a low, confused cry, as he glanced involuntarily downward at his crucifix, he gathered up the skirts of his *soutane* and, as though to vent his emotion in physical exertion, began to force his way savagely through the bushes and undergrowth.

He had other things to do than waste time in toying with visionary sentiment! There was one detail in that scene of *peace* he had not seen—that man in the rear room of the *presbytère* who was going to trial for the murder of Théophile Blondin, because he was decked out in the clothes of one Raymond Chapelle, *alias* Henri Mentone.

It would be well, perhaps, for Raymond Chapelle to remember that, and to remember nothing else for the remainder of the afternoon!

He went on through the woods, heading as nearly as he could judge in a direction that would bring him out at the rear of the tavern. And now he laughed shortly to himself. Peace! There would be a peace that would linger long in somebody's memory at Mother Blondin's this afternoon, if only luck were with him!

He was on a priestly mission—to console, bring comfort to the old hag for the loss of her son, and, quite incidentally, to precipitate a fight with any of the loungers who might be burying their noses in Mother Blondin's home-made *whiskey blanc!*

He laughed out again. St. Marleau would talk of that, too, and applaud the righteousness of the good young Father Aubert—but he would attain the object he sought. He, the good young Father

Aubert, the man with a rope around his neck, whose hands were against every man's, had too many friends in St. Marleau—he needed an *enemy* now! It was the one thing that would make the night's work sure.

He reached the edge of the wood to find himself even nearer the tavern than he had expected—and to find, too, that he would not have to lie long in wait for a visitor to Mother Blondin's. There was one there already. So far, then, he could have asked for no better luck. He caught the sound of voices—the old hag's, high-pitched and querulous; a man's, rough and domineering.

Looking cautiously through the fringe of trees that still sheltered him, Raymond discovered that he was separated from Mother Blondin's back door by a matter of but a few yards of clearing. The door was open, and a man, heavy-built, in a red-checked shirt, a wide-brimmed hat of coarse straw, was forcing his way past the shriveled old woman.

As the man turned his head sidewise, Raymond caught a glimpse of the other's face. It was not a pleasant face. The eyes were black, narrow, and shifty under a low brow; and a three-days' growth of black stubble on his jaws added to his exceedingly dirty and unkempt appearance.

Mother Blondin's voice rose furiously. "You will pay first!" she screamed. "I know you too well, Jacques Bourget! Do you understand? The money! You will pay me first!"

"Or otherwise you will tell the police, eh?" the man guffawed contemptuously. He pushed his way inside the house, and pushed a table that stood in the center of the room roughly back against the wall. "You shut your mouth!" he jeered at her—and, stooping down, lifted up a trap-door in the floor. "Now trot along quick for some glasses, so you can keep count of all we both drink!"

"You are a thief, a robber, a *crapule*, a—" she burst into a stream of blasphemous invective. Her wrinkled face grew

livid with ungovernable rage. She shook a bony fist at him. "I will show you what you will get for this! You think I am alone—eh? You think I am an old woman that you can rob as you like—eh? You think my whisky is for your guzzling throat without pay—eh? Well, I will show you, you—"

The man made a threatening movement toward her, and she retreated back out of Raymond's sight—evidently into an inner room, for her voice, as viragolike as ever, was muffled now.

"Bring me a glass, and waste no time about it!" the man called after her. "And if you do not hold your tongue, something worse will happen to you than the loss of a drop out of your bottle!"

The man turned, and descended to the cellar through the trap-door.

"Yes," said Raymond softly to himself. "Yes, I think M. Jacques Bourget is the man I came to find."

He stepped out from the trees, walked noiselessly across to the house, and, reaching the doorway, remained standing quietly upon the threshold. He could hear the man moving about in the cellar below; from the inner room came Mother Blondin's incessant mutterings. Raymond smiled ominously—and then Raymond's face grew stern with well-simulated clerical disapproval.

The man's head, back turned, showed above the level of the floor. Into the doorway from the inner room came Mother Blondin—and halted there, her withered old jaw sagging downward in dumfounded surprise until it displayed her almost toothless gums. The man gained his feet, turned around—and, with a startled oath, dropped the bottle he was carrying. It crashed to the floor, broke, and the contents began to trickle back over the edge of the trap-door.

"*Sacristi!*" shouted the man, his face flaring up into an angry red. He thrust his head forward truculently from his shoulders, and glared at Raymond. "*Sacré nom de Dieu*, it is the saintly priest!" he sneered.

"My son," said Raymond gravely, "do not blaspheme. And have respect for the Church!"

"Bah!" snarled the man. "Do you think I care for you—or your church?" He looked suddenly at Mother Blondin. "Hah!"—he jumped across the room toward her. "So that is what you meant by not being alone—eh? I did not understand! You would trick me, would you? You would sell me out for the price of a drink—and—ha, ha—to a priest! Well"—he had her now by the shoulders—"I will take a turn at showing you what *I* will do! Eh—why did you not warn me he was here?" He caught her head and banged it brutally against the wall. "Eh—why did—"

Raymond, too, was across the room. It was strange! Most strange! He had intended to seek an occasion to quarrel. The occasion was made for him. He had no longer any desire to quarrel—he was possessed of an overwhelming desire to get his fingers around the throat of this cur who banged that straggling, disheveled gray hair against the wall. He was not quite sure that it was himself who spoke. No, of course, it was not! It was *monsieur le curé*—the good young Father Aubert. He was between them now, only Mother Blondin had fallen to the floor.

"My son," he said placidly, "since you will not respect the Church for one reason, I will teach you to respect it for another." He pointed to old Mother Blondin, who, more terrified than hurt perhaps, was getting to her knees, moaning and wringing her hands. "You have heard, though I fear you have forgotten it, of the Mosaic law. An eye for an eye, my son. I intend to do to you exactly what you have done to this woman."

The man, drawn back, eyed him first in angry bewilderment, and then with profound contempt.

"You'd better get out of here!" he said roughly.

"Presently—when I have thrown you out"—Raymond was calmly tucking up

the skirts of his *soutane*. "And"—the flat of his hand landed with a stinging blow across the other's cheek—"you see that I do not take even you off your guard."

The man reeled back—and then, with a bull-like roar of rage, head down, rushed at Raymond.

It was not *monsieur le curé* now—it was Raymond Chapelle, alias Arthur Leroy, alias Three-Ace Artie, cold, contained, quick, and lithe as a panther, and with a panther's strength. A crash—a lightning right whipped to the point of Bourget's jaw—and Bourget's head jolted back quivering on his shoulders like a tuning-fork. And like a flash, before the other could recover, a left and right smashed full again into Bourget's face.

With a scream, Mother Blondin crawled and scuttled into the doorway of the inner room. The man, bellowing with mad dismay, his hands outstretched, his fingers crooked to tear at Raymond's flesh if they could but reach it, rushed again.

And now Raymond, wary of the other's strength and bulk, gave ground; and now he side-stepped and swung, battering his blows into Bourget's face; and now he ran craftily from the other. Chairs and table crashed to the floor; their heels crunched in the splinters of the broken bottle.

The man's face began to bleed profusely from both nose and a cut lip. They were not tactics that Bourget understood.

He clawed, he kept his head down, he rushed in blind clumsiness—and always Raymond was just beyond his reach.

Again and again they circled the room, Bourget, big, lumbering, awkward, futilely expending his strength, screaming oaths with gasping breath. And again and again, springing aside as the man charged blindly by, Raymond with a grim fury rained in his blows. It was something like that other night—here in Mother Blondin's. She was shrieking again now from the doorway:

"Kill him! The *misérable*! Hah,

Jacques Bourget, are you a jack-in-the-box only to bob your head backward every time you are hit? I did not bring the priest here! *Sacré nom*, you cannot blame me! I had nothing to do with it! *Sacré nom—sacré nom—sacré nom—kill him!*"

Kill who? Who did she mean—the man or himself? Raymond did not know. She was just a blurred object of rags and tumbled hair dancing in a frenzy up and down there in the doorway. He ran again. Bourget, like a stunned fool, was covering his face with his arms as he dashed forward. Ah, yes, Bourget was trying to crush him back into the corner there, and—no!—the maniacal rush had faltered, the man was swaying on his feet. And then Raymond, crouched to elude the man, sprang instead at the other's throat, his hands closed like a vise, and with the impact of his body both lurched back against the wall by the rear doorway.

"My son," panted Raymond, "you remember—an eye for an eye"—he smashed Bourget's head back against the wall—and then, gathering all his strength, flung him out through the open door.

The fight was out of the man. For a moment he lay sprawled on the grass. Then he raised himself up, and got upon his knees. His face was bruised and blood-stained almost beyond recognition. He shook both fists at Raymond.

"By God, I'll get you for this!" His voice was guttural with unbridled passion. "I'll get you, you censer-swinging devil! I'll twist your neck with the chain of your own crucifix! Damn you to the pit! You're not through with me!"

"Go!" said Raymond sternly. "Go—and be glad that I have treated you no worse!"

He shut the door in the man's face; and, turning abruptly, walked across the floor to where Mother Blondin, quiet for the moment, gaped at him from the threshold of the other room.

"He will not trouble you any more, Mme. Blondin, I imagine," he said quiet-

ly. "See, it is over!" He smiled at her reassuringly—he needed to know now only where the man lived. "I should be sorry to think he was one of my parishioners. Where does he come from?"

"He is a farmer, and he lives in the house on the point a mile and a quarter up the road"—the answer had come automatically; she was listening, without looking at Raymond, to the threats and oaths that Jacques Bourget, as he evidently moved away, for his voice kept growing fainter, still bawled from without.

And then hate and sudden viciousness was in her face again. Her hair had tumbled to her shoulders and straggled over her forehead. She jabbed at it with both hands, sweeping it from her eyes, and leered at him fiercely.

"You dirty spy!" she croaked hoarsely. "I know you—I know all of you priests! You are all alike! Sneaks! Sneaks! Meddlers and sneaks! But you'll get to hell some day—like the rest of us! Ha, ha—to hell! You can't fool the devil! I know you! That's what you sneaked up here for—to spy on me, to find something against me that the police weren't sharp enough to find, so that you could get rid of me, get me out of St. Marleau! I know! They've been trying that for a long time!"

"To turn you over to the police," said Raymond gently, "would never save you from yourself. I came to talk to you a little about your son—to see if in any way I could help you, or be of comfort to you."

She stared at him for an instant, wondering and perplexed; and then the snarl was on her lips again.

"You lie! No priest comes here for that! I am an *excommuniée*."

"You are a woman in sorrow," Raymond said simply.

She did not answer him—only drew back into the other room.

Raymond followed her. It was the room where he had fought that night—with Théophile Blondin. His eyes swept

it with a hurried glance. There was the *armoïre* from which Théophile Blondin had snatched the revolver—and there was the spot on the floor where the dead man had lain. And here was the old hag with the streaming hair, as it had streamed that night, who had run shrieking into the storm that he had murdered her son. The whole scene began to live itself over again in his mind in minute detail. It seemed to possess an unhealthy fascination that bade him linger, and at the same time to fill with an impulse to rush away from it. The impulse was the stronger; and, besides, it would be evening soon, and there was that man in the *presbytère*, and there was much to do, and he had his confederate now—one Jacques Bourget.

"I shall not stay now"—he smiled as he turned to Mother Blondin and held out his hand. "You are upset over what has happened. Another time. But you will remember, will you not, that I would like to help you in any way I can?"

She reached out her hand mechanically to take his that was extended to her, and suddenly, muttering, jerked it back—and Raymond, appearing not to notice, smiled again, and, crossing the room, went out through the front door.

He went slowly across the little patch of yard, and on along the road in the direction of the village, and now his lips thinned in a grim smile. Yes, St. Marleau would hear of this, his chivalrous protection of Mother Blondin—and place another halo on his head! The devil's sense of humor was of a brand all its own! The more he twisted and squirmed and wriggled to get out of the trap, desperate to the extent that he would hesitate at nothing, the more he became—the good young Father Aubert!

Even that dissolute old hag, whose hatred for the Church and all pertaining to it was the most dominant passion in her life, was not far from the point where she would tolerate a priest—if the priest were the good young Father Aubert!

He reached the point where the road

began to descend the hill, and, pausing, looked back. Yes—even Mother Blondin, the *excommuniéc!* She was standing in the doorway, dirty, unkempt, disreputable, and, shading her eyes with her hand, was gazing after him. Yes, even she—*whose son had been killed in a fight with him.*

And Raymond, fumbling suddenly with his hat, lifted it to Mother Blondin, and went on down the hill.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HOUSE ON THE POINT.

IT was late, a good half-hour after the usual supper-time, when Raymond returned to the *presbytère*. He had done a very strange thing. He had gone into the church and sat there in the silence and the quiet of the sacristy—and twilight had come unnoticed.

It was the quiet he had sought, respite for a mind that had suddenly seemed nerve-racked to the breaking point as he had come down the hill from Mother Blondin's. It had been dim, and still, and cool, and restful in there—in the church. There was still Valérie, still the priest who had not died, still his own peril and danger, and still the hazard of the night before him; all that had not been altered; all that still remained—but in a measure, strangely, somehow, he was calmed.

He was full of apologies now to Mme. Lafleur, as he sat down to supper.

"But it is nothing!" she said, placing a lamp upon the table. She sat down herself; and added simply, as though, indeed, no reason could be more valid: "I saw you go into the church, *monsieur le curé.*"

"Yes," said Raymond, his eyes now on Valérie's empty seat. "And where is Mlle. Valérie? Taking our *pauvre* Mentone his supper?"

"Oh, no!" she answered quickly. "I took him his supper myself a little while ago—though I do not know whether he

will eat it or not. Valérie went over to her uncle's about half past five. She said something about going for a drive."

Raymond cut his slice of cold pork without comment. He was conscious of a dismal sense of disappointment, a depression, a falling of his spirits again. The room seemed cold and dead without Valérie there, without her voice, without her smile. And then there came a sense of pique, of irritation, unreasonable no doubt, but there for all that. Why had she not included him in the drive?

Fool! Had he forgotten? He could not have gone if she had—he had other things to do than drive that evening!

"Yes," said Mme. Lafleur significantly, reverting to her former remark, as she handed him his tea, "yes, I do not know if the poor fellow will eat anything or not."

Raymond glanced at her quickly. What was the matter? Had anything been discovered! And then his eyes were on his plate again. Mme. Lafleur's face, whatever her words might be intended to convey, was genuinely sympathetic, nothing more.

"Not cat?" he repeated mildly. "And why not, Mme. Lafleur?"

"I am sure I do not know," she replied, a little anxiously. "I have never seen him so excited. I thought it was because he was to be taken away to-morrow morning. And so, when we went out this afternoon, I tried to say something to him about his going away that would cheer him up. And would you believe it, *monsieur le curé*, he just stared at me, and then, as though I had said something droll, he—fancy, *monsieur le curé*, from a man who was going to be tried for his life—he laughed until I thought he would never stop. And after that he would say nothing at all; and since he has come in he has not been for an instant still. Do you not hear him, *monsieur le curé?*"

Raymond heard very distinctly. His ears had caught the sounds from the moment he had entered the *presbytère*. Up and down, up and down, from that back

room came the stumbling footfalls; then silence for a moment, as though from exhaustion the man had sunk down into a chair; and then the pacing to and fro again.

Raymond's lips tightened in understanding, as he bent his head over his plate. Like himself, the man in there was waiting—for darkness!

"He is over-excited," he said gravely. "And being still so weak, the news that he is to go to-morrow, I am afraid, has been too much for him. I have no doubt he was verging on hysteria when he laughed at you like that, Mme. Lafleur."

"I—I hope we shall not have any trouble with him," said Mme. Lafleur, nervously. "I mean that I hope he won't be taken sick again. He did not look at the tray at all when I took it in; he kept his eyes on me all the time, as though he were trying to read something in my face."

"Poor fellow!" murmured Raymond.

Mme. Lafleur nodded her gray head in sympathetic assent.

"Ah, yes, *monsieur le curé*—the poor fellow!" she sighed. "It is a terrible thing that he has done; but it is also terrible to think of what he will have to face. Do you think it wrong, *monsieur le curé*, to wish almost that he might escape?"

Escape! Curse it—what was the matter with Mme. Lafleur to-night! Or was it something the matter with himself?

"Not wrong, perhaps," he said, smiling at her, "if you do not connive at it."

"Oh, but, *monsieur le curé*!" she exclaimed reprovingly. "What a thing to say! But I would never do that! Still, it is all very sad, and I am heartily glad that I am not to be a witness at the trial like you and Valérie. And they say that Mme. Blondin, and M. Labbé, the station agent, and a lot of the villagers are to go, too."

"Yes; I believe so," Raymond nodded.

Mme. Lafleur, in quaint consternation, suddenly changed the subject.

"Oh, but I forgot to tell you!" she

cried. "The bread! Mme. Bouchard sent you two loaves all fresh and hot. Do you like it?"

The bread! He had been conscious neither that the bread was sour, nor that the crust was unmanageable. He became suddenly aware that the morsel in his mouth was not at all like the baking of Mme. Lafleur.

"You are all too good to me here in St. Marleau," he protested.

He checked her reply with a chiding forefinger, and a shake of his head—and presently, the meal at an end, pushed back his chair and strolled to the window. He stood there for a moment looking out. It was dark now—dark enough for his purpose.

"It is a beautiful night, *madame*," he said enthusiastically. "I am almost tempted to go out again for a little walk."

"But, yes, *monsieur le curé*—why not?" Mme. Lafleur was quite anxious that he should go. She was possessed of that enviable disposition that was instantly responsive to the interests and pleasures of others.

"Yes—why not?" smiled Raymond, patting her arm as he passed by her on his way to the door. "Well, I believe I will."

But outside in the hall he hesitated. Should he go first to the man in the rear room? He had intended to do so before he went out—to probe the other, as it were; to satisfy himself, perhaps more by the man's acts and looks than by words, that Henri Mentone had entered into the plans for the night.

But he was satisfied of that now. Mme. Lafleur's conversation had left no doubt but that the man's unusual restlessness and excitement were due to his being on the *qui vive* of expectancy. No, there was no use, therefore, in going to the man now, it would only be a waste of valuable time.

This decision taken, Raymond walked to the front door and down the steps of the porch. Here he turned, and choosing the opposite side of the house from the

kitchen and dining-room, where he might have been observed by Mme. Lafleur, yet still moving deliberately as though he were but sauntering idly toward the beach, made his way around to the rear of the *presbytère*.

It was quite dark. There were stars, but no moon. Behind here, between the back of the house and the shed, there was no possibility of his being seen. The only light came from Henri Mentone's room, and the shades there were drawn.

He opened the shed door silently, stepped inside, and closed the door behind him. He struck a match, held it above his head, and almost instantly extinguished it, as he located the sacristan's overalls, and the old coat and hat.

And now Raymond worked quickly. He stripped off his *soutane*, drew on the overalls, turning the bottoms well up over his own trousers, slipped on the coat, tucked the hat into one of the coat-pockets, and put on his *soutane* again. It was very simple—the *soutane* hid everything. He smiled grimly as he stepped outside again—the *monsieur le curé* who came out was the *monsieur le curé* who had gone in.

Raymond chose the beach. The village street meant that he would be delayed by being forced to stop and talk with any one he might meet, to say nothing of the possibility of having the ruinous, if well-meaning, companionship of some one foisted upon him — while, even if seen, there would be nothing strange in the fact that the *curé* should be taking an evening walk along the shore.

He started off at a brisk pace along the stretch of sand just behind the *presbytère*. It was a mile and a quarter to the point—to Jacques Bourget's. At the end of the sandy stretch Raymond went more slowly—the shore-line as a promenade left much to be desired—there was a seemingly interminable ledge of slate-rock over which he had need to pick his way carefully. He negotiated this, and was rewarded with another short, sandy

strip—but only to encounter the slate-rocks again with their ubiquitous little pools of water in the hollows, which he must avoid warily.

Sometimes he slipped; once he fell. The grim smile was back on his lips. There seemed to be something ironical even in these minor difficulties that stood between him and the effecting of the other's escape! There seemed to be a world of irony in the fact that he who sought escape himself should plan another's rather than his own!

It was the devil's toils, that was all, the devil's damnable ingenuity, and hell's incomparable sense of humor! He had either to desert the man or stand in the man's place himself and dangle from the gallows for his pains, or get the man away.

Well, he had no desire to dangle from the gallows—or to desert the man! He had chosen the third and only course left open to him. If he got the man away, if he succeeded in making his escape, it would not only save him, but he, Raymond, would have nothing thereafter to fear—the *curé* of St. Marleau in due course would meet with his deplorable and fatal accident!

True the priest would always live in the shadow of pursuit, a thing that he, Raymond, had been willing to accept for himself only as a last resort; but there was no help for that in the other's case now. He would give the man more money, plenty of it. He should be across the border and in the States early tomorrow, then New York, and a steamer for South America.

Yes, it should unquestionably succeed. He had worked out all those details while he was still racking his brain for a "Jacques Bourget," and he would give Henri Mentone minute instructions at the last moment when he gave him more money — that hundred dollars was only an evidence of good faith and of the loyalty of one "Pierre."

The only disturbing factor in the plan was Mentone's physical condition. The

man was still virtually an invalid—otherwise the police would have been neither justified in so doing, nor for a moment have been willing to leave him in the *presbytère*, as they had. Dupont was no fool, and it was perfectly true that the man had not the slightest chance in the world of getting away—*alone*.

But aided as he, Raymond, proposed to aid him, the man surely would be able to stand the strain of traveling, for a man could do much where his life was at stake.

Yes, after all, why worry on that score? It was only the night and part of the next day. Then Mentone could rest quietly at a certain address in New York while waiting for his steamer. Yes, unquestionably, the man, with his life in the balance, would be able to manage that.

Raymond was still picking his way over the ledges, still slipping and stumbling; and now, recovering from a fall that had brought him to his knees, he gave his undivided attention to his immediate task. It seemed a very long mile and a quarter, but at the expiration of perhaps another twenty minutes he was at the end of it, and halted to take note of his surroundings. He could just distinguish the village road edging away on his left; while ahead of him, but a little to his right, out on the wooded point, he caught the glimmer of a light through the trees.

That would be Jacques Bourget's house.

He now looked cautiously about him. There was no other house in sight. His eyes swept the road up and down as far as he could see—there was no one, no sign of life. He listened—there was nothing save the distant lapping of the water far out, for the tide was low on the mud flats.

A large rock close at hand suggested a landmark that could not be mistaken. He stepped toward it, took off his *soutane*, and laid the garment down beside the rock; he removed his clerical collar and

his clerical hat, and placed them on top of the *soutane*, taking care, however, to cover the white collar with the hat—then, turning down the trouser legs of the overalls, and turning up the collar of the threadbare coat, he took the battered slouch hat from his pocket and pulled it far down over his eyes.

"Behold," said Raymond cynically: "behold Pierre—what is his other name? Well, what does it matter? Pierre—Desforgeries. Desforgeries will do as well as any—behold Pierre Desforgeries!"

He left the beach, went up the little rise of ground that brought him among the trees, and made his way through the latter toward the lighted window of the house. Arrived here, he once more looked about him.

The house was isolated, far back from the road; and, in the darkness and the shadows cast by the trees, would have been scarcely discernible, save that it was whitewashed, and but for the yellow glow diffused from the window. He approached the door softly, and listened. A woman's voice, and then a man's, snarling viciously, reached him.

" . . . le sacré maudit curé!"

Raymond laughed low. Jacques Bourget and his wife appeared to have an engrossing topic of conversation, if they had been at it since afternoon! Also Jacques Bourget appeared to be of an unforgiving nature!

There was no veranda, not even a step—the door was on a level with the ground; and, from the little Raymond could see of the house, now that he was close beside it, it appeared to be as down-at-the-heels and as shiftless as its proprietor.

He leaned forward to avail himself of the light from the window, and, taking out a roll of bills of smaller denominations than those which he carried in his pocket-book, he counted out five ten-dollar notes.

Jacques Bourget from within was still in the midst of a blasphemous tirade. Raymond rapped sharply on the door

with his knuckles. Bourget's voice ceased instantly, and there was silence for a moment. Raymond rapped again—and then, as a chair-leg squeaked upon the floor, and there came the sound of a heavy tread approaching the door, he drew quickly back into the shadows at one side.

The door was flung open, and Bourget's face, battered and cut, an eye black and swollen, his lip puffed to twice its normal size, peered into the darkness.

"Who's there?" he called out gruffly.

"S-sh! Don't talk so loud!" Raymond cautioned in a guarded voice. "Are you Jacques Bourget?"

The man, with a start, turned his face in the direction of Raymond's voice. Mechanically he dropped his own voice.

"Maybe I am, and maybe I'm not," he growled suspiciously. "What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you if you are Jacques Bourget," Raymond answered. "And if you are I can put you in the way of turning a few dollars to-night, to say nothing of another little matter that will be to your liking."

The man hesitated, then drew back in the doorway.

"Well, come in," he invited. "There's no one but the old woman here."

"The old woman is one old woman too many," Raymond said roughly. "I'm not on exhibition. You come out here, and shut the door. You've nothing to be afraid of—the only thing I have to do with the police is to keep away from them, and that takes me all my time."

"I ain't worrying about the police," said Bourget shrewdly.

"Maybe not," returned Raymond. "I didn't say you were. I said I was. I've got a hundred dollars here that—"

A woman appeared suddenly in the doorway behind Bourget.

"What is it? Who is it, Jacques?" she shrilled out inquisitively.

Bourget, for answer, swore at her, pushed her back, and, slamming the door behind him, stepped outside.

"Well, what is it? And who are you?" he demanded.

"My name is Desforges—Pierre Desforges," said Raymond, his voice still significantly low. "That doesn't mean anything to you—and it doesn't matter. What I want you to do is to drive a man to the second station from here to-night—St. Eustace is the name, isn't it?—and you get a hundred dollars for the trip."

"What do you mean?" Bourget's voice mingled incredulity and avarice. "A hundred dollars for that, eh? Are you trying to make a fool of me?"

Raymond held the bills up before the man's face.

"Feel the money if you can't see it!" he suggested with a short laugh. "That's what talks."

"*Bon Dieu!*" ejaculated Bourget. "Yes, it is so! Well, who am I to drive? You? You are running away! Yes, I understand! They are after you—eh? I am to drive you, eh?"

"No," said Raymond. He drew the man close to him in the darkness and placed his lips to Bourget's ear. "*Henri Mentone.*"

Bourget, startled, sprang back.

"What? Who?" he cried out loudly.

"I told you not to talk so loud!" snapped Raymond. "You heard what I said."

Bourget twisted his head furtively about.

"No, '*cré nom*—no!" he said huskily. "It is too much risk! If one were caught at that—eh? *B'en non, merci!*"

"There's no chance of your being caught"—Raymond's voice was smooth again. "It is only nine miles to St. Eustace—you will be back and in bed long before daylight. Who is to know anything about it?"

"Yes, and you!"—Bourget was still twisting his head about furtively. "What do I know about you? What have you to do with this?"

"I will tell you," said Raymond, and into the velvet softness of his voice there crept an ominous undertone; "and at

the same time I will tell you that you will be very wise to keep your mouth shut. You understand? If I trust you, it is to make you trust me. Henri Mentone is my pal. I was there the night Théophile Blondin was killed. But I made my escape. I do not desert a pal, only I had no money. Well, I have the money now, and I am back. And I am just in time—eh? They say he is well enough to be taken away in the morning."

"*Mon Dieu*, you were there at the killing!" muttered Bourget hoarsely. "No—I do not like it! No—it is too much risk!" His voice grew suddenly sharp with undisguised suspicion. "And why did you come to *me*, eh? Why did you come to me? Who sent you here?"

"I came because Mentone must be driven to St. Eustace—because he is not strong enough to walk," said Raymond, coolly. "And no one sent me here. I heard of your fight this afternoon. The *curé* is telling around the village that if he could not change the aspect of your heart there was no doubt as to the change in the aspect of your face."

"*Sacré torieu!*" gritted Bourget furiously. "He said that? I will show him! I am not through with him yet! But what has he to do with this that you come here? Eh? I do not understand."

"Simply," said Raymond meaningly, "that *monsieur le curé* is the one with whom we shall have to deal in getting Mentone away."

"Hah!" exclaimed Bourget fiercely. "Yes—I am listening now! Well?"

"He sits a great deal of the time in the room with Mentone," explained Raymond, with a callous laugh. "Very well. Mentone has been warned. If this fool of a *curé* knows no better than to sit there all night to-night, I will find some reason for calling him outside, and in the darkness, where he will recognize no one, we shall know what to do with him, and when we are through we will tie him and gag him and throw him into the shed where he will not be found until morning.

On the other hand, if we are able to get Mentone away without the *curé* knowing it, you will still not be without your revenge. He is responsible for Mentone, and if Mentone gets away through the *curé's* negligence, the *curé* will get into trouble with the police."

"I like the first plan better," decided Bourget with an ugly sneer. "He talks of my face, does he? *Nom de Dieu*, he will not be able to talk of his own! And a hundred dollars—eh? You said a hundred dollars? Well, if there is no more risk than that in the rest of the plan, *sacré nom*, you can count on Jacques Bourget!"

"There is no risk at all," said Raymond. "And as to which plan—we shall see. We shall have to be guided by the circumstances, eh? And for the rest—listen! I will return by the beach and watch the *presbytère*. You give me time to get back, then harness your horse and drive down there—drive past the *presbytère*. I will be listening, and will hear you. Then, after you have gone a little way beyond, turn around and come back, and I will know that it is you.

"If you drive in behind the church to where the people tie their horses at mass on Sundays, you can wait there without being seen by any one passing by on the road. I will come and let you know how things are going. We may have to wait a while after that until everything is quiet, but in that way we will be ready to act the minute it is safe to do so."

"All that is simple enough," Bourget grunted in agreement. "And then?"

"And then," said Raymond, "we will get Mentone out through the window of his room. There is a train that passes St. Eustace at ten minutes after midnight—and that is all. The St. Eustace station, I understand, is like the one here—far from the village, and with no houses about. He can hide near the station until train time; and, without having shown yourself, you can drive back home and go to bed. It is your wife that you have to think of—she will say nothing, eh?"

"*Baptême!*" snorted Bourget contemptuously. "She has learned before now when to keep her tongue where it belongs! And you? You are coming, too?"

"Do you think I am a fool, Bourget?" inquired Raymond shortly. "When they find Mentone is gone they will know he must have had an accomplice, for he could not get far alone. They will be looking for *two* of us traveling together. I will go the other way. That makes it safe for Mentone—and safe for me. I can walk to Tournayville easily before daylight; and in that way we shall both give the police the slip."

"*Diable!*" grunted Bourget admiringly. "You have a head!"

"It is good enough to take care of us all in a little job like to-night's," returned Raymond, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Well, do you understand everything? For if you do, there's no use wasting any time."

"Yes—I have it all!" Bourget's voice grew vicious again. "That sacred, accursed *curé!* Yes, I understand."

Raymond thrust the bank-notes he had been holding into Bourget's hand.

"Here are fifty dollars to bind the bargain," he said crisply. "You get the other fifty at the church. If you don't get them, all you've got to do is drive off and leave Mentone in the lurch. That's fair, isn't it?"

Bourget shuffled back to the edge of the lighted window, counted the money, and shoved it into his pocket.

"*Bon Dieu!*" Bourget's puffed lip twisted into a satisfied grin. "I do not mind telling you, Pierre Desforbes, that it is long since I have seen so much."

"Well, the other fifty is just as good," said Raymond in grim pleasantry. He stepped back and away from the house. "At the church then, Bourget—in, say, three-quarters of an hour."

"I will be there," Bourget answered. "Have no fear—I will be there!"

"All right!" Raymond called back—and a moment later gained the beach.

At the rock he once more put on his *soutane*; and, running now where the sandy stretches gave him opportunity, scrambling as rapidly as he could over the ledges of slate-rock, he headed back for the *presbytère*.

It was as good as done! There was a freeness to his spirits now—a weight and an oppression lifted from him. Henri Mentone would stand in no prisoner's dock day after to-morrow to answer for the murder of Théophile Blondin. And it was very simple—now that Bourget's aid had been enlisted.

He smiled ironically as he went along. It would not even be necessary to pommel *monsieur le curé* into a state of insensibility! Mme. Lafleur retired very early—by nine o'clock always at the latest—as did Valérie.

As soon as he heard Bourget drive up to the church he would go to the man to allay any impatience, and as evidence that the plan was working well. He would return then to the *presbytère*—it was a matter only of slipping on and off his *soutane* to appear as Father Aubert to Mme. Lafleur and Valérie, and as Pierre Desforbes to Jacques Bourget. And the moment Mme. Lafleur and Valérie were in bed, he would extinguish the light in the front room as proof that *monsieur le curé*, too, had retired; run around to the back of the house, get Henri Mentone out of the window, and hand him over to Bourget, explaining that everything had worked even more smoothly than he had hoped for; that all were in bed, and that there was no chance of the escape being discovered until morning.

Bourget, it was true, was very likely to be disappointed in the measure of the revenge wreaked upon the *curé*, but Bourget's feelings in the matter, since Bourget then would have no choice but to drive Henri Mentone to St. Eustace, were of little account.

And as far as Henri Mentone was concerned, it was very simple, too. The man would have ample time and opportunity to get well out of reach. He, Raymond,

would take care that his disappearance was not discovered any earlier than need be in the morning!

It would then be a perfectly natural supposition—a supposition which he would father—that the man, in his condition, could not be far away, but had probably only gone restlessly and aimlessly from the house; and at first no one would even think of such a thing as escape. They would look for him around the *presbytère*, and close at hand on the beach. It would be impossible that, weak as he was, the man had gone far!

The search would perhaps be extended to the village by the time M. Dupont ar-

rived for his vanished prisoner. Then they would extend the search still further, to the adjacent fields and woods, and it would certainly be noontime before the alternative that the man, aided by an accomplice, had got away, became the only tenable conclusion.

But even then M. Dupont would either have to drive three miles to the station to reach the telegraph, or return to Tournayville—and by that time Henri Mentone would long since have been in the United States.

And after that—Raymond smiled ironically again—well, after that it would be M. Dupont's move!

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.

Form or No Form

by

Eli Moffatt Millen



VERY much depends upon the kind of tree you are climbing or propose to climb as to the ease with which ascent to the topmost branches is accomplished. The climbing of the tree, whose leafy, branched top is known as A-Place-in-Life, is very like arriving at the foliage end of an upstanding Sequoia without spikes. Arms are not designed with enough elasticity to

reach around it for a hold. The first branch is a long, long way up. Finger nails, literally and figuratively, are worn to the quick with trying to stick. A slip before the first branch is reached means almost invariably a peculiar and very unpleasant scraping descent as far south as the bottom.

Toppling from a branch is different. The process of inverse gradation does

not afford slow mutilation; but is so swift and uninterrupted that a smashing jolt is the end. If the fallen one is not put out of business for good he is likely to resume the ascent more quickly than the slipper.

The slipping has its pitiful side. The shins get scratched, the arms and fingers torn with trying to stop and by the time you have arrived at the base, to all intents and purposes, your appearance to the observer is that of one who has made a backward, sliding descent down a thorn tree with a bob cat under each arm.

If, while a man is trying to mount a Sequoia, the back of his neck irritates and begs for just one scratch, and the climber inclines to the call for a scratch—he has made a mistake.

Harmon Hiter started upward for A-Place-in-Life, slowly but very well, in the small town in which his father had managed to become a school trustee, a church deacon, and one or two other prominent things. The son adopted his father's calling—insurance and real estate, varied and sundry. He married, built his home, went to lodge, church at times, could speak in public and look any man in the eye.

But, in a moment of irritation, he let go a holt, slipped, and was never able to pull up until the bottom was unmistakably reached.

As a young man he purposed to live and be worth while. His most pleasant anticipation, after marriage, was that his home would include a childish voice or two. Medical wisdom, real or quack, suggested to Hiter that, if he valued the life of his wife, such would not likely be.

Disappointment, bitter and almost unbelievable, he at first tempered with consideration. This gave place in time to a sullen discontent, and then one night—only the night before his wife had planned to reveal to him that their physician was not all wise—he abandoned all hope to his claim for A-Place-in-Life. The little singing teacher went

away with him. Hiter really believed for the moment that he was registering a complaint against Fate.

His wife did not divorce him. Filled first with the grief of a forsaken woman, then with a sudden fury, she had him pursued. He was her own; she would have him punished and afterward take him back to share in the parenthood. The trail of the fugitives was lost. Hiter was not to know until he reached bottom that a son had been born to him within six months after his departure. He avoided the beaten paths. He had no news from the little village. Given a respectable time in which he was convinced that his wife had freed herself of his name, he married the singer. His profession of marriage to her was based upon paradoxical honor. The real heart of the man was back in the first home, and as the years went on he confessed to the second mate that his first sweetheart was the one he still loved.

In time and after numerous vicissitudes, he brought up in a two-room flat on a presumably respectable, but unrefined street, passed an apprenticeship and entered routinely upon the profession of steno-typewriter in the services of a great afternoon newspaper. At the end of the ninth year as husband of the little singer with still no parental responsibility came the moment when he let all holts go.

Something familiar on the upturned, half cylindrical face of a first page plate he had cast for impatient presses caught his eye. Spreading over three columns was the photographic reproduction of a handwritten letter with an "inset" of the picture of a man—himself. A moment later a reporter for his own paper called him to ask direct questions concerning the self-occasioned end of his wife.

He started home. Before he reached there the "extras" were on the street. The photographed page of a letter, which his wife had left, smeared itself around his picture on the front page.

It had been addressed to Rose Wilson Hiter, the wife whom Harmon had deserted. It was abrupt; it was broken; it was penitent.

Its first sentence began:

If I could only go where no one would call me by the name I have no right to have. If I could forget the man I love was not my own.

You were the girl he loved. I remember he showed me a little photo of you one day and said: "This is the girl I love. I shed bitter tears for her."

Hiter did not go on to the flat to complete his obligations of fidelity; to shed a tear of pity or remorse over the body of the one who had endeavored to atone for their joint misdeed.

Fourteen years later, lacking three days, he returned to the city. His age was fifty-two. The process of slipping had marked him for seventy. A man's job he could not get or hold. Even a boy's was hard, but a boy's job he got after much pleading and at smaller wage than the previous lad employed.

He became messenger, errand boy, cleaner for a drug store on the river front—a drug store whose claim upon the name was a bluff at a prescription counter; a dusty, felt-bottom half oval show-case for toilet articles; a few bottles with latin labels upon the shelves, most of them empty; whose customers, as a majority, were inclined to the use of rags for handkerchiefs, whose noses seemed constantly without proper air clearance, their faces splotched, their bodily presence made known to a healthy passerby many feet away by other sense than sight.

The job was good for less than three days. It might have been longer had not the burning of The Belle of the Bend interfered.

It was on the afternoon of the third day of Harmon's services, while he slept fitfully in a weak-legged chair under the partial shade of a tattered awning at the front of the store that the alarm was sounded.

The Belle of the Bend was something

new to Hiter in the way of an excursion boat. The day previous he had seen her arrive from down the river, her great decks and cabins speckled with excursionists, and slip easily into her place against the wharf boat; had seen her slip out again for a short trip up-river; had asked a question or two about her, receiving a lazy and half informative answer and then had forgotten that such a boat existed.

If Hiter had only been interested enough in the great excursion steamer that had made its advent upon the river within the last year or two and had inquired of wide-awake people he might have learned that a young man, Joe Wilson by name, was the brains of the company that owned her. The name might have sounded familiar to him, but even then might not have revealed itself to him—for the name Wilson is not uncommon. Joe Wilson was the son of Rose Wilson Hiter, born to her six months after his father had disappeared.

When the lad had come to years of discretion and a partial story of his father had been made known to him, he dropped of his own accord, the Hiter, and argued without effect that his mother should do the same. Her refusal was firm, her reasons as logical for holding the name as were those of the son for trying to forget it.

Her reasons were that she had married for love; there could be no such thing as divorce; as a lawful wife she could punish with the law. The latter she swore to do if she should find him.

Joe Wilson grew and prospered and became a river man, for the steamboat fascinated him; but the roustabout's, the deck hand's, the mate's, the captain's job were each too small for him for any length of time. His vision was too large. He foresaw a fleet of boats with greater trade, he foresaw the excursion traffic, and the keel of The Belle of the Bend was laid on the day that Joe Wilson became vice-president and manager of the company which was

to operate her. Joe Wilson, Hiter might have learned, was the prince of rivermen. In less than another week he could hardly have been so dull and insensible to even small gossip as to have escaped some story of the boy who had made river boats pay.

But events had moved too swiftly for Hiter to have learned the name of Joe Wilson or to have conjectured, had he heard of him, that he was a son.

"Belle's on fiah! She's comin' in on fiah!" shrieked a shanty boat dweller—and the levee came to life. The great excursion craft had burst into flames within sight of the wharf boat as she returned from up the river. Gilded and tinselled, built for show, she was doomed to go like a cracker-box, and the levee knew it.

The work of rescue was quickly and apparently thoroughly done. Excitement there was, of course, but cool heads, steady hands, plenty of boats, tugs, and barges made quick work of taking off the excursionists. Then all tarried to witness the spectacular blaze.

If any were missing the officers on hand could not account for them, and a breath of relief went up from the levee throng—the thousands who had gathered to watch the big hulk when she would finally splutter and hiss, her boilers explode and she would go down with a dip like a fabled Viking ship.

Brought to life and for a time thrilled and enthralled by the sight, Harmon Hiter watched it all from his place at the top of the levee.

The automobile crowds began to gather; the streets were filled with them. With difficulty fire lines had been established and passage ways made. To the average machine, and the average occupants, excitedly chattering, Hiter gave but little heed. He had seen the rich, the near-rich, and the would-be-rich, too much in times past to be amused or curious. But about the time the last deck-hand had slipped down to a rescuing craft there darted down to the

levee's edge, with a bump into the crowd, a limousine that seemed to have come for a purpose.

Its occupant was a woman past middle years, gray and grave, but handsome and well kept. Harmon Hiter merely observed that the vehicle was a limousine, that its occupant was a woman of undoubted wealth, but further than this his stupid brain did not stir itself. He heard her call from the door of the car to a man who seemed to have been of some importance: "Where is Joe?"

"Joe?" queried the big man. "Joe's out of town to-day."

"But he isn't!" exclaimed the woman fiercely. "He was on the Belle. Is every one off?"

"Every one accounted for," said the big man.

The deck-hand who a few moments before had swung off the burning boat at that instant butted his way, like a maddened goat, through the crowd yelling excitedly as he caught sight of the big man at the limousine.

"One of the boys ain't off! I tried to find him."

"Who!" exclaimed the woman. "Is it Joe?"

"More than one!" screamed a child, who also had fought her way through the throng to find some one who would believe her.

"One of the boat's men was knocked down a hole they tore in the floor. A big plank hit him. Some nice dressed man went after him and they never come back. There's two of them, I tell you! There's two of them."

The big man groaned. "No power on earth can save them now. Who is it?" he shrieked, shaking the deck-hand by the shoulders.

"I didn't see but one," answered the deck-hand. "That boy fell through the floor. I didn't see nobody go after him."

"It's Joe! It's Joe!" cried the woman in the limousine. "He is on the Belle. He changed his mind. He went to Sharonport this morning and caught

her coming down; said there was some new machinery he wanted to inspect. Tell me you have seen him! He is on that boat, if you haven't, and he is the man who went after the deck-hand. It's just like him. Nobody but Joe would do it. Can't some one get him out? Please, some one get him out?"

The big man galvanized into action. His voice boomed over the levee like the roar of an enraged lion.

"There's two men on the Belle. Who'll go with me and get them out?"

Not even a fireman volunteered. A murmur of resignation, of regret, passed over the vast throng like the moan of a barley field when the first gust of wind before the storm passes through.

"It can't be done." was the sentiment.

Shoving, butting, striking out with his fists, the big man hurried down to the water's edge through the sardined crowd. His call for volunteers was repeated frantically.

Harmon Hiter had moved down the levee before an announcement had been made of missing ones. As the big man neared him bawling his plea for help to save the manager of the Belle, Hiter was wondering how a living soul could board that floating inferno. Then he heard the big man calling. He looked around for the rush of firemen and observed that none had answered. He listened again and watched to see some other brave man respond.

"God in Heaven! Isn't there even a fireman that knows how to be brave?" yelled the big man as he passed quite close to Hiter. His voice was edged with a sob. "Isn't there any man that don't give a damn for himself—and will go?"

Somehow the "don't give a damn," appeal struck Hiter as no self appraisal of recent years had. Was he not one of the "don't give a damn." His mind leaped through its dope-clouded shadow and came out in the clear. He jumped forward and seized the big man by the arm.

"I'll do it! Give me a sack, two of them, or three! Big gunny sacks—and get me a string to tie them around my head. Get the boat, and I will be there!"

The gunny sacks were provided on the instant, by the emptying of bags of corn that awaited loading on the levee. As the little launch with Hiter and his big companion shot out from the bank and into the shower of blazing splinters which fell about them, hissing and dying in the mud-tanned waters, Hiter soused the sacks in the river, wrapped them drenched and dripping about his head and shoulders, tied a string or two with a jerk, crawled to the prow of the boat and poised for action when they should find the spot where he could board the seething, drifting former palace of pleasure.

The little launch shot under the protecting overreach of the prow, scraped its varnished side along the steel shell of the big craft's hull, then came to a place where a grappling hook with its clinging rope would catch an iron rail.

Something of the old stereotyper's strength came back to Hiter. He was on the Belle a moment after the hook had found its place. Above the crackle and roar of the flames his voice carried an order to the man in the launch, and then he disappeared.

What danger he faced, how heroic the rescue, where he searched and how, Hiter never intimated to the public. All the levee throng knew or saw were two inert figures let down over the boat's side in something like fifteen minutes after Hiter had pulled himself to the deck—fifteen minutes that to those most interested must have been as so many hours.

Of melodrama there was brief but very visible evidence. The blazing of the gunny sack about Hiter's head as he sprang out upon the open deck with the second limber body furnished a gasp for the levee. Hiter shook it from him, let down his burden to the launch and standing for a moment erect shook his

fist, for what cause no one knew, at the levee throng. Then he dived from the deck into the river, appeared in an instant among the charred drift wood and struck out for shore slowly but with a kind of renewed vigor, a temporary strength, in the wake of the launch.

Firemen and reporters pulled him out, and right there the tussle for news began.

Some asked him if he were hurt; if his lungs were seared; if he needed whisky; if he should go to the hospital. Some tried to shake his hand and call him a hero; a woman or two tried to kiss him, but the reporters had him and reporters do not let go.

Hiter refused an ambulance; he had no need of a hospital. He tried to free himself from the solicitations and queries of the newspaper tribe.

"Where are you going?" asked one of the boys when Hiter with angry force shook himself free from restraining hands.

"I don't know," growled Hiter. "but it's time I was there."

"Don't you know you are some sort of an angel, man? Sort of a fiery furnace god? Don't you know that you will be cared for after this? What is your name?"

"Bill Smith will do!" said Hiter shortly.

"Bill Smith!" laughed one of the older boys. "Come on, tell us about it. What is your name and where do you live, old hero soak?"

"That's all for *you*," growled Hiter. "I know you boys. Bill Smith maybe ain't my name, but it *is* for you. I know what you did for me once, and in this town, too. If I told you what it was you would smear the whole front page again. Just let it be, and talk to the lads that almost got overlooked."

And so far as Hiter was concerned Bill Smith was all they got. In a moment when the "boys" had slipped across to see how the saved men were, Hiter escaped into the throng, and try

as they might and search where they would he was lost to newspapers. Likewise the levee drug store lost an errand boy.

But a feature was still to be had for the newspaper boys. Joe Wilson had all but given his life for the sake of a deck-hand and would, with the deck-hand, have gone down unmissed until too late had not Joe's mother known where he was.

At mention of the full name of Joe Wilson's mother, an old financial editor, who fourteen years before was a star reporter, bethought himself of history. Back files were pulled from musty shelves; the story of the letter to Rose Wilson Hiter was found and told again. It was even reproduced—that old front page was photographed—and Harmon Hiter's youthful picture stood forth again as the center of triangle romance in a front page story. There was an interview with Mrs. Hiter and one with Joe. They had begged and pleaded that the story of the letter be not again retold. But promises were not given; the story was too good.

An impudent cub asked Mrs. Hiter why she had never married again or changed her name—if she felt as did Joe about the errant husband.

"Because," she answered, "he was my husband first and last. If dead I do not know; if alive I still would make him suffer. I hate the name, but bear it because my duty bids me. I hate him. I would not care to ever see him again, but if I did he'd suffer—he'd suffer as he made me suffer."

Said Joe: "I was born of wedlock. In other respects I have never had a father. The name of Hiter to me is repugnant. As a father's it fills me with the hatred of hell, and were I ever to face the man who was once my mother's husband I'd see him suffer, too."

And then he made his final plea: "Don't use the old story, boys, for my sake and hers. I beg you not to use it."

A smile and a shrugging of shoulders;

neither "yes" or "no" were the answers.

But some one still curious for more color stuff on the burning of the Belle put forth another question.

"What would you do for the bum that pulled you out?"

Joe Wilson smiled with wondrous gratitude.

"I am not the richest man in town, but in this world's goods I have sufficient and some to spare, and if ever you find that dear old bum, please tell him Joe Wilson wants to see him. You say he smelled like dope; you say he shook like a booze-wrecked tramp; well let me tell you: if you ever find him, if you ever meet him face to face tell him for me that Joe Wilson will help him save himself. God knows my mother needs me, and I need her. That God-sent bum you spoke of is all that stands between me and a crisp at the bottom of the Belle as she sleeps in the mud of the river: I wish you would find him for me."

It was time for the bats and bugs when Harmon Hiter crept out of his frowzy room on the river front that evening. His manner of exit upon the street was that of a man upon whom consciousness of crime had fallen: of one who momentarily expects a shoulder tap and "come along, old man, we want you."

His blistered face and neck, his parched hands he tried to hide as one would put away the unwashable stains of murder. He seemed to fear recognition. He had slept and dreamed, and in his dreams he was haunted by the old story—his desertion, his despondency, his muddled loves—and now he yearned for just a chance to slip away from the scenes that hurt him most. Had he but given his name he felt sure the old story would be told, for he recalled how Memory lies awake in newspaper rooms.

With seeming indifference he bought a paper and in the glare of the first street lamp he spread it out and there before him, like that nightmare—as well repro-

duced, more graphically told, more pathetically colored—he saw that story of fourteen years before. It stared at him for all the world like the pitiful countenance of a mother who tries to smile forgivingly upon an undutiful son from her cot in an almshouse ward just before her end.

Hiter threw the paper down and shook himself as though to purge his mind of an evil recollection; then walked away. But, somehow, all was not complete. He had not finished. Who was it he had saved? Just that one thing he would like to know before he left for parts unknown. He found the sheet and read it again.

If his cloudy brain had stirred for a moment on the levee when he wondered whether he were the man "not worth a damn," it cleared just now still more. The puckered lines about the eyes smoothed out a bit; the eyelids drooped with a sort of loving shade, the pupils of his eyes, for many years pointed and dull, tried hard to enlarge with a glow of love.

A surprise had been sprung upon him. A name or two he knew—and he, an unknown bum, had brought the story forth again.

He had a son!

He read and reread the words of hatred and contempt which Rose Wilson Hiter and her son had uttered to the press. His knees began to quiver; a weakness seized upon him. He sank down upon the street curb for the moment. Once he shook his head; at another time he nodded it. After a while he arose. His mouth had a definite set; his eyes suggested purpose.

"I guess it's not according to form, because the thing for me to do is run away. A decent man I guess would go. He'd stay away. I have done enough to make them say those things. If the form chart counts for anything I ought to get clean out or off the map—right now; but form or no form I am going to see Joe Wilson."

The Argus Pheasant

by John Charles Beecham

Author of "Leah," "That Affair of Dabjangsari," etc., etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

KOYALA, daughter of Leveque, a French trader, and a native Borneo woman, has been brought up as white at the mission school. When she learns of her birth her horror and bitterness turn to hatred of the white race, and she becomes the leader of her mother's people—pirates and head-hunters—who call her Bintang Burung, the Argus Pheasant, and on account of her white skin and education look up to her with superstitious awe. Under her leadership lawlessness has thriven until the Dutch government is desperate. His Excellency Van Schouten, by advice of his secretary, Sachsen, appoints Peter Gross, the American mate of the ship *Coryander*, resident at Bulungan. Peter, after some hesitation, decides to accept, but is warned by Sachsen that Koyala is a beauty and a siren, who has already got the acting-resident, Mynheer Muller, entirely under her influence. Peter decides to take with him only twenty-five picked men. He has little difficulty in getting these, but finds it hard to get a leader to suit him. Finally an old sea captain tells him of an ex-American army officer, Captain Carver. Peter goes to see him, and on the way is waylaid by the tongmen of Ah Sing, the organizer and head of the pirates. After a fierce fight he is finally rescued by Captain Carver and a nephew of the old sea captain, Paddy Rouse. Gross finds Carver exactly the man he wants and hires him; he also takes Paddy with him, partly on account of his red hair which the natives hold in reverence. They arrive at Bulungan, where Peter goes ashore alone and interviews Muller and Van Slyck, the military commander.

Peter calls a meeting of all the native chiefs, rajas, *et cetera*, and tries to win their confidence. Under the secret influence of Ah Sing, however, the worst element gets control, and Peter is about to be killed when Koyala interferes and turns the tide in Gross's favor, most of the chiefs swearing blood brotherhood. Captain Carver, however, is not convinced of Koyala's good faith, and when, that same night, a poisoned arrow narrowly misses Peter, the captain points to it as an evidence of the girl's treachery.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SUMMONS TO SADONG.

WITH pen poised, Peter Gross sat at his desk in the residency building and stared thoughtfully at the blank sheets of stationery before him. He was preparing a letter to Captain Rouse, to assure that worthy that all was going well, that Paddy was in the best of health and proving his value in no uncertain way, and to give

a pen picture of the situation. He began:

DEAR CAPTAIN:

Doubtless you have heard from Paddy before this, but I want to add my assurance to his that he is in the best of health and is heartily enjoying himself. He has already proven his value to me, and I am thanking my lucky stars that you let me have him.

We have been in Bulungan for nearly a month, and so far all is well. The work is going on, slowly, to be sure, but successfully, I hope. I can already see what I think are the first fruits of my policies.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for February 3.

The natives are not very cordial as yet, but I have made some valuable friends among them. The decisions I have been called upon to make seem to have given general satisfaction, in most instances. I have twice been obliged to set aside the judgments of *controlleurs*, whose rulings appeared unjust to me, and in both cases my decision was in favor of the poorer litigant. This has displeased some of the *orang kayas*, or rich men, of the villages, but it has strengthened me with the tribesmen. I believe.

He described the council and the result, and continued:

I am now having a census taken of each district in the residency. I have made the *controlleur* in each district responsible for the accuracy of the census in his territory, and have made Mynheer Muller, the acting-resident prior to my coming, chief of the census bureau. He opposed the count at first, but has come round to my way of thinking, and is prosecuting the work diligently. The chief difficulty is the natives—some one has been stirring them up—but I have high hopes of knowing, before the next harvest, how many people there are in each village and what proportion of the tax each chief should be required to bring. The taxation system has been one of the worst evils in Bulungan in the past; the poor have been oppressed, and all the tax gatherers have enriched themselves, but I expect to end this.

I had a peculiar request made of me the other day. Captain Van Slyck asked that Captain Carver and his company be quartered away from Bulungan. The presence of Carver's irregulars was provoking jealousies among his troops, he said, and was making it difficult to maintain discipline. There is reason in his request, yet I hesitate to grant it. Captain Van Slyck has not been very friendly toward me, and a mutiny in the garrison would greatly discredit my administration. I have not yet given him my answer.

Inchi tells me there is a persistent rumor in the town that the great Datu, the chief of all the pirates, is in Bulungan. I would have believed his story the day after the council, for I thought I recognized his voice there; but I must have been mistaken. Captain Enckle, of the Prins Lodewyk, who was here a week ago, brings me positive assurance that the man is at Batavia. He saw him there himself, he says. It cannot be that my enemy has a double; nature never cast two men in that mold in one generation. Since Inchi cannot produce any one who will swear positively that he has seen the Datu, I am satisfied that the report is unfounded. Maybe you can find out something.

As Peter Gross was affixing the required

stamp, the door opened and Paddy Rouse entered.

"The baby doll is here and wants to see you," Paddy announced.

"Who?" Peter Gross asked, mystified.

"The yellow kid. Old man Muller's chocolate darling," Paddy elucidated.

Peter Gross looked at him in stern reproof.

"Let the Juffrouw Koyala be the Juffrouw Koyala to you hereafter," he commanded harshly.

"Yes, sir." Paddy erased the grin from his lips but not from his eyes.

"Shall I ask the lady to come in?"

"You may request her to enter," Peter Gross said. "And, Paddy—"

"Yes, sir."

"—leave the door open."

"Yes, sir."

The red head bobbed to hide another grin.

Koyala glided in softly as a kitten. She was dressed as usual in the Malay-Javanese costume of kabaya and sarong. Peter Gross could not help noticing the almost mannish length of her stride and the haughty, arrogant tilt of her head.

"Unconquerable as the sea," he mused.

"And apt to be as tempestuous. She's well named—the Argus Pheasant."

He placed a chair for her. This time she did not hesitate to accept it. As she seated herself she crossed her ankles in girlish unconsciousness. Peter Gross could not help noticing how slim and perfectly shaped those ankles were, and how delicately her exquisitely formed feet tapered in the soft, doe-skin sandals.

"Well, *juffrouw*, which of my *controlleurs* is in mischief now?" he asked in mock resignation.

Koyala flashed him a quick smile, a swift, dangerous, alluring smile.

"Am I always complaining, *mynheer*?" she asked.

Peter Gross leaned back comfortably. He was smiling, too, a smile of masculine contentment. "No, not always, *juffrouw*," he conceded. "But you kept me pretty busy at first."

"It was necessary, *mynheer*."

Peter Gross nodded assent. "To be sure, *juffrouw*, you did have reason to complain," he agreed gravely. "Things were pretty bad, even worse than I had expected to find them. But we are gradually improving conditions. I believe that my officers now know what is expected of them."

He glanced at her reprovingly. "You haven't been here much this week; this is only the second time."

A mysterious light flashed in Koyala's eyes, but Peter Gross was too intent on admiring her splendid physical sufficiency to notice it.

"You are very busy, *Mynheer Resident*," Koyala purred. "I take too much of your time as it is with my trifling complaints."

"Not at all, not at all," Peter Gross negated vigorously. "The more you come, the better I am pleased." Koyala flashed a swift glance at him. "Come every day if you can. You are my interpreter, the only voice by which I can speak to the people of Bulungan and be heard. I want you to know what we are doing and why we are doing it; there is nothing secret here that you should not know." He leaned forward earnestly.

"We must work out the salvation of Bulungan together, *juffrouw*. I am relying very much upon you. I cannot do it alone; your people will not believe in me. Unless you speak for me there will be misunderstandings, maybe bloodshed."

Koyala's eyes lowered before his beseeching gaze and the earnestness of his plea.

"You are very kind, *mynheer*," she said softly. "But you overestimate my powers. I am only a woman—it is the rajas who rule."

"One word from Koyala has more force in Bulungan than the mandate of the great council itself," Peter Gross contradicted. "If you are with me, if you speak for me, the people are mine, and all the rajas, *gustis*, and *datus* in the residency could not do me harm."

He smiled frankly.

"I want to be honest with you, *juffrouw*. I am thoroughly selfish in asking these things. I want to be known as the man who redeemed Bulungan, even though the real work is yours."

Koyala's face was hidden. Peter Gross saw that her lips pressed together tightly and that she was undergoing some powerful emotion. He looked at her anxiously, fearful that he had spoken too early, that she was not yet ready to commit herself utterly to his cause.

"I came to see you, *mynheer*, about an affair that happened in the country of the Sadong Dyaks," Koyala announced quietly.

Peter Gross drew back. Koyala's reply showed that she was not yet ready to join him, he perceived. Swallowing his disappointment, he asked in mock dismay:

"Another complaint, *juffrouw*?"

"One of Lkath's own people, a Sadong Dyak, was killed by a poisoned arrow," Koyala stated. "The arrow is tufted with heron's feathers; Jahi's people use those on their arrows. Lkath has heard that the head of his tribesman now hangs in front of Jahi's hut."

The smile that had been on Peter Gross's lips died instantly. His face became drawn and hard.

"I cannot believe it!" he exclaimed at length in a low voice. "Jahi has sworn brotherhood with me and sworn to keep the peace. We rubbed noses and anointed each others' foreheads with the blood of a fresh-killed buffalo."

"If you choose the hill people for your brothers, the sea people will not accept you," Koyala said coldly.

"I choose no nation and have no favorites," Peter Gross replied sternly. "I have only one desire—to deal absolute and impartial justice to all. Let me think."

He bowed his head in his hands and closed his eyes in thought. Koyala watched him like a tigress in the bush.

"Who found the body of the slain

man?" he asked suddenly, looking up again.

"Lkath himself, and some of his people," Koyala replied.

"Do the Sadong Dyaks use the sumpitan?"

"The Dyaks of the sea do not fight their enemies with poison," Koyala said scornfully. "Only the hill Dyaks do that."

"H-m! Where was the body? How far from the stream?"

"It was by a water-hole."

"How far from Lkath's village?"

"About five hours' journey. The man was hunting."

"Was he alone? Were there any of Lkath's people with him?"

"One. His next younger brother. They became separated in the baba, and he returned home alone. It was he who found the body, he and Lkath."

"Ah!" Peter Gross exclaimed involuntarily. "Then, according to the Dyak custom, he will have to marry his brother's wife. Are there any children?"

"One," Koyala answered. "They were married a few moons over a year ago." Pensively she added, in a woman's afterthought: "The woman grieves for her husband and cannot be consoled. She is very beautiful, the most beautiful woman of her village."

"I believe that I will go to Sadong myself," Peter Gross said suddenly. "This case needs investigating."

"It is all I ask," Koyala said. Her voice had the soft, purring quality in it again, and she lowered her head in the mute Malay obeisance. The action hid the tiny flicker of triumph in her eyes.

"I will go to-morrow," Peter Gross said. "I can get a prau at Bulungan."

"You will take your people with you?"

"No, I will go alone."

It seemed to Peter Gross that Koyala's face showed a trace of disappointment.

"You should not do that," she reproved. "Lkath is not friendly to you. He will not welcome a blood warrior of Jahi since this has happened."

"In a matter like this, one or two is always better than a company," Peter Gross dissented. "Yet I wish you could be there. I cannot offer you a place in my prau—there will be no room for a woman—but if you can find any other means of conveyance, the state will pay." He looked at her wistfully.

Koyala laughed. "The Argus Pheasant will fly to Sadong faster than your prau," she said. She rose. As her glance roved over the desk she caught sight of the letter Peter Gross had just finished writing.

"Oh, you have been writing to your sweetheart," she exclaimed. Chaffingly as the words were spoken Peter Gross felt a little of the burning curiosity that lay back of them.

"It is a letter to a sea-captain at Batavia whom I once served under," he replied quietly. "I told him about my work in Bulungan. Would you care to read it?"

He offered her the envelope. Quivering with an eagerness she could not restrain, Koyala half reached for it, then jerked back her hand. Her face flamed scarlet and she leaped back as though the paper was death to touch. With a choking cry she exclaimed:

"I do not want to read your letters. I will see you in Sadong—" She bolted through the door.

Peter Gross stared in undisguised bewilderment after her. It was several minutes before he recovered and placed the letter back in the mailing receptacle.

"I never will be able to understand women," he said sadly, shaking his head.

CHAPTER XIX.

KOYALA'S ULTIMATUM.

THE house of Lkath, chief of the Sadong Dyaks, stood on a rocky eminence at the head of Sabu bay. The bay is a narrow arm of the Celebes Sea whose entrance is cunningly concealed by a series of projecting headlands

and jealously guarded by a triple row of sawtooth rocks whose serrated edges, pointed seaward, threaten mischief to any ship that dares attempt the channel.

Huge breakers, urged on by the south-east monsoon, boil over these rocks from one year's end to the next. The headlands drip with the unceasing spray, and at their feet are twin whirlpools that go down to the very bowels of the earth, according to tradition, and wash the feet of Sangjang, ruler of Hades, himself. Certain it is that nothing ever cast into the whirlpools has returned; certain it is, too, say the people of Bulungan, that the sangsangs, good spirits, have never brought back any word of the souls of men lost in the foaming waters.

In their rocky citadel and rock-guarded harbor the Sadong people have for years laughed at their enemies, and combed the seas, taking by force when they could, and taking in trade when those they dealt with were too strong for them. None have such swift praus as they, and none can follow them into their lair, for only the Sadong pilots know the intricacies of that channel. Vengeful captains who have permitted their eagerness to outrun discretion found their ships in the maelstrom and rent by the rocks before they realized it, while the Sadongers in the still, landlocked waters beyond, mocked them as they sank to their death.

Two days after Koyala had reported the murder of the Sadonger to Peter Gross a swift prau approached the harbor. Even an uncritical observer would have noticed something peculiar in its movements, for it cut the water with the speed of a launch, although its bamboo sails were furled on the maze of yards that cluttered the triangle mast. As it neared the channel its speed was reduced, and the chug-chug of a powerful gasoline motor became distinctly audible. The sentinel on the promontory gesticulated wildly to the sentinels farther inland, for he had distinguished his chief, Lkath, at the wheel.

Under Lkath's trained hand the prau

skipped through the intricate channel without scraping a rock and shot the length of the harbor. With shouts of "*salaamat*" (welcome) the happy Sadongers trooped to the water-front to greet their chief. Lkath's own body-guard, fifty men dressed in purple, red, and green chawats and headdresses and carrying beribboned spears, trotted down from the citadel and cleared a space for the voyagers to disembark from the sampuns that had put out for them.

As the royal sampun grounded, Lkath, with a great show of ceremony, assisted out of the craft a short, heavy-jowled Chinaman with a face like a Hindoo Buddha's. A low whisper of awe ran through the crowd—this was the great Datu himself. The multitude sank to its knees, and each man vigorously pounded his head on the ground.

The next passenger to leave the sampun was the Raja Wobanguli, tall, a trifle stoop-shouldered, and leering craftily at the motley throng, the cluster of houses, and the fortifications. A step behind him Captain Van Slyck, dapper and politely disdainful as always, sauntered along the beach and took his place in one of the *dos-à-dos* that had hastened forward at a signal from Lkath. The vehicles rumbled up the hill.

When they neared the temple that stood close to Lkath's house at the very summit of the hill an old man dressed in long robes stepped into the center of the lane and lifted his hand. The procession halted.

"What is it, voice of Djath?" Lkath asked respectfully.

"The *bilian* is here and awaits your presence," the priest announced.

Lkath stifled an exclamation of surprise.

"Koyala is here," he said to his guests. Ah Sing's face was expressionless. Wobanguli, the crafty, smiled non-committally. Van Slyck alone echoed Lkath's astonishment.

"A hundred miles over jungle trails in less than two days," he remarked, with

a low whistle. "How the devil did she do it?"

There was no doubting the priest's words, however, for as they entered the temple Koyala herself came to meet them.

"Come this way," she said authoritatively, and led them into a side-chamber reserved for the priests. The room was imperfectly lit by a single window in the thick rock walls. A heavy, oiled Chinese paper served as a substitute for glass.

"He will be here to-morrow," she announced. "What are you going to do with him?"

There was no need for her to mention a name, all knew whom she referred to. A silence came upon them. Van Slyck, Wobanguli, and Lkath, with the instinct of lesser men who know their master, looked at Ah Sing. The Chinaman's eyes slumbered between his heavy lids.

"What are you going to do with him, Datu?" Koyala demanded, addressing Ah Sing directly.

"The Princess Koyala is our ally and friend," he replied gutturally.

"Your ally waits to hear the decision of the council," Koyala retorted coldly.

Wobanguli interposed. "There are things, *bilian*, that are not fitting for the ear of a woman," he murmured suavely, with a sidelong glance at Ah Sing.

"I am a warrior, raja, as well as a woman, with the same rights in the council that you have," Koyala reminded.

Wobanguli smiled his pleasantest. "True, my daughter," he agreed diplomatically. "But he is not yet ours. When we have snared the bird it is time enough to talk of how it shall be cooked."

"You told me at Bulungan that this would be decided on shipboard," Koyala replied sharply. "Am I to be used as a decoy and denied a voice on what shall be done with my prisoner?"

"We haven't decided—" Van Slyck began.

"That is false!"

Van Slyck reddened with anger and raised his hand as though to strike her. Koyala's face was a dusky gray in its

pallor and her eyes blazed with contempt.

"Peace!" Ah Sing rumbled sternly. "He is my prisoner. I marked him for mine before he was named resident."

"You are mistaken, Datu," Koyala said significantly. "He is my prisoner. He comes here upon my invitation. He comes here under my protection. He is my guest, and no hostile hand shall touch him while he is here."

Ah Sing's brow ridged with anger. He was not accustomed to being crossed. "He is mine, I tell you, woman," he snarled. "His name is written in my book, and his nails shall rest in my cabinet."

The Dyak blood mounted to Koyala's face.

"He is not yours; he is mine!" she cried. "He was mine long before you marked him yours, Datu."

Wobanguli hastened to avoid a rupture. "If it is a question of who claimed him first, we can lay it before the council," he suggested.

"The council has nothing to do with it," Koyala retorted. There was a dangerous gleam in her eyes. "I marked him as mine more than a year ago, when he was still a humble sailor with no thought of becoming resident. His ship came to the mouth of the Abbas River, to Wolang's village, and traded for rattan with Wolang. I saw him then, and swore that one day he would be mine."

"You desire him?" Ah Sing bellowed. The great purple veins stood out on his forehead, and his features were distorted with malignancy.

Koyala threw back her head haughtily.

"If I do, who is going to deny me?"

Ah Sing checked in inarticulate fury. His face was black with rage.

"I will, woman!" he bawled. "You are mine—Ah Sing's—"

He leaped toward her and buried his long fingers, with their sharp nails, into the soft flesh of her arm. Koyala winced with pain; then outraged virginity flooded to her face in a crimson tide. Tear-

ing herself away, she struck him a stinging blow in the face. He staggered back. Van Slyck leaped toward her, but she was quicker than he and backed against the wall. Her hand darted inside her kabaya and she drew a small, silver-handled dagger. Van Slyck stopped in his tracks.

Ah Sing recovered himself and slowly smoothed his rumpled garments. He did not even look at Koyala.

"Let us go," he said thickly.

Koyala sprang to the door. She was panting heavily.

"You shall not go until you pledge me that he is mine!" she cried.

Ah Sing looked at her unblinkingly. The deadly malignancy of his face caused even Van Slyck to shiver.

"You may have your lover, woman," he said in a low voice.

Koyala stared at him as though turned to stone. Suddenly her cheeks, her forehead, her throat even, blazed scarlet. She flung her weapon aside; it clattered harmlessly on the bamboo matting. Tears started in her eyes. Burying her face in her arms, she sobbed unrestrainedly.

They stared at her in astonishment. After a glance at Ah Sing, Wobanguli placed a caressing hand on her arm.

"*Bilian*, my daughter—" he began.

Koyala flung his arm aside and lifted her tear-stained face with a passionate gesture.

"Is this my reward?" she cried. "Is this the return I get for all I have done to drive the *orang blanda* out of Bulungan? My lover? When no lips of man have ever touched mine, shall ever touch mine—" She stamped her foot in fury. "Fools! Fools! Can't you see why I want him? He laughed at me—there by the Abbas River—laughed at my disgrace—yea, I know he was laughing, though he hid his smile with the cunning of the *orang blanda*. I swore then that he would be mine—that some day he should kneel before me, and beg for these arms around his, and my kiss on his lips. Then I would sink a dagger into his heart as I bent to kiss him—let him drink the deep

sleep that has no ending outside of Sangjang."

Her fingers clenched spasmodically, as though she already felt the hilt of the fatal blade between them.

Van Slyck drew a deep breath. The depth of her savage, elemental passion dazzled him. She looked from man to man, and as he felt her eyes upon him he involuntarily stepped back a pace, shuddering. The doubt he had of her a few moments before vanished; he did not question but what he had glimpsed into her naked soul. Lkath and Wobanguli were convinced, too, for fear and awe of this wonderful woman were expressed on their faces. Ah Sing alone scanned her face distrustfully.

"Why should I trust you?" he snarled.

Koyala started, then shrugged her shoulders indifferently and flung the door open for them to pass out. As Ah Sing passed her he halted a moment and said significantly:

"I give you his life to-day. But remember, Bintang Burung, there is one more powerful than all the princes of Bulungan."

"The god Djath is greater than all princes and Datus," Koyala replied quietly. "I am his priestess. Answer, Lkath, whose voice is heard before yours in Sadong?"

Lkath bowed low, almost to the ground.

"Djath rules us all," he acknowledged.

"You see," Koyala said to Ah Sing, "even your life is mine."

Something like fear came into the eyes of the Chinaman for the first time.

"I go back to Bulungan," he announced thickly.

CHAPTER XX.

LKATH'S CONVERSION.

THE afternoon sun was waning when Peter Gross's sailing prau arrived at Sadong. The resident had been fortunate in finding a Sadonger at Bulungan, and a liberal promise of brass bracelets

and a bolt of cloth persuaded the rover to pilot them into Sadong harbor. Paddy Rouse accompanied his chief.

A vociferous crowd of Dyaks hastened to the beach under the misapprehension that the prau was a trader. When shouts from the crew apprised them that the *orang blanda* chief was aboard, their cries of welcome died away. Glances of curious and friendly interest changed to glances of hostility, and men on the edges of the crowd slunk away to carry the news through the village. The inhospitable reception depressed Peter Gross, but he resolutely stepped into one of the sampans that had put off from shore at the prau's arrival and was paddled to the beach.

"We must be awfully popular here," Paddy remarked cheerfully, and he looked unabashed into the scowling faces of the natives. He lifted his hat. Rays from the low-hanging sun shone through his ruddy, tousled hair, making it gleam like living flame. A murmur of surprise ran through the crowd. Several Dyaks dropped to their knees.

"They're beginning to find their prayer-bones, Mr. Gross," Paddy pointed out, blissfully unconscious that it was he who had inspired their reverence.

At that moment Peter Gross saw a familiar girlish figure stride lightly down the lane. His face brightened.

"Good afternoon, *jujrouc!*" he exclaimed delightedly as she approached. "How did you get here so soon?"

He offered his hand, and after a moment's hesitation Koyala permitted his friendly clasp to encircle the tips of her fingers.

"Lkath has a house ready for you," she said. "The *dos-à-dos* will be here in a moment." They chatted while the natives gaped until the jiggly, two-wheeled carts clattered toward them.

Lkath received them at the door of his house. Peter Gross needed only a glance into his face to see that Koyala had not been mistaken in her warning. Lkath entertained no friendly feeling toward him.

"Welcome to the falcon's nest," Lkath said.

The words were spoken with a stately courtesy in which no cordiality mingled. Dyak tradition forbade closing a door to a guest, however unwelcome the guest might be.

Seized with a sudden admiration of his host, who could swallow his prejudices to maintain the traditional hospitality of his race, Peter Gross resolved to win his friendship at all costs. It was his new-born admiration that inspired him to reply:

"Your house is well named, Gusti. None but eagles would dare roost above the gate to Sangjang."

Lkath's stern features relaxed with a gratified smile, showing that the compliment had pleased him. There was more warmth in his voice as he said:

"My poor house and all that is in it is yours, Mynheer Resident."

"There is no door in Borneo more open than Lkath's," Peter Gross responded. "I am happy to be here with you, brother."

The words were the signal, according to Dyak custom, for Lkath to step forward and rub noses. But the chief drew back.

"The blood of one of my people is between us, Mynheer Resident," he said bluntly. "There can be no talk of brother until the Sadong Dyaks are avenged."

"Am I not here to do justice?" Peter Gross asked. "To-morrow, when the sun is an hour high, we will have a council. Bring your people who know of this thing before me at that time."

Lkath bowed and said: "Very good, Mynheer Resident."

Having performed his duty as head of his nation, Lkath the chief became Lkath the host, and ushered Peter Gross, Rouse, and Koyala into the house. Peter Gross was surprised to find the dwelling fitted out with such European conveniences as chandelier oil-lamps, chairs, and tables, and even a reed organ. Boys dressed in

white appeared with basins of water and napkins on silver salvers for ablutions. The dinner was all that an epicure could desire. Madeira and bitters were first offered, together with a well-spiced vegetable soup. Several dishes of fowls and other edible birds, cooked in various ways, followed. Then a roast pig, emitting a most savory odor, was brought in, a fricassee of bats, rice, potatoes, and other vegetables, stewed durian, and, lastly, various native fruits and nuts. Gin, punch, and a native beer were served between courses.

Lkath's formal dignity mellowed under the influence of food and wine, and he became more loquacious. By indirect reference Peter Gross obtained, piece by piece, a coherent account of the hunting trip on which the Sadonger had lost his life. It confirmed his suspicion that the brother knew far more about the murder than he had admitted, but he kept his own counsel.

The next morning the elders assembled in the *balais*, or assembly-hall. Peter Gross listened to the testimony offered. He said little, and the only man he questioned was the Sadonger's brother, Lkath's chief witness.

"How did they know it was Jahi who was responsible?" he asked the Sadongers who had accompanied Lkath on the search. They broke into voluble protestations. Did they use the sumpitan? Was it not exclusively a weapon of the hill Dyaks? Did not the feathers on the arrow show that it came from Jahi's tribe? And did they not find a strip of red calico from a hillman's chawat in the bush?"

Peter Gross did not answer their questions. "Show me where the body was found," he directed.

Paddy Rouse, usually bold to temerariousness, protested in dismay, pointing out the danger in venturing into the jungle with savages so avowedly unfriendly.

"There is no middle course for those who venture into the lion's den," Peter Gross replied. "We will be in no greater danger in the jungle than here, and I may

be able to solve the mystery and do our cause some good."

"I'm with you wherever you go," Paddy said loyally.

Lkath led the expedition in person. To Peter Gross's great relief, Koyala went also. The journey took nearly five hours, for the road was very rugged and there were many détours on account of swamps, fallen trees, and impenetrable thickets. Koyala rode next to Peter Gross all the way. He instinctively felt that she did so purposely to protect him from possible treachery. It increased his sense of obligation toward her. At the same time he realized keenly his own inability to make an adequate recompense. Old Sachsen's words, "If you can induce her to trust us, half your work is done," came to him with redoubled force.

They talked of Bulungan, its sorry history, its possibilities for development. Koyala's eyes glowed with a strange light, and she spoke with an ardency that surprised the resident.

"How she loves her country," he thought.

They were riding single file along a narrow jungle-path when Koyala's horse stumbled over a hidden creeper. She was not watching the path at the moment, and would have fallen had not Peter Gross spurred his animal alongside and caught her. Her upturned face looked into his as his arm circled about her and held her tightly. There was a furious rush of blood to her cheeks; then she swung back into the saddle lightly as a feather and spurred her horse ahead. A silence came between them, and when the path widened and he was able to ride beside her again, he saw that her eyes were red.

"These roads are very dusty," he remarked, wiping a splinter of fine shale from his own eyes.

When they reached the scene of the murder Peter Gross carefully studied the lay of the land. Lkath and the dead man's brother, upon request, showed him where the red calico was found, and how

the body lay by the water-hole. Standing in the bush where the red calico strip had been discovered, Peter Gross looked across the seven or eight rods to the water-hole and shook his head.

"There is some mistake," he said. "No man can blow an arrow that far."

Lkath's face flashed with anger. "When I was a boy, Mynheer Resident, I learned to shoot the sumpitan," he said. "Let me show you how a Dyak can shoot." He took the sumpitan which they had taken with them at Peter Gross's request, placed an arrow in the orifice, distended his cheeks, and blew. The shaft went across the water-hole.

"A wonderful shot!" Peter Gross exclaimed in pretended amazement. "There is none other can shoot like Lkath."

Several Sadongers offered to show what they could do. None of the shafts went quite so far as their chief's. Taking the weapon from them, Peter Gross offered it to the dead Sadonger's brother.

"Let us see how far you can shoot," he said pleasantly.

The man shrank back. Peter Gross noticed his quick start of fear. "I cannot shoot," he protested.

"Try," Peter Gross insisted firmly, forcing the sumpitan into his hand. The Sadonger lifted it to his lips with trembling hands, the weapon shaking so that careful aim was impossible. He closed his eyes, took a quick half-breath, and blew. The arrow went little more than half the distance to the water-hole.

"You did not blow hard enough," Peter Gross said. "Try once more." But the Sadonger, shaking his head, retreated among his companions, and the resident did not press the point. He turned to Lkath.

"It is time to start, if we are to be back in Sadong before *malam*" (night) "casts its mantle over the earth," he said. Well content with the showing he had made, Lkath agreed.

They were passing the temple: it was an hour before sundown when Peter Gross said suddenly:

"Let us speak with Djath on this matter." He singled out Koyala, Lkath, and the Sadonger's brother, inviting them to enter the temple with him. A dusky pallor came over the Sadonger's face, but he followed the others into the enclosure.

"The great god Djath is not my god," Peter Gross said, when they had entered the silent hall and stood between the rows of grinning idols. "Yet I have heard that he is a god who loves the truth and hates falsehood. It seems good to me, therefore, that the Bintang Burung call down Djath's curse on this slayer of one of your people. Then, when the curse falls, we may know without doubt who the guilty one is. Is it good, Lkath?"

The chief, although plainly amazed at hearing such a suggestion from a white man, was impressed with the idea.

"It is good," he assented heartily.

Peter Gross looked at Koyala. She was staring at him with a puzzled frown, as if striving to fathom his purpose.

"Invoke us a curse. O Bintang Burung, on the slayer," he asked. "Speak your bitterest curse. Give him to the Budjang Brani, to the eternal fires at the base of the Gunong Agong."

Koyala's frown deepened, and she seemed on the point of refusal, when Lkath urged: "Call us down a curse, daughter of Djath, I beg you."

Seeing there was no escape, Koyala sank to her knees and lifted her hands to the vault above. A vacant stare came into her eyes. Her lips began to move, first almost inaudibly; then Peter Gross distinguished the refrain of an uninterpretable formula of the Bulungan priesthood, a formula handed down to her by her grandfather, Chawatangi. Presently she began her curse in a mystic drone:

"May his eyes be burned out with fire; may the serpents devour his limbs; may the vultures eat his flesh; may the wild pigs defile his bones; may his soul burn in the eternal fires of the Gunong Agong—"

"Mercy, *bilian*, mercy!" Shrieking his plea, the dead Sadonger's brother stag-

gered forward and groveled at Koyala's feet. "I will tell all!" he gasped. "I shot the arrow; I killed my brother; for the love of his woman I killed him—"

He fell in a fit, foaming at the mouth.

There was utter silence for a moment. Then Peter Gross said to the aged priest who kept the temple:

"Call the guard, father, and have this carrion removed to the jail." At a nod from Lkath, the priest went.

Neither Lkath nor Koyala broke the silence until they had returned to the former's house. Peter Gross, elated at the success of his mission, was puzzled and disappointed at the look he surprised on Koyala's face, a look of dissatisfaction at the turn of events. The moment she raised her eyes to meet his, however, her face brightened.

When they were alone Lkath asked:

"How did you know, O wise one?" His voice expressed an almost superstitious reverence.

"The gods reveal many things to those they love," was Peter Gross's enigmatical reply.

To Paddy Rouse, who asked the same question, he made quite a different reply.

"It was really quite simple," he said. "The only man with a motive for the crime was the brother. He wanted the wife. His actions at the water-hole convinced me he was guilty; all that was necessary was a little claptrap and an appeal to native superstition to force him to confess. This looked bad for us at the start, but it has proven the most fortunate thing that could have happened. Lkath will be with us now."

CHAPTER XXI.

CAPTURED BY PIRATES.

WHEN they rose the next morning Peter Gross inquired for his host, but was met with evasive replies. A premonition that something had gone wrong came upon him. He asked for Koyala.

"The Bintang Burung has flown to the jungle," one of the servant lads informed him after several of the older natives had professed ignorance.

"When did she go?" he asked.

"The stars were still shining, Datu, when she spread her wings," the lad replied. The feeling that something was wrong grew upon the resident.

An hour passed, with no sign of Lkath. Attempting to leave the house, Peter Gross and Paddy were politely but firmly informed that they must await the summons to the *balais*, or assembly hall, from the chieftain.

"This is a rum go," Paddy grumbled.

"I am very much afraid that something has happened to turn Lkath against us," Peter Gross remarked. "I wish Koyala had stayed."

The summons to attend the *balais* came a little later. When they entered the hall they saw a large crowd of natives assembled. Lkath was seated in the judge's seat. Peter Gross approached him to make the customary salutation, but Lkath rose and folded his hands over his chest.

"Mynheer Resident," the chief said with dignity, "your mission in Sadong is accomplished. You have saved us from a needless war with the hill people. But I and the elders of my tribe have talked over this thing, and we have decided that it is best you should go. The Sadong Dyaks owe nothing to the *orang blanda*. They ask nothing of the *orang blanda*. You came in peace. Go in peace."

A tumult of emotions rose in Peter Gross's breast. To see the fruits of his victory snatched from him in this way was unbearable. A wild desire to plead with Lkath, to force him to reason, came upon him, but he fought it down. It would only hurt his standing among the natives, he knew; he must command, not beg.

"It shall be as you say, Lkath," he said. "Give me a pilot and let me go."

"He awaits you on the beach," Lkath replied. With this curt dismissal, Peter Gross was forced to go.

The failure of his mission weighed heavily upon Peter Gross, and he said little all that day. Paddy could see that his chief was wholly unable to account for Lkath's change of sentiment. Several times he heard the resident murmur: "If only Koyala had stayed."

Shortly before sundown, while their prau was making slow headway against an unfavorable breeze, Paddy noticed his chief standing on the raised after deck watching another prau that had sailed out of a jungle-hid creek-mouth shortly before and was now following in their wake. He cocked an eye at the vessel himself and remarked:

"Is that soap-dish faster than ours, or are we gaining?"

"That is precisely what I am trying to decide," Peter Gross answered gravely.

Paddy observed the note of concern in the resident's voice.

"She isn't a pirate, is she?" he asked quickly.

"I am very much afraid she is," Peter Gross spoke calmly, but Paddy noticed a tremor in his voice.

"Then we'll have to fight for it?" he exclaimed.

Peter Gross avoided a direct reply. "I'm wondering why she can stay so close inshore and outsail us," he said. "The wind is offshore, those high hills should cut her off from what little breeze we're getting, yet she neither gains nor loses an inch on us."

"Why doesn't she come out where she can get the breeze?"

"Aye, why doesn't she?" Peter Gross echoed. "If she were an honest trader she would. But keeping that course enables her to intercept us in case we should try to make shore."

Paddy did not appear greatly disturbed at the prospect of a brush with pirates. In fact, there was something like a sparkle of anticipation in his eyes. But seeing his chief so concerned, he suggested soberly:

"Can't we beat out to sea and lose them during the night?"

"Not if this is the ship I fear it is," the resident answered gravely.

"What ship?" The question was frankly curious.

"Did you hear something like a muffled motor exhaust a little while ago?"

Paddy looked up in surprise. "That's just what I thought it was, only I thought I must be crazy imagining such a thing here."

Peter Gross sighed. "I thought so," he said with gentle resignation. "It must be her."

"Who? What?" There was no escaping the lad's eager curiosity.

"The ghost prau. She's a pirate—Ah Sing's own ship, if reports be true. I've never seen her; few white men have; but there are stories enough about her, God knows. She's equipped with a big marine engine imported from New York, I've heard; and built like a launch, though she's got the trimmings of a prau. She can outrun any ship, steam or sail, this side of Hong-Kong, and she's manned by a crew of fiends that never left a man, woman, or child alive yet on any ship they've taken."

Paddy's face whitened a little, and he looked earnestly at the ship. Presently he started and caught Peter Gross's arm.

"There," he exclaimed. "The motor again! Did you hear it?"

"Aye," Peter Gross replied. "We had gained a few hundred yards on them, and they've made it up."

Paddy noted the furtive glances cast at them by the crew of their own prau, mostly Bugis and Bajaus, the sea-rovers and the seawash, with a slight sprinkling of Dyaks. He called Peter Gross's attention to it.

"They know the prau," the resident said. "They'll neither fight nor run. The fight is ours, Paddy. You'd better get some rifles on deck."

"We're going to fight?" Rouse asked eagerly.

"Aye," Peter Gross answered soberly. "We'll fight to the end." He placed a hand on his protégé's shoulder.

"I shouldn't have brought you here, my lad," he said. There was anguish in his voice. "I should have thought of this—"

"I'll take my chances," Paddy interrupted gruffly, turning away. He dove into their tiny cubicle, a boxlike contrivance between decks, to secure rifles and cartridges. They carried revolvers. When he came up the sun was almost touching the rim of the horizon. The pursuing prau, he noticed, had approached much nearer, almost within hailing distance.

"They don't intend to lose us in the dark," he remarked cheerfully.

"The moon rises early to-night," Peter Gross replied.

A few minutes later, as the sun was beginning to make its thunderclap tropic descent, the *juragan*, or captain of the prau issued a sharp order. The crew leaped to the ropes and began hauling in sail. Peter Gross swung his rifle to his shoulder and covered the navigator.

"Tell your crew to keep away from those sails," he said with deadly intentness.

The *juragan* hesitated a moment, glanced over his shoulder at the pursuing prau, and then reversed his orders. As the crew scrambled down they found themselves under Paddy's rifle.

"Get below, every man of you," Peter Gross barked in the *lingua franca* of the islands. "Repeat that order, *juragan!*"

The latter did so sullenly, and the crew dropped hastily below, apparently well content at keeping out of the impending hostilities.

These happenings were plainly visible from the deck of the pursuing prau. The sharp chug-chug of a motor suddenly sounded, and the disguised launch darted forward like a hawk swooping down on a chicken. Casting aside all pretense, her crew showed themselves above the rail. There were at least fifty of them, mostly Chinese and Malays, fierce, wicked-looking men, big and powerful, some of them nearly as large, physically, as the resident himself. They were armed with maga-

zine rifles and revolvers and long-bladed crises. A rapid-firer was mounted on the forward deck.

Paddy turned to his chief with a whimsical smile. "Pretty big contract," he remarked with unimpaired cheerfulness.

Peter Gross's face was white. He knew what Paddy did not know, the fiendish tortures the pirates inflicted on their hapless victims. He was debating whether it was more merciful to shoot the lad and then himself or to make a vain stand and take the chance of being rendered helpless by a wound.

The launch was only a hundred yards away now—twenty yards. A cabin door on her aft deck opened and Peter Gross saw the face of Ah Sing, aglow in the dying rays of the sun with a fiendish malignancy and satisfaction. Lifting his rifle he took quick aim.

Four things happened almost simultaneously as his rifle cracked. One was Ah Sing staggering forward, another was a light footfall on the deck behind him and a terrific crash on his head that filled the western heavens from horizon to zenith with a blaze of glory, the third was the roaring of a revolver in his ear and Paddy's voice trailing into the dim distance:

"I got you, damn you."

When he awoke he found himself in a vile, evil-smelling hole, in utter darkness. He had a peculiar sensation in the pit of his stomach, and his lips and tongue were dry and brittle as cork. His head felt the size of a barrel. He groaned unconsciously.

"Waking up, governor?" a cheerful voice asked. It was Paddy.

By this time Peter Gross was aware, from the rolling motion, that they were at sea. After a confused moment he picked up the thread of memory where it had been broken off.

"They got us, did they?" he asked.

"They sure did," Paddy chirruped, as though it was quite a lark.

"We haven't landed yet?"

"We made one stop. Just a few hours.

I guess, to get some grub aboard. I can't make out much of their lingo, but from what I've heard I believe we're headed for one of the coast towns where we can get a doctor. That shot of yours hit the old bird in the shoulder; he's scared half to death he's going to croak."

"If he only does," Peter Gross prayed fervently under his breath. He asked Paddy: "How long have we been here?"

"About fourteen hours, I'd say on a guess. We turned back a ways, made a stop, and then headed this way. I'm not much of a sailor, but I believe we've kept a straight course since. At least the roll of the launch hasn't changed any."

"Fourteen hours," Peter Gross mused. "It might be toward Coti, or it might be the other way. Have they fed you?"

"Not a blankety-blanked thing. Not even sea-water. I'm so dry I could swallow the Mississippi."

Peter Gross made no comment. "Tell me what happened," he directed.

Paddy, who was sitting cross-legged, tried to shuffle into a more comfortable position. In doing so he bumped his head against the top of their prison. "Ouch!" he exclaimed feelingly.

"You're not hurt?" Peter Gross asked quickly.

"A plug in the arm and a tunk on the head," Paddy acknowledged. "The one in my arm made me drop my rifle, but I got two of the snakes before they got me. Then I got three more with the gat before somebody landed me a lallapaloosa on the beano and I took the count. One of the steersmen—*jurumuddis* you call 'em, don't you?—got you. We forgot about those chaps in the steersmen's box when we ordered the crew below. But I finished him. He's decorating a nice flat in a shark's belly by now."

Peter Gross was silent.

"Wonder why they didn't chuck us overboard," Paddy remarked after a time. "I thought that was the polite piratical stunt. Seeing they were so darned considerate, giving us this private apartment, they might rustle us some grub."

"How shall I tell this light-hearted lad what is before us," Peter Gross groaned in silent agony.

A voluble chatter broke out overhead. Through the thin flooring they heard the sound of naked feet pattering toward the rail. A moment later the ship's course was altered and it began pitching heavily in the big rollers. Peter Gross sat bolt upright, listening intently.

"What's stirring now?" Paddy asked.

"Hist! I don't know," Peter Gross warned sharply.

There was a harsh command to draw in sail, intelligible only to Peter Gross, for it was in the island patois. Paddy waited in breathless anticipation while Peter Gross, every muscle strained and tense, listened to the dissonancy above, creaking cordage, the flapping of bamboo sails, and the jargon of two-score excited men jabbering in their various tongues.

There was a series of light explosions, and then a steady vibration shook the ship. It leaped ahead instantly in response to its powerful motor. It was hardly underway when they heard a whistling sound overhead. There was a moment's pause, then the dull boom of an explosion reached their ears.

"We're under shell-fire!" Paddy gasped.

"That must be the Prins," Peter Gross exclaimed. "I hope to Heaven Enckel doesn't know we're aboard."

Another whistle of a passing shell and the thunder of an explosion. The two were almost simultaneous, the shell could not have fallen far from the launch's bow, both knew.

"They may sink us!" Paddy cried in a half-breath.

"Better drowning than torture." The curt reply was cut short by another shell. The explosion was more distant.

"They're losing the range," Paddy exclaimed in a low voice. In a flash it came to him why Peter Gross had said: "I hope Enckel doesn't know we're here."

Peter Gross stared white and silent into the blackness, waiting for the next shell.

It was long in coming, and fell astern. A derisive shout rose from the pirates.

"The Prins is falling behind," Paddy cried despairingly.

"Aye, the prau is too fast for her," the resident assented in a scarcely audible voice. Tears were coursing down his cheeks, tears for the lad that he had brought here to suffer unnameable tortures, for Peter Gross did not underestimate the fiendish ingenuity of Ah Sing and his crew. He felt grateful for the wall of darkness between them.

"Well, there's more than one way to crawl out of a rain-barrel," Paddy observed with unimpaired cheerfulness.

Peter Gross felt that he should speak and tell Rouse what they had to expect, but the words choked in his throat. Blissful ignorance and a natural buoyant optimism sustained the lad, it would be cruel to take them away, the resident thought. He groaned again.

"Cheer up," Paddy cried, "we'll get another chance."

The grotesqueness of the situation—his youthful protégé striving to raise his flagging spirits—came home to Peter Gross even in that moment of suffering and brought a rueful smile to his lips.

"I'm afraid, my lad, that the Prins was our last hope," he said. There was an almost fatherly sympathy in his voice, responsibility seemed to have added a decade to the slight disparity of years between them.

"Rats!" Paddy grunted. "We're not going to turn in our checks just yet, governor. This bird's got to go ashore somewhere, and it 'll be deuced funny if Cap Carver and the little lady don't figure out some way between 'em to get us out of this."

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE TEMPLE.

THE hatch above them opened. A bestial Chinese face, grinning cruelly, appeared in it.

"You big-um fellow gettee outee here

plenty damn quick!" the Chinaman barked. He thrust a piece of bamboo into the hole and prodded the helpless captives below with a savage energy. The third thrust of the cane found Peter Gross's ribs. With a hoarse cry of anger Paddy sprang to his feet and shot his fist into the Chinaman's face before the resident could cry a warning.

The blow caught the pirate between the eyes and hurled him back on the deck. He gazed at Paddy a dazed moment and then sprang to his feet. Lifting the cane in both his hands above his head he uttered a shriek of fury and would have driven the weapon through Rouse's body had not a giant Bugi, standing near by, jumped forward and caught his arm.

Wrestling with the maddened Chinaman the Bugi shouted some words wholly unintelligible to Paddy in the pirate's ear. Peter Gross scrambled to his feet.

"Jump on deck, my lad," he shouted. "Quick, let them see you. It may save us."

Paddy obeyed. The morning sun, about four hours high, played through his rumpled hair, the auburn gleaming like flame. Malays, Dyaks, and Bugis, attracted by the noise of the struggle, crowded round and pointed at him, muttering superstitiously.

"Act like a madman," Peter Gross whispered hoarsely to his aide.

Paddy broke into a shriek of foolish laughter. He shook as though overcome with mirth, and folded his arms over his stomach as he rocked back and forth. Suddenly straightening, he yelled a shrill "Whoopee!" The next moment he executed a handspring into the midst of the natives, almost upsetting one of them. The circle widened. A Chinese mate tried to interfere, but the indignant islanders thrust him violently aside. He shouted to the *juragan*, who ran forward waving a pistol.

Every one of the crew was similarly armed, and every one wore a kris. They formed in a crescent between their officer

and the captives. In a twinkling Peter Gross and Rouse found themselves encircled by a wall of steel.

The *juragan's* automatic dropped to a dead level with the eyes of the Bugi who had saved Paddy. He bellowed an angry command, but the Bugi closed his eyes and lowered his head resignedly, nodding in negation. The other islanders stood firm. The Chinese of the crew ranged themselves behind their captain and a bloody fight seemed imminent.

A Dyak left the ranks and began talking volubly to the *juragan*, gesticulating wildly and pointing at Paddy Rouse and then at the sun. A crooning murmur of assent arose from the native portion of the crew. The *juragan* retorted sharply. The Dyak broke into another volley of protestations. Paddy looked on with a glaringly stupid smile. The *juragan* watched him suspiciously while the Dyak talked, but gradually his scowl faded. At last he gave a peremptory command and stalked away. The crew returned to their duties.

"We're to be allowed to stay on deck as long as we behave ourselves until we near shore, or unless some trader passes us," Peter Gross said in a low voice to Rouse. Paddy blinked to show that he understood, and burst into shouts of foolish laughter, hopping around on all fours. The natives respectfully made room for him. He kept up these antics at intervals during the day, while Peter Gross, remaining in the shade of the cabin, watched the pirates. After prying into every part of the vessel with a childish curiosity that none of the crew sought to restrain, Paddy returned to his chief and reported in a low whisper:

"The old bird isn't aboard, governor."

"I rather suspected he wasn't," Peter Gross answered. "He must have been put ashore at the stop you spoke of."

It was late that day when the prau, after running coastwise all day, turned a quarter circle into one of the numerous bays indenting the coast. Peter Gross recognized the familiar headlands crown-

ing Bulungan Bay. Paddy also recognized them, for he cried:

"They're bringing us back home."

At that moment the tall Bugi who had been their sponsor approached them and made signs to indicate that they must return to the box between decks from which he had rescued them. He tried to show by signs and gestures his profound regret at the necessity of locking them up again; his anxiety to convince the "son of the Gunong Agong" was almost ludicrous. Realizing the futility of objecting, Peter Gross and Paddy permitted themselves to be locked in the place once more.

It was quite dark and the stars were shining brightly when the hatch was lifted again. As they rose from their cramped positions and tried to make out the circle of faces about them, unceremonious hands yanked them to the deck, thrust foul-smelling cloths into their mouths, blindfolded them, and trussed their hands and feet with stout cords. They were lowered into a boat, and after a brief row were tossed on the beach like so many sacks of wool, placed into boxlike receptacles, and hurried inland. Two hours' steady jogging followed, in which they were thrown about until every inch of skin on their bodies was raw with bruises. They were then taken out of the boxes and the cloths and cords were removed.

Looking about, Peter Gross and Paddy found themselves in the enclosed court of what was evidently the ruins of an ancient Hindoo temple. The massive columns, silvery in the bright moonlight, were covered with inscriptions and outline drawings, crudely made in hieroglyphic art. In the center of one wall was the chipped and weather-scarred pedestal of a Buddha. The idol itself, headless, lay broken in two on the floor beside it. Peter Gross's brow puckered—the very existence of such a temple two hours' journey distant from Bulungan Bay had been unknown to him.

The *juragan* and his Chinese left after giving sharp instructions to their jailers, two Chinese, to guard them well. Peter

Gross and Paddy looked about in vain for a single friendly face or even the face of a brown-skinned man—every member of the party was Chinese. The jailers demonstrated their capacity by promptly thrusting their prisoners into a dark room off the main court. It was built of stone, like the rest of the temple.

"Not much chance for digging out of here," Rouse observed, after examining the huge stones, literally mortised together, and the narrow window aperture with its iron gratings. Peter Gross also made as careful an examination of their prison as the darkness permitted.

"We may as well make ourselves comfortable," was his only observation at the close of his investigation.

They chatted a short time, and at last Paddy, worn out by his exertions, fell asleep. Peter Gross listened for a while to the lad's rhythmic breathing, then tiptoed to the gratings and pulled himself up to them. A cackle of derisive laughter arose outside. Realizing that the place was carefully watched, he dropped back to the floor and began pacing the chamber, his head lowered in thought. Presently he stopped beside Rouse and gazed into the lad's upturned face, blissfully serene in the innocent confidence of youth. Tears gathered in his eyes.

"I shouldn't have brought him here; I shouldn't have brought him here," he muttered brokenly.

The scraping of the ponderous bar that bolted the door interrupted his meditations shortly after daybreak. The door creaked rustily on its hinges, and an ugly, leering Chinese face peered inside. Satisfying himself that his prisoners were not planning mischief, the Chinaman thrust two bowls of soggy rice and a pannikin of water inside and gestured to Peter Gross that he must eat. The indignant protest of the door as it closed awoke Paddy, who sat bolt upright and blinked sleepily until he saw the food.

"What? Time for breakfast?" he exclaimed with an amiable grin. "I must have overslept."

He picked up a bowl of rice, stirred it critically with one of the chopsticks their jailers had provided, and snuffed at the mixture. He put it down with a wry face.

"Whew!" he whistled. "It's stale." "You had better try to eat something," Peter Gross advised.

"I'm that hungry I could eat toasted sole leather," Paddy confessed. "But this stuff smells to heaven."

Peter Gross took the other bowl and began eating, wielding the chopsticks expertly.

"It isn't half bad—I've had worse rations on board your uncle's ship," he encouraged.

"Then my dear old avunculus ought to be hung," Paddy declared with conviction. Hunger and his superior's example finally overcame his scruples, however, and presently he was eating with gusto.

"Faith," he exclaimed, "I've got more appetite than I imagined."

Peter Gross did not answer. He was wondering whether the rice was poisoned, and half hoped it was. It would be an easier death than by torture, he thought. But he forbore mentioning this to Paddy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AH SING'S VENGEANCE.

TWO days, whose monotony was varied only by occasional visits from one or another of their jailers, passed in this way. Peter Gross's faint hope that they might be able to escape by overpowering the Chinamen while the latter brought them their meals faded; the jailers had evidently been particularly cautioned against such an attempt and were on their guard.

On the afternoon of the second day a commotion in the forecourt of the temple, distinctly audible through the gratings, raised their curiosity to fever heat. They listened intently and tried to distinguish voices and words in the hubbub, but were

unsuccessful. It was apparent, however, that a large party had arrived. There were fully a hundred men in it, Peter Gross guessed, possibly twice that number.

"What's this?" Paddy asked.

Peter Gross's face was set in hard, firm lines, and there was an imperious note in his voice as he said:

"Come here, Paddy. I have a few words to say to you."

Paddy's face lost its familiar smile as he followed his chief to the corner of their prison farthest from the door.

"I don't know what this means, but I rather suspect that Ah Sing has arrived," Peter Gross said. He strove to speak calmly, but his voice broke. "If that is the case, we will probably part. You will not see me again. You may escape, but it is doubtful. If you see the slightest chance to get away, take it. Being shot or kried is a quicker death than by torture."

In spite of his effort at self-control, Paddy's face blanched.

"By torture?" he asked in a low voice of amazement.

"That is what we may expect," Peter Gross declared curtly.

Paddy breathed hard a moment. Then he laid an impulsive hand on his leader's arm.

"Let's rush 'em the minute the door opens, Mr. Gross."

Peter Gross shook his head in negation. "While there is life there is hope," he said, smiling.

Paddy did not perceive that his chief was offering himself in the hope that his death might appease the pirate's craving for vengeance.

They strolled about, their hearts too full for speech. Presently Paddy lifted his head alertly and signaled for silence. He was standing near the window and raised himself on tiptoe to catch the sounds coming through. Peter Gross walked softly toward him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I thought I heard a white man

speaking just now," Paddy whispered. "It sounded like Van Slyck's voice—Hist!"

A low murmur of ironic laughter came through the gratings. Peter Gross's face became black with anger. There was no doubting who it was that had laughed.

A few minutes later they heard the scraping of the heavy bar as it was lifted out of its socket, then the door opened. Several armed Chinamen, giants of their race, sprang inside. Ah Sing entered behind them, pointed at Peter Gross, and issued a harsh, guttural command.

The resident walked forward and passively submitted to the rough hands placed upon him. Paddy tried to follow, but two of the guards thrust him back so roughly that he fell. Furious with anger, he leaped to his feet and sprang at one of them, but the Chinaman caught him, doubled his arm with a jiu-jitsu trick, and then threw him down again. The other prodded him with a spear. Inwardly raging, Paddy lay motionless until the guards tired of their sport and left him.

In the mean time Peter Gross was half led, half dragged through the forecourt of the temple into another chamber. Those behind him prodded him with spear-points, those in front spit in his face. He stumbled, and as he regained his balance four barbs entered his back and legs, but his teeth were grimly set and he made no sound. Although he gazed about for Van Slyck, he saw no signs of him; the captain had unquestionably deemed it best to keep out of sight.

In the chamber, at Ah Sing's command, they bound him securely hand and foot, with thongs of crocodile hide. Then the guards filed out and left the pirate chief alone with his prisoner.

As the doors closed on them Ah Sing walked slowly toward the resident, who was lying on his back on the tessellated pavement. Peter Gross looked back calmly into the eyes that were fixed so gloatingly upon him. In them he read no sign of mercy. They shone with a savage

exultation and fiendish cruelty. Ah Sing sighed a sigh of satisfaction.

"Why you don't speak, Mynheer Gross?" he asked, mimicking Van Schouten's raspy voice.

Peter Gross made no reply, but continued staring tranquilly into the face of his arch enemy.

"Mebbe you comee Ah Sing's house for two-three men?" the pirate chief suggested with a wicked grin.

Still no answer from Peter Gross.

"Mebbe you show Ah Sing one damn fine ring Mauritius," the pirate chief mocked.

Peter Gross did not flick an eyelash. A spasm of passion flashed over Ah Sing's face, and he kicked the resident violently.

"Speakee, Christian dog," he snarled.

Peter Gross's lips twitched with pain, but he did not utter a sound.

"I teachum you speakee Ah Sing," the pirate declared grimly. Whipping a dagger from his girdle, he thrust it between Peter Gross's fourth and fifth ribs, next to his heart. The point entered the skin, but Peter Gross made no sound. It penetrated a quarter-inch.

Ah Sing, smiling evilly, searched the face of his victim for an expression of fear or pain. Three-eighths of an inch, half an inch—Peter Gross suddenly lunged forward. An involuntary contraction of his facial muscles betrayed him, and the Chinaman pulled the dagger away before the resident could empale himself upon it. He stepped back, and a look of admiration came upon his face—it was the tribute of one strong man to another.

"Peter him muchee likee go *sangjang* (hades)," he observed. "Ah Sing sendee him to-morrow, piecee, piecee, plenty much talkee then." The pirate indicated with strokes of his dagger that he would cut off Peter Gross's toes, fingers, ears, nose, arms, and legs piecemeal at the torture. Giving his victim another violent kick, he turned and passed through the door. A few minutes later a native physician came in with two armed guards and stanches the flow of blood: applying bandages

with dressings of herbs to subdue inflammation.

Night settled soon after. The darkness in the chamber was abysmal. Peter Gross lay on one side and stared into the blackness waiting for the morning, the morning Ah Sing promised to make his last. Rats scurried about the floor and stopped to sniff suspiciously at him. At times he wished they were numerous enough to attack him. He knew full well the savage ingenuity of the wretches into whose hands he had fallen for devising tortures unspeakable, unendurable.

Dawn came at last. The first rays of the sun peeping through the gratings found him asleep. Exhausted nature had demanded her toll, and even the horror of his situation had failed to banish slumber from his heavy lids. As the sun rose and gained strength the temperature sensibly increased, but Peter Gross slept on.

He awoke naturally. Stretching himself to ease his stiffened limbs, he felt a sharp twitch of pain that brought instant remembrance. He struggled to a sitting posture. The position of the sun's rays on the wall indicated that the morning was well advanced.

He listened for the camp sounds, wondering why his captors had not appeared for him before now. There was no sound outside except the sougning of the wind through the jungle and the lackadaisical chatter of the pargams and lories.

"Strange!" he muttered to himself. "It can't be that they've left."

His shoulders were aching frightfully, and he tugged at his bonds to get his hands free, but they were too firmly bound to be released by his unaided efforts. His clothing, he noticed, was almost drenched, the heavy night dew had clustered thickly upon it. So does man cling to the minor comforts even in his extremity that he labored to bring himself within the narrow park of the sun's rays to dry his clothing.

He was still enjoying his sun-bath when he heard the bar that fastened the door

of his chamber lifted from its sockets. His lips closed firmly. A half-uttered prayer, "God give me strength," floated upward, then the door opened. An armed guard, one of his jailers for the past two days, peered inside.

Seeing his prisoner firmly bound, he ventured within with the customary bowl of rice and pannikin of water. A slash of his kris cut the thongs binding Peter Gross's hands, then the jailer backed to the door while the resident slowly and dazedly unwound the thongs that had bound him.

Expecting nothing else than that he would be led to the torture, persuaded that the door would be opened for no other purpose, Peter Gross could not comprehend for a few moments what had happened. Then he realized that a few hours of additional grace had been vouchsafed him, and that Ah Sing and his crew must have left.

He wondered why food was offered him. In the imminent expectancy of death, the very thought of eating nauseated him the moment before. Yet to have this shadow removed, if only for a few hours, brought him an appetite. He ate with relish, the guard watching him in the mean time with catlike intentness and holding his spear in instant readiness. As soon as the resident had finished he bore the dishes away, barring the door carefully again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A RESCUE.

RELEASED from his bonds, for the jailer had not replaced these, Peter Gross spent the hours in comparative comfort. He amused himself in examining every inch of the cell in the faint hope that he might find a weak spot, and in meditating other plans of escape. Although missing Paddy's ready smile and readier chaff greatly, he did not worry about the lad, for since he was safe himself he reasoned that his subordinate must be.

Late in the afternoon, while he was pacing his cell, the sharp crack of a rifle suddenly broke the forest stillness. Holding himself tense and rigid, with every fiber thrilling at the thought of rescue, he listened for the repetition of the shot. It came quickly, mingled with a blood-curdling yell from a hundred or more savage throats. There were other scattered shots.

His finger-nails bit into his palm, and his heart seemed to stand still. Had Carver found him? Were these Dyaks friends or enemies? The next few moments seemed that many eternities; then he heard a ringing American shout:

"We've got 'em all, boys; come on!"

Peter Gross leaped to the grating. "Here, Carver, here!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

"Coming!" twenty or more voices shouted in a scattered chorus. There was a rush of feet, leather-shod feet, across the forecourt pavement. The heavy bar was lifted. Striving to remain calm, although his heart beat tumultuously, Peter Gross waited in the center of the chamber until the door opened and Carver sprang within.

The captain blinked to accustom himself to the light. Peter Gross stepped forward and their hands clasped.

"In time, Mr. Gross, thank God!" Carver exclaimed. "Where's Paddy?"

"In the other chamber; I'll show you," Peter Gross answered. He sprang out of his cell like a colt from the barrier and led the way on the double-quick to the cell that had housed him and Paddy for two days. Carver and he lifted the bar together and forced the door. The cell was empty.

It took a full minute for the resident to comprehend this fact. He stared dazedly at every inch of the floor and wall, exploring bare corners with an eager eye, as though Paddy might be hiding in some nook or cranny. But the tenantless condition of the chamber was indisputable.

A half-sob broke in Peter Gross's

throat. It was the first emotion he had given way to.

"They've taken him away," he said in a low, strained voice.

"Search the temple!" Carver shouted in a stentorian voice to several of his command. "Get Jahi to help; he probably knows this place."

"Jahi's here?" Peter Gross exclaimed incredulously.

"He and a hundred hillmen," Carver replied crisply. "Now to comb this pile."

The tribesmen scattered to search the ruin. It was not extensive. In the meantime Peter Gross briefly sketched the happenings of the past few days to Carver. At the mention of Van Slyck the captain's face became livid.

"The damn skunk said he was going to Padang," he exclaimed. "He left Banning in charge. I hope to God he stays away."

One of Jahi's hillmen reported that no trace of Rouse could be found. "Him no here; him in bush," he said.

"The Chinks have gone back to their proas; the trail heads that way," Carver said. "Some of Jahi's boys picked it up before we found you. But what the deuce do they want with Rouse, if they haven't killed him?"

"He's alive," Peter Gross declared confidently, although his own heart was heavy with misgiving. "We've got to rescue him."

"They've got at least five hours the start of us," Carver remarked. "How far are we from the seacoast?"

Peter Gross's reply was as militarily curt as the captain's question.

"About two hours' march."

"They're probably at sea. We'll take a chance, though," Carver glanced upward at the sound of a footfall. "Ah, here's Jahi."

Peter Gross turned to the chieftain who had so promptly lived up to his oath of brotherhood. Warm with gratitude, he longed to crush the Dyak's hand within his own, but restrained himself, knowing how the Borneans despised display of

emotion. Instead he greeted the chief formally, rubbing noses according to the custom of the country.

No word of thanks crossed his lips, for he realized that Jahi would be offended if he spoke. Such a service was due from brother to brother, according to the Dyak code.

"Raja, can we catch those China boys before they reach their proas?" Carver asked.

"No can catch," Jahi replied.

"Can we catch them before they sail?"

"No can say."

"How far is it?"

They were standing near a lone column of stone that threw a short shadow toward them. Jahi touched the pavement with his spear at a point about six inches beyond the end of the shadow.

"When there shall have reached by so far the finger of the sun," he declared.

Both Carver and Peter Gross understood that he was designating how much longer the shadow must grow.

"About two hours, as you said," Carver remarked to his chief. "We'd better start at once."

Jahi bowed to indicate that he had understood. He took some soiled sheets of China rice paper from his chawat.

"Here are skins that talk, *mynheer kapitein*," he said respectfully. "Dyak boy find him in China boy kampong."

Carver thrust them into his pocket without looking at them and blew his whistle. A few minutes later they began the march to the sea.

While they were speeding through a leafy tunnel with Jahi's Dyaks covering the front and rear to guard against surprise, Carver found opportunity to explain to Peter Gross how he had been able to make the rescue. Koyala had learned Ah Sing's plans from a native source and had hastened to Jahi, who was watching the borders of his range to guard against a surprise attack by Lkath. Jahi, on Koyala's advice, had made a forced march to within ten miles of Bulungan, where Carver, summoned by Koyala, had joined

him. Starting at midnight, they had made an eight-hour march to the temple.

"Koyala again," Peter Gross remarked. "She has been our good angel all the way."

Carver was silent. The resident looked at him curiously.

"I am surprised that you believed her so readily," he said. They jogged along some distance before the captain replied.

"I believed her. But I don't believe in her," he said.

"Something's happened since to cause you to lose confidence in her?" Peter Gross asked quickly.

"No, nothing specific. Only Muller and his *controlleurs* are having the devil's own time getting the census. Many of the chiefs won't even let them enter their villages. Somebody has been stirring them up. And there have been raids—"

"So you assume it's Koyala?" Peter Gross demanded harshly.

Carver evaded a reply. "I got a report that the priests are preaching a holy war among the Malay and Dyak Mohammedans."

"That is bad, bad," Peter Gross observed, frowning thoughtfully. "We must find out who is at the bottom of this."

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 Argus Pheasant isn't flying around the country for nothing," Carver suggested, but stopped abruptly as he saw the flash of anger that crossed his superior's face.

"Every success we have had is due to her," Peter Gross asserted sharply. "She saved my life three times."

Carver hazarded one more effort.

"Granted. For some reason we don't know she thinks it's to her interest to keep you alive—for the present. But she has an object. I can't make it out yet, but I'm going to—" The captain's lips closed resolutely.

"You condemned her before you saw her because she has Dyak blood," Peter Gross accused. "It isn't fair."

"I'd like her a lot more if she wasn't so confounded friendly," Carver replied dryly.

Peter Gross did not answer, and by tacit consent the subject was dropped.

Captain Carver was looking at his watch—the two hours were more than up—when Jahi, who had been in the van, stole back and lifted his hand in signal for silence.

"*Orang blanda* here stay, Dyak boy smell kampong," he said.



T H E E C L I P S E

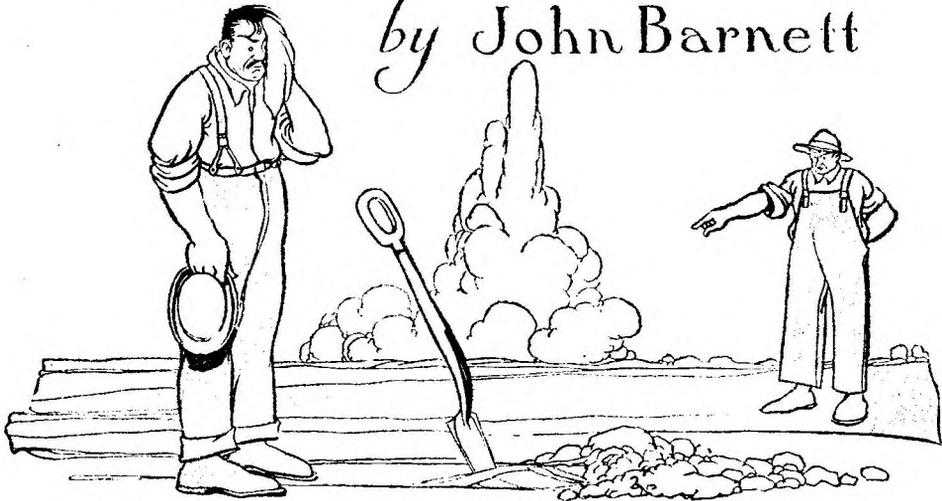
BY FLORENCE VAN CLEVE

MY life was like the Moon that gropes afar,
With craters of dead griefs defaced and scarred—
With shadows of old sorrows maimed and marred—
Incapable of light—a sterile star.

But all the shadows turned to silver sheen.
O Sun of Love, at your reluming spark:
Flood all my being dear!—dispel my dark:
For in your light I shine, content, serene.

Posh Luker — His Memoirs

by John Barnett



VI—RECLAIMING A CRIMINAL

A RASHLY driven motor-car was responsible for one of the strangest adventures of Posh Luker's odd career. Incidentally, it nearly terminated that career once for all. It knocked the senses from him, and only a man of Mr. Luker's luck and toughness would have escaped with his life.

He was walking down a narrow lane somewhere in the suburbs. All things considered, it would be indiscreet to particularize the suburb. It was a dark night and well adapted for Mr. Luker's purpose. He was bent upon business—unlawful business.

In his capacious pockets were gloves for his hands, socks to be drawn over

his boots and a well-selected assortment of nefarious tools. He was bound for a certain house owned by a stock-broker of wealth.

He had investigated the house with care, had held various profitable conversations with garrulous maid servants, and he expected to encounter little difficulty. When a man has reached Mr. Luker's time of life he does not embark incautiously upon a "job." He prefers to have everything cut and dried.

Burglary was nothing more or less than a business with Mr. Luker. It provided a fairly comfortable livelihood at less cost of monotonous toil than any steady, honest work with his power.

There were certain risks and penalties attached to it, of course. But, knowing Posh Luker as I do, I am prepared to state that those risks lent a sporting charm to his dishonest toil. The man is a hardened sinner, of course, but somehow he contrives to be a sportsman, too.

The narrow lane curved suddenly; Mr. Luker's eyes were blinded by a white glare of light, and in his ears was the roar of a rushing car. It was full upon him without warning.

Even then, but for those dazzling lamps, he might have escaped. He sprang desperately for the hedge, a fraction of a second too late. Something struck him a heavy glancing blow, and with a regrettable word upon his lips, he seemed to pass into slumber.

"It was just like being 'outed' by a right hook on the jaw, mister," he told me. "I didn't know nothing at all for ever so long. As for them cars, they ought to be put down by law! They are a fair blooming danger to innocent people! Just take my own case. There was I knocked silly, with enough tools and things in me pockets to convict an archbishop of burglary!"

The situation was certainly painfully awkward for Mr. Luker. It would have been better for him if he had been run down by callous road hogs and left to die while the car sped on. But, as it was, he had been injured by humane people, and—the contents of his pockets gave him away most horribly!

He came back to consciousness to find himself in bed. A man, apparently a doctor, was bending above him. In the background two other men were standing. As his scattered senses returned he realized that he was neither at a police station nor in a hospital. And there was not even a policeman visible.

Remembering his errand and the damning articles in his pockets he was dully conscious of surprise and thankfulness. As a matter of fact, the accident had occurred almost at the gates of the

house owned by the people who had run him down, and it had seemed best to them to take their victim in and put him to bed without delay.

"What's happened?" Posh Luker muttered. "What hit me, mister? Was it an earthquake or a blooming car?"

"You were run over, my man," the doctor answered. "Luckily you were not badly hurt. Drink this and go to sleep."

Posh Luker obeyed both directions. He is something of a fatalist, and in any case he was scarcely in a condition for anxious thought. He just trusted to his luck to pull him through any perils that might be looming ahead, and fell into a heavy sleep. When he woke it was broad daylight, and a man-servant had just entered the bedroom carrying a tray.

"Somehow, I mistrusted the looks of that blooming menial from the fust, mister," Posh Luker told me. "I could see that he was one of your psalm-singing, self-righteous prigs. He was a stoutish sort of man of about my age, very nicely dressed in black, with a big, pale, fat face on him. He might have been a superior mute at a funeral. He seemed to have a very low opinion of yours truly!"

"Good morning, old pal!" Posh Luker remarked with graceful ease. "Glad to see as you've been thoughtful enough to bring me some breakfast! I feel as though I can bring meself to pick a bit, if I'm properly tempted."

As a matter of fact, Mr. Luker was feeling quite himself. He had not even a headache. His skull in its sturdy thickness would put many a negro's to shame.

The stately man servant returned no word in answer to the cheery insolence of Mr. Luker's greeting. He seemed affronted, almost shocked, by such familiarity. His manner, as he put down the breakfast tray upon a table, would have chilled a nature more sensitive than Mr. Luker's.

"I think I'll have some grub before I get up," Posh Luker stated pleasantly. "You'll be pleased and relieved to hear, old sport, that I've got quite a useful twist on me!"

Again the man servant answered nothing, but if possible his look of lofty anger became intensified.

"You ain't dumb, by any chance, are yer?" Posh Luker asked anxiously. "If you are, just nod your head, and I'll make allowances for yer misfortune. Or you might chat to me on your fingers."

The man servant broke his frigid silence.

"When you have had breakfast you are to dress, and I will take you down to my master's study," he said, and his voice held a chilly menace.

"Righto, old top," responded Mr. Luker. "Your master and me will 'ave to discuss the interesting question of compensation. He knows, of course, that he can't knock down and injure innocent people with his blooming car without paying for it. Meanwhile, I quite appreciate his 'ospitality and the look of that breakfast which you've brought me. If I'm treated proper and the bell is answered prompt like, I sha'n't grudge you 'alf a dollar for yer-self when I leave the house, old sport!"

The man servant actually smiled at hearing this handsome offer. But it was a sardonic smile. It shook even Posh Luker's brazen impudence a trifle.

"It is probable that what my master has to say will surprise you," he said grimly. Then he left the room, and Mr. Luker heard him lock the door behind him.

"Somehow, I didn't like the look of things at all, mister," Posh Luker told me. "My clothes was lying on a chair, and I made haste to examine the pockets. It came as a bit of a shock to find that everything 'ad been taken out! I knew then that the little game was up. But what puzzled me was why they 'adn't called in the perleece already.

"I reckoned that I should find them

down-stairs in the study, but it was no good worrying. One has to put up with a lot of little annoyances in my trying profession. I just put on my toggery and made a very decent breakfast. I never believe in starving myself, whatever's going to happen."

An hour later the door opened and the butler entered with one of the biggest men whom Posh Luker had ever beheld at his heels. Judging by his dress and appearance he might have been a gardener. He waited by the door, and it was the butler who spoke.

"My master is ready to see you now," he said.

"Then don't let's keep him waiting," returned Posh Luker cordially. "His time is mine, as you might say. By the way, have you brought up this out-sized gentleman just to introduce him to me? If so, I'm very charmed to meet any friend of yours, old sport. I was always interested in prize giants!"

"You needn't concern yourself with him," the butler answered with an awful stiffness. "So long as you behave yourself, he will have nothing to say to you."

But Mr. Luker would not hear of such aloofness. He insisted on shaking hands warmly with the giant, who seemed slightly embarrassed.

"That's better!" said Posh Luker brightly. "We're all pals now, as you might say. Mine's a warm, affectionate nature, and I can't bear coldness. Lead on, Macduff, as fast as you blooming well like!"

The disgusted butler obeyed: Mr. Luker followed him, and close at his heels came the giant gardener. Down the stairway of the great house went the little procession, and Posh Luker was ushered into the presence of its master.

He was seated at a desk in a magisterial attitude. Mr. Luker judged him to be at least six feet in height, and his figure was gaunt and narrow. His face was long and craggy with prominent cheek bones and a thin-lipped, precise mouth. His pale-gray eyes and white

side whiskers gave him an air of prim severity.

"I judged at once that there weren't much change to be got out of that old cove, mister," Posh Luker told me.

The master of the house motioned with one long, lean hand, and Mr. Luker was led in front of his desk.

"Good morning, sir, I hope I see you well," Mr. Luker, ever polite, said brightly.

"Good morning," the gaunt man answered coldly. "I am glad to see that you are little the worse for the accident."

"Well, as for that, we can only hope for the best," Posh Luker said guardedly. "You never can tell in the case of these nasty motor accidents. I'm not as young as I was, mister, and your car hit me uncommon hard. I may look all right and feel all right and eat my grub all right, and yet the fust time as I try to work I may find out as I'm a cripple for life!"

"It is about your work that I wish to speak to you," the master of the house said frigidly.

"You mean with regard to compensation, sir," Posh Luker answered genially.

"No, quite another matter. As you know, my car knocked you down, thanks to the carelessness of my chauffeur, and I had you carried into my house. My name, by the way, is Craven. Quite by accident one of my servants discovered the contents of your pockets. They were of a very significant and damning nature. I should be fully justified in handing you over to the police. Have you anything to say for yourself?"

"What a man's got in his pockets don't prove nothing, although the perleece always makes out as it does," Mr. Luker protested with honest warmth. "I'm a decent, straight going man, a bricklayer by pfeffession. Lots of people, I dare say, would speak up for me, if one could only find them. But I'm not going to suggest the perleece as my references, mister, because they've always had a nasty prejudice ag'in' me."

"I regret that I cannot accept your denial, my man," Mr. Craven answered, quite unmoved by this eloquence. "I am forced to believe that you were on your way to commit a burglary when the accident happened. I recommend you to tell me no more falsehoods. Have you anything further to say?"

"Yes, I have, any amount!" Posh Luker retorted heatedly. "I don't doubt you call yourself a gentleman, but do you think you're doing the square thing? Your car knocks me down and jolly nearly kills me, and you find out something ag'in' me, thanks to the nasty prying habits of your servant! And then you talk about handing me over to the perleece!"

"I wish to be just," Mr. Craven answered quietly. "Do you admit that you were on your way to commit a crime?"

"I don't admit nothing!" Posh Luker cried. "But I'll make a fair suggestion to you, mister. Give me back the things you've prigged out of my pockets and let me go. Say nothing to the perleece, and I'll say nothing about the compensation for injury which you rightly owes me!"

"I cannot do that," Mr. Craven said coldly. "But on the other hand I do not propose to hand you over to the police. I have fully considered your case and have decided what to do with you."

"Ho, indeed!" retorted Mr. Luker, half relieved and half defiant. "And what is that, if I may ask?"

"I have always been deeply interested in the reclamation of criminals," Mr. Craven said. "I am convinced that our prison system is faulty. Providence has thrown you, a criminal, into my hands, and I propose to test my theories upon you."

Mr. Luker gasped.

"It won't be legal, I warns you it won't be legal!" he cried. "But just out of curiosity, and without prejudice, as you might say, I'd like to hear what your precious theories is."

"Speaking broadly, my endeavor will be to restore your self respect by a course of steady, unceasing work upon a light diet," Mr. Craven answered, not without a kind of restrained enthusiasm.

"It sounds disgustin', simply disgustin'!" Posh Luker growled. "I haven't the strength for steady work, I never had. And my system wants plenty of good grub. It always did."

"You will be put to work in the grounds of this house," Mr. Craven went on unmoved. "My servants are entirely to be trusted. You will find resistance and mutiny useless and even painful. Your hours of work will be long and hard, but your toil will be useful and productive. That in itself should be a cause of pride and self respect to you. Soon, quite soon, you will find yourself taking pleasure in it. Your diet, at first at any rate, will be bread and water."

"Well, I'm—somethinged!" Mr. Luker ejaculated. "Do you think that you're the King of Russia? Do you think I'm going to stand your little games? Bread and water and long hours of unceasing work, indeed! Why, I'd rather take my chance of quod any day!"

"The choice is not given to you," Mr. Craven answered coldly. "I have no more to say to you at present, my man. In consideration of yesterday's accident you may rest for to-day, but your course of training will begin to-morrow. I shall observe your progress with genuine concern and interest. A great chance has come to you. I earnestly counsel you to endeavor to profit by it."

Mr. Luker was not entirely certain that he was not experiencing a horrid dream. In his wildest visions he had never imagined this sort of thing. He began to rage and protest, but at his first violent word he was abruptly checked.

"I have a strong aversion to blasphemy," Mr. Craven told him severely. "A repetition of the offense will lead to your instant punishment."

"There'll be questions in the House of Commons about this—this blooming outrage!" Mr. Luker growled. "You mark my words if there ain't! The Home Secretary will 'ave something to say! And you wait till the 'alfpenny papers get hold of it!"

"No one will know of the experiment," Mr. Craven said coolly. "This house is completely isolated, and my servants, as I told you, are to be trusted. Lead him away now, Jarrow, and let him rest for to-day."

Protesting wildly, the unfortunate Mr. Luker was led from the study and locked in his bedroom to meditate upon his curious fate.

"It was enough to drive a man crazy or to drink—if there'd been any, mister!" he told me. "I seemed to have fallen into the power of a blooming dangerous lunatic! Bread and water and hard work for the rest of my life, perhaps! It was a nice prospect for a poor blighter to look forward to—I don't think!"

I confess to a certain sympathy with Mr. Luker. Undoubtedly one of the most trying periods of his checkered career began next day. Prison life he was hardened to, to some extent, but in many ways this incarceration was worse than prison.

It might go on forever, so far as Mr. Luker knew. There was no definite term of years about it. And the work was harder and the food was worse. To a man of Mr. Luker's tastes there is a maddening monotony about an unbroken diet of bread and water. After one week of the great experiment Posh Luker was near to desperation.

But there seemed little enough hope for him, sanguine as he is by nature. He was too well watched and guarded for escape. A young footman slept in his room at night. Through the day the gigantic gardener was always near at hand.

"And if you'd only seen that chap, mister," Posh Luker told me with real

feeling, "you'd understand what chance any ordinary man 'ad got ag'in' him! I had one turn up with him quite early, out of pure desperation. But it was like a poor little harmless kitten trying to scrap with a blooming great tiger! He could use his hands more than a little. It was a painful business while it lasted. After that I gave up kicking openly, as you might say, and turned my great mind to the idea of working an escape."

There were many servants in the huge house, but otherwise Mr. Craven lived alone save for his widowed daughter and her little boy.

"He fairly worshiped them two, mister," Posh Luker told me. "And she was a pretty young lady enough, and that boy kid was none so dusty as kids go. I only saw them at a distance in the garden, of course. There was a big wall all round the grounds, and no one ever seemed to come to visit. It was dig, dig, dig in the blooming earth for me all day. I never want to touch or see a spade agin'!"

But Posh Luker seldom despairs for long, and he is a man who reckons little of long odds against him. One day in the garden he had the luck to light upon an old clasp-knife, which he secreted with deft swiftness. And that very night he made his bid for freedom. He retired early to his couch and fell asleep at once with great ostentation. The steady music of his snores would have deceived a more suspicious nature than that of the young footman who shared his room. And in any case his doubts of the prisoner had been skilfully lulled to rest. For the past week Posh Luker had seemed a docile captive. Mr. Craven, watching him closely, had conceived high hopes of the result of his experiment. The footman fell asleep with a clear conscience.

He woke with Posh Luker's weight upon his chest and his hand upon his throat.

"If you try to cry out I'll have to hurt you bad!" Mr. Luker whispered. "I'm only going to gag you and tie you

up with these strips of sheet. I'm stronger nor you. Now, don't you be a fool, young feller, me lad!"

The footman gamely attempted to struggle, but he had been taken at a disadvantage and he was overmatched in weight and strength. He yielded sullenly, to ease that torturing clutch upon his throat, and was securely bound and gagged. Posh Luker left him lying upon his bed, and advanced with noiseless feet to the locked door.

It did not resist him long. He cut round the lock with the knife and crept into the passage; and might have made his escape from the house with ease, but it was not in his mind to go empty-handed. Posh Luker was not the man to miss a chance of exacting payment from his host for his imprisonment.

He was making his way to Mr. Craven's dressing-room. He had noticed certain rings of tempting value which it was that gentleman's habit to wear. Posh Luker always has a keen professional eye for such matters. It struck him that there was at least a chance of gleaning those rings and possibly other trifles of price from the dressing-room of his host.

He reached the room without mishap. Every one in the great house, except himself and the gagged footman, appeared to be peacefully asleep. Through the door he could hear the steady breathing of his host. A flicker of moonlight came through the blinds and gleamed upon something lying on the toilet-table. Posh Luker's small eyes glinted at the sight. There were the four rings he sought and a tie-pin of distinct possibilities!

He wasted no time. Here was a sufficient haul to pay him for his painful experience. The plunder was in his pocket in a moment, and he turned and left the dressing-room with silent speed. So far all had gone well, surprisingly well. But on the landing outside, his luck, as he himself expressed it, got up and hit him.

He heard a patter of feet and a quick, sharp succession of yaps. They came from the little fox-terrier belonging to

Mr. Craven's daughter. Posh Luker had seen the small creature often in the garden, and had endeavored, with a professional eye to the future, to win its friendship, but the dog had always shown a marked distrust for him. It was revealing all that distrust at this unlucky moment and giving tongue most loudly to its suspicions.

"I dunno why dogs like that is allowed to live, mister!" Posh Luker confided to me. "If I had my way they'd be wiped out, one and all! They're a constant danger and annoyance to decent men of my profession. If I could have got my hands upon that specimen I'd have stopped its nasty yapping pretty quick!"

He grabbed at the little dog with that intention, but it was far too active for him. It kept its distance warily and continued its yapping protest, which sounded horribly loud in the silent house.

Posh Luker turned his thoughts to flight, instant flight. In his stockinged feet he sprang for the stairs, with the little dog at his heels. He might yet reach the garden before the house was roused. But it was not to be. As he sprang down the last flight a huge shape made for him out of the darkness. Posh Luker felt great arms locked round him. He was in the grip of the gigantic gardener. Resistance was useless.

"I'm as fond of a little scrap as any one," Posh Luker told me with perfect truth. "But I've got the sense to know when I'm safe to be licked. I didn't want another turn up with that big brute. So I just chucked up the sponge good and easy. There weren't nothing else to do."

The house was thoroughly aroused by row. Servants came running in various stages of undress. Mr. Jarrow, the stout and stately butler, appeared in quite a striking costume. Posh Luker had never realized before how much the man owed to his clothes. Mr. Jarrow appeared to wake with a start to his own undignified appearance, and to notch one more grievance in his long score against Posh Luker.

"What's all this, what's all this?" he

asked fussily. "Has that nasty, dishonest fellow been giving more trouble?"

"Oh, you go and put your fat head in a bag!" growled Mr. Luker. "You're enough to make a cat laugh in that get-up!"

A footman snickered, and Mr. Jarrow reddened with outraged fury. The gardener explained the situation. Just then a man servant came running with the news that Posh Luker's jailer had been discovered bound and gagged upon his bed.

"Search him!" commanded Mr. Jarrow, and was promptly obeyed. The rings and pin were swiftly brought to light, and the butler seemed to swell with gratified self-righteousness as he took them into his charge.

"I knew trouble would come of keeping such a rascal in the house!" he said. "Perhaps the master will be guided by me now and send for the police!"

"I'd like three minutes, just three minutes, alone with you, you old image!" remarked Posh Luker quite pleasantly. "I could do all what's necessary and proper in that time! And you wouldn't know yourself when you looked in the glass afterwards!"

"Hold him tightly, Smith!" commanded Jarrow nervously, and at that moment Mr. Craven, in a long dressing-gown, stalked down-stairs. The stirring adventures of the night were narrated to him at some length by Mr. Jarrow, and he frowned judicially at the tale.

"Bring the prisoner into the study," he commanded, and led the way into the room and sat down at his desk.

"This is a disappointment to me, my man," he said gravely. "I had formed hopes of your future, high hopes. It had seemed to me that my experiment was justifying itself with striking success. And yet you prove yourself incorrigible: you have reverted to your old evil, violent, and dishonest ways!"

"That's all right, mister!" growled Mr. Luker. "I'm a wrong un, no doubt, but I ain't the only one what breaks the laws! You're breaking 'em, too, by keep-

ing me a prisoner here like this. I've had enough of your experiments and little games. How would you like yourself to work like a slave and be half-starved on bread and water all the while? Send for the blooming perleece and have done with it!"

Mr. Craven shook his head.

"I must consider your case," he said. "I am loath to believe that my experiment has failed. Take him away now, Jarrow, and see that he is securely bestowed for the night."

Posh Luker was removed, complaining lustily, and taken to his bedroom.

"Bring a length of clothes-line," commanded Mr. Jarrow.

"What are you going to do, you old scoundrel?" asked Mr. Luker anxiously. "You ain't thinking of hanging me, are you?"

"You will be tied up for the night," answered Mr. Jarrow with stately calm. "We all need sleep, and you will not be permitted to disturb us again to-night. The master said that you were to be secured, and I am obeying him."

Posh Luker was tied hand and foot and laid upon the bed. Then the door was locked and he was left alone. It was characteristic of him that he promptly fell asleep. Posh Luker is always a gentleman who takes things as they come.

He had done his best to get clear away and he had failed. It was no use worrying about what the morrow might bring. It might mean the police or another course of that painful experiment. But in any case it was all in the game. Within half an hour Posh Luker was snoring peacefully.

But that eventful night was not to pass without further alarms. Some time before the dawn Posh Luker awoke feeling half suffocated. There was a strong odor of smoke in his nostrils, and he seemed to hear the crackling of flames.

"The blooming house is afire!" mused Mr. Luker. "I don't want to be left here to roast like a trussed chicken! I'd better yell!"

And he yelled with fervor. Soon to his relief he heard cries and the pattering of feet. Others besides himself had awakened to the peril. Then his door was opened and Smith, the gardener, entered. He hastily cut Mr. Luker's bonds.

"Come on down into the garden!" he ejaculated. "There ain't no time to waste!"

He spoke the truth. The first floor of the house was already well ablaze. The stairs would soon be impassable. Mr. Luker and his guardian hurried down. They found the household gathered in the garden.

"It was just about the quickest fire I've ever seen," Posh Luker told me. "That old house burned like tinder. The flames looked pretty ghastly like in the dark, a leaping out of the winders. The engines hadn't come up yet, but they was expected. I seed Mr. Craven and his daughter and the boy kid on the lawn. I hoped to be able to slip away in the confusion, but that out-sized gardener kept near me like a blooming shadow!"

Some half an hour later Mr. Luker, still seeking a chance of escape, was startled by a sudden sharp scream of terror. It came from Mr. Craven's daughter. She was pointing wildly to the house. From a window upon the second floor a small white face was peering.

Let Posh Luker tell what followed, even as he told it to me:

"It was that boy kid, mister! He'd sneaked back into the house for some blooming toy, when every one's eye was off him for a moment. Them blooming kids is always up to mischief. It was rather awful like to hear his mother scream. Mr. Craven went white as calico. Every one danced round and yelled. They thought that the kid was cut off and a goner, and it did look like it.

"Old Posh Luker was the only one of 'em all as seemed to keep his head. The front stairs was well on fire by now, but the back stairs weren't so bad. The

kid must have gone up them. I left those silly fools chattering and dancing on the lawn and ran into the house. They'd forgotten all about me. I dunno myself why I didn't just do a slope. We most of us do damn silly things at times.

"I put my hands before my face and ran up them stairs. It was pretty sultry, but not as bad as it looked. But it was nice to get into clear air on the second floor. I grabbed up that kid and wrapped my old coat round him and made for the stairs agin. The fire was worse by now even in that short while, but we got through somehow and out into the air.

"They all yelled at sight of us. Smith chucked a bucket of water over me, and I was glad of it, although not holding with the use of cold water as a rule. But I'm not sure that my clothes and hair wasn't just beginning to catch.

"I handed the kid to its mother. It deserved a smacking, and I hope it got it. She looked as though she'd got some

thoughts about kissing me. Mr. Craven so far forgot hisself as to shake hands with an unreclaimed criminal. The criminal wanted a drink uncommon bad.

"Ten minutes later the engines and one or two nasty perleecemen turned up, and it was then that I did an Ally Sloper. I just slipped off in the dark and climbed the wall and headed for good old London. No, I wasn't going to stay to be patted and given carrots and sugar, mister.

"No doubt Mr. Craven was grateful, but I'd had enough of his experiments. He'd set his heart on what he called reclaiming me, and he'd have been bound to have another try at it, and when a man's come to my age he hasn't got no use for being reclaimed. You can't teach a poor old dog new tricks."

It may be that Posh Luker knew best. It may be that he is hardened in crime beyond redemption.

But sometimes I think that there are many worse than he in this odd world.



The Dicky-Bird

by
Lew M. Davis

HE was a blithe spirit, if there ever was one. And he surely "poured forth his full heart in profuse strains of unpremeditated art." Bert and I heard him ten years ago; and the memory of it still sets our own hearts into profuse and unpremeditated activities.

We discovered him in the house of Herr Konrad, the great impresario. But first I will have to tell you how we, who are not on the official calling list of New York's four hundred, happened to be stopping at Herr Konrad's.

Bert and I were very unconventional.

Vulgar people, like members of the New York police force and such, were "sore at us" for this; but we uniformly ignored their sneers, followed our own chosen path, and asked no favors except to be let alone.

One convention which we persistently violated was the one known as "private property." In spite of the divine injunction not to lay up treasures on earth, our religious neighbors were forever trying it. Bert and I never formed the obnoxious habit. Frequently we laid hands upon the treasures, and relieved their worshipful owners from the temptations they entailed. But we never became idolatrous toward the treasures. We always turned them into cash as soon as possible, and we never kept the cash for any length of time.

All this time, remember, we were not *obstreperously* unconventional. Persons with fine sensibilities do not like to force their eccentricities upon the attention of those who may be offended by them. With rare tact we refrained from indulging in our unconventional conduct except when we were quite sure there were no policemen present.

We were sociable in a way, Bert and I. I spent most of my evenings redistributing my wealth to all who could show three of a kind against my inevitable eights and deuces, which I was never known to fill. Bert spent his, I believe, in studying the styles; so that his outward appearance, at least, might be as inoffensive as possible.

The police called him "Gentleman Bert." I wasn't so aristocratic myself, and usually passed under the *bourgeois* name of "Peanuts." But we followed the social life of New York together, and the police will tell you we were often found in the homes of the best families.

To his death Herr Konrad never had the pleasure of our acquaintance. I am sure it would have been a pleasure. I am sure, in fact, that he made definite overtures toward bringing about an introduction. But Bert and I shrunk from pub-

licity. When it came to formal meetings, we were positively shy.

Although, as I have said, we had *entré* to the best homes, we were not invited in the usual way. There seemed to be a tacit understanding between the families and us which suited our eccentricities admirably. When there was anything special doing in the social line, Mrs. Best-Family would notify us through the afternoon papers. We read the society columns religiously, especially between the lines.

The type might merely announce that Mrs. B.-F. would be present. Between the lines the announcement would read: "She will, of course, get her jewels out of the deposit vault this afternoon and bring them home. She will leave them practically unguarded in her room upstairs while she goes down to dinner. This is to notify Gentleman Bert and Peanuts that their presence will be unexpected."

"Here's an invitation, Peanuts, that we must accept," Bert said one afternoon. He tossed the paper to me. I read that Herr Konrad would conduct a new symphony that evening, and that Mme. Konrad would wear her tiara and famous necklace.

"Get the telephone-book," said Bert.

We found the address immediately and went out to get the lay of the land. We knew nothing of the family or the number of servants. No matter. By watching the lights we could readily keep track of them. While the family is at dinner the maid, as a rule, puts out her mistress's wraps, sets the room to rights, and then proceeds to the next room. As she leaves the room she either turns the light out or turns it very low.

Sometimes there is a sick person in the house, and Bert and I always make it a point never to disturb the sick. Once, in the beginning of my career, I had walked in on one unexpectedly.

I don't know what was the matter with her, but it had not impaired her throat or lungs. I was so affected by the embarrassing error that I was compelled to

withdraw from all social activities for several seasons, regaining my lost nerve in the famous baths of Sing Sing. A light may be turned low, I learned from that experience, for the benefit of an invalid; and I became solicitous at once for the health of the house of Konrad. I went to a phone.

"Plaza 489."

"Hello! Is this Plaza 489?" It was.

"This is Dr. Smith. Any one sick in your house? Some one left a call half an hour ago; I'm not sure that I have the right number. Who is this, please?" It was Mrs. Konrad herself, and no one was ill. So Bert took a turn of watchful waiting for the lights, and I set out to find an "empty."

I was back in five minutes. There was a vacant house several doors away. Nobody invited us in, and as nobody seemed in charge of the house, we accepted the invitation with alacrity. If you must know the details, we also accepted it with a "stick" or "jimmy," another little token of our unconventionality.

Two more modest social climbers never operated in New York. We both dreaded to meet the Konrads, and just couldn't help fixing things so that we wouldn't commit ourselves to the ordeal. So we social-climbed six stories to the top of the empty, and left the trap-door in the roof ajar. We had a feeling, both of us, that we might be so overcome with embarrassment at the last moment that a very quiet exit would be a godsend.

On the ground, we had counted the houses between Konrad's and the empty. Now we began to count them the other way. People who live smugly in these city houses never seem to consider the vicissitudes of unconventional guests.

There we were going to Konrad's; and we might have been going to the north pole, for all any one seemed to know or care. There was a terrific cold wind, and the roofs were covered with ice and snow. How would the impresario have felt, think you, if one of us had missed his step?

When we reached the house adjoining Konrad's, we found that our journey had been in vain. Konrad's house was fully six feet away. To be sure, we could have jumped; but that would have made a noise and announced our coming. We were too bashful to do that. So we trudged back and secured a ladder.

"Never mind, Peanuts," said Bert encouragingly: "only by patience, perseverance, and hard work is success achieved."

To tell the truth, I didn't suffer from the cold. Something—I suppose it was my extreme bashfulness—kept me perspiring. From a boy I have always been passionately fond of music, and the thought that I might soon meet this great impresario face to face was fairly overwhelming.

To approach his presence by degrees was our plan. We reasoned that he was now at dinner on the first floor, if he was in the house at all. In a burst of humility, we decided to enter by the fifth. Adjusting a rope ladder—bashful people have to depend on such mechanical aids—we were soon inside an upper window.

Very, very unpretentiously we made our way to the hall. We could hear the family talking in the dining-room below. We decided not to disturb them if we could help it. The stairs were heavily carpeted, but that was not enough for us. We hugged the wall as we descended, reasoning that only *bona-fide* guests should walk in the center, where the stairs are more apt to creak.

Finally we reached the second floor. If we had been found there very suddenly, I am sure I should have blushed. I should probably have withdrawn from society again. Bert, good old chap, who seemed to sympathize with my feelings in every detail, agreed to watch on the stairway while I entered the room just opposite to collect my thoughts—and anything else that might be lying loose.

"Don't let them come up too suddenly—or too far," I whispered. "We'll keep at least one flight ahead of them."

Once in the room, I began to be my own unconventional self. My intuition told me there was private property around, and my old whim gripped me hard. It was amazing how this great artist, who should have had his mind on spiritual things, had laid up treasures on earth. He had laid them in five "securely locked" bureau drawers. Opening things that are securely locked is an obsession with me, and I soon had them open.

In the first drawer I found a quantity of jewelry that amazed me. There must have been ten pounds of it. My eye noticed, though, that each piece was defective or bent. Evidently this was an accumulation of things to be repaired.

"Tst!" By an almost soundless click of the tongue, I attracted Bert's attention. Silently I pointed to the "junk." Bert shook his head. I understood. I was to get the other treasures first, as there was little danger of Herr Konrad becoming dangerously attached to this. Also, we may have been a trifle selfish; this would make rather an unhandy bundle.

The second drawer was full of lingerie, odds and ends of women's finery. "Eights and deuces," I always called such truck—might look valuable, but of no use to me. The third drawer—I forgot my embarrassment! I wanted to sing. In its soft, blue-black plush bed lay the famous stomacher and tiara. Here, right in my hands, were one hundred thousand dollars' worth of diamonds. The invitation between the lines in that society column was certainly O. K.

The case was too bulky. So I threw it aside and dropped the blazing bauble in my pocket like a loose handful of change. I know it was an unconventional thing to do. And I know that I will be accused of unworthy motives. But I swear that I was never tempted to wear those jewels. I didn't intend to keep them. Even in that ecstatic moment I planned to get rid of them within a reasonable length of time.

There were a dozen or more smaller pieces of jewelry in the drawer which I handed to Bert. In the next drawer I came upon twenty or thirty medals and some jewelry-cases. These I divided between us. People in such a house, we knew, were not expected to have their pockets bulging. And Bert, he was a fastidious dresser, anyway.

If Bert and I only realized it, it was time to go. We had already overstayed our welcome. But a single room with so much private property in it was too much for me. I was curious—with something of the same curiosity I had shown on another occasion when I tried to see if I could stop an electric fan with my fingers.

This time it wasn't an electric fan which attracted me. It was a gold filigree box; one of those dainty things you see on the dressing table of wealthy women. For a moment or two I stood drinking in its exquisite beauty, and, incidentally, thinking of the exquisite price I would get for it.

I took the box in my hands. I easily found the catch; the cover flew back, and up popped a beautiful canary bird; from its golden throat streamed forth a melody from "Lohengrin." Every note was clear, full, and true. I stood there entranced; momentarily I had forgotten why I was in the house. Then Bert came in and spoiled the whole thing.

"Choke that damned bird!" he rasped.

Here was this lovely creature singing so charmingly—oh, well, Bert knew more about the latest thing in cocktails than he did of the wonders of Wagner. Bert had left the room; he was back again in a flash.

"For God's sake, Peanuts, wring its neck!"

But just then we were seized with another fit of embarrassment. Steps were coming up-stairs. I quickly put the lid on Dicky Bird and softly cursed Bert for his lack of the esthetic.

I could hear a telephone bell tinkling musically somewhere down-stairs, and I

somehow got the hunch that the cops were going to drop in quite informally.

"Let's go some place where there is not so much noise. I am getting a bit nervous." Bert's eagerness was astonishing.

Our ladder was hanging a few inches from the fifth floor window. We had only a few seconds to spare while the tribe of Konrad was taking in the situation from below. Bert went up first, and then steadied the ladder for me.

Just as I stepped out on the sill a woman rushed into the room. I heard her scream, and saw her fall in a heap on the floor. For this rude shock I now wish to ask her pardon. I had no time then to explain to her that bashful young gentlemen of our set do not walk off fifth-story windows unless they have taken previous precautions. Bert and I hauled up the ladder after us, and left the house of high notes and high society as informally as we came.

"Our exit was almost rude, Peanuts," Bert whispered, as soon as we reached the adjoining roof. Then we heard a scream below.

"He jumped from the window!" cried a hysterical voice.

Bert and I peered over the edge of the roof. Women were craning their necks out of the window to catch sight of my mangled remains below.

"Where is he? Can you see him?" I asked Bert.

"Shut up!" he answered. "Little boys should keep quiet at their own funerals. Let's get out of this before the cops are wised."

We started for the empty building, carrying the ladder between us.

"There ought be a bus line here," Bert grumbled. "No accommodations on these roofs at all." But we took our hardships philosophically and never publicly complained.

We had made the call on the Konrads quite informally. We told no one of our intended call, for we wished to surprise the family. Imagine, then, my surprise

when I found that I had a caller waiting for me at the foot of the stairs.

"You, Gintlemin Bert and Peanuts, stand ye where ye ar-re!" We stood. It was just as well, for I didn't see any chairs around, anyway.

"Jist ramble over to th' wall and place y'ur hands ag'in' it."

We rambled.

"'Tis th' magisty of th' law I ripri-sint. Don't move your hands. Steady, now. 'Tis a beautiful pose ye have."

It was ungentlemanly of Officer Flannagan: without a "by your leave," he searched every pocket I had and then confined himself with Bert.

"'Tis a captain I'll be for this night's work—"

That's as far as he got. I had been watching and waiting; the time seemed ripe, and I laid one on the jaw of the cop as hard as I could hit. As he staggered, Bert and I tore for it. I could hear Office Flannagan yelling and blowing his police whistle.

Bert and I didn't have much to say going home in the subway.

The pair of us were seated in the lobby of the Rupert. Bert was reading a newspaper: I was thinking of Officer Flannagan. Then I sat up with a start and drank in every word I heard:

"They are simply wonderful! Last week my house was robbed, you know. They would have gotten away with a hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewels if I hadn't bought the burglar-alarm that very afternoon. You see, it looks like a jewel-case, and the minute you touch it a mechanical bird pops out and begins singing at the top of its voice, warning every one in the house. Better get one: you never can tell."

Bert's paper rested in his lap; he looked up, and his eye caught mine. The smile that spread over his face found its counterpart on mine. The haunting melody of Wagner's "Lohengrin" dawned upon him at last.

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



ALL men, as a rule, have a preference for little women; the funniest of comedians have an insatiable longing to play *Hamlet*, and the more domesticated a man is, the greater is the attraction of the untrodden wastes that lie beyond the boundaries of civilization.

John Sheldon was not domesticated. But he was disappointed, and, in search of solace, he sought that which no man has a right to seek when fate and his fellow man have been unkind. He went in search of solitude—the real thing—and in the limitless Northwest, far from the grubby hives of industry, *Sheldon* found what he sought until—

The rest of it will appear next week in the form of an excellent and complete novelette called—

THE FIRE FLOWER

BY JACKSON GREGORY

Author of "Wolf Breed," "The Short Cut," "The Outlaw," etc.

This accomplished and successful author's work is always sure of a hearty welcome, because it is always sure to be worth while—as virile and alive as all outdoors. The keen breath of the open spaces, the pulse of sharp, decisive action, men of breadth and depth and brawn, and women of the stronger and truer, deeper sort—these are some of the ingredients that go into a Gregory story and make you catch your breath—just as if the biting, bracing winds of the great Northwest were actually whipping you in the face, telling you that you were *alive!*

So that you have a particularly pleasant prospect ahead of you.

And *only a week* to wait for it!

THERE *have* been men who have found it good to die. Tired souls, weary of incessant strife and the "ills that flesh are heir to," have willingly taken leave of life, and gone across the Border with a strange peace in their hearts. And then there was *Burke*. *Burke's* experience was—as were all things with him—different. Which accounts for

THE MAN WHO WAS DEAD

BY HELEN TOPPING MILLER

A "Different" Story

To divulge just how different *Burke's* experience was would be to take much of the suspense

from the pleasure you are going to have when you read this splendid little story. It will appear in our next issue, and in itself is well worth the price of your copy of the magazine.

It is a debatable point whether absolute faith in one's fellow man is, in the long run, sure to show a balance on the right side of the ledger. The frailties of humankind are legion, and every one knows that it is much easier to go down than up—that as a stream of water will follow the line of least resistance, so will man, in his weaker moments, obey the impulses that lead him away from the path that is straight and narrow. *Senator Ebert L. Castle*, who plays the principal part in "BREAD UPON

THE WATERS," by Du Vernet Rabell, was, in spite of what life should have taught him, an optimist with a big O. He'd take a chance on "the other fellow" any time. And did. *This* time he took another chance and—that's the story.

DAME FORTUNE dons some queer disguises sometimes, as if determined to make herself as unrecognizable as possible; and in "LUCK," by J. H. Green, the fickle dame came to *David Baird* in one of the queerest forms we have ever read of. This is one of those "quiet" stories, with a kick in every line of it, and even if it does carry you all the way to Western Australia, you'll be mighty glad to make the journey. The cost is only a fraction of the price of our next week's issue.

NOTICE.—Inquiries concerning stories that we have published will be answered in the Heart to Heart Talks only when the name of the author as well as the title of the story is supplied by the correspondent.

BURROUGHS'S MARTIAN STORIES

Replying to inquiries from Mr. M. R. Kielgas, Remer, Minnesota; "F. M.," Belleville, Kansas, and many others, the stories of Mars, by Edgar Rice Burroughs, are as follows: "Under the Moons of Mars," *All-Story* (monthly), February to July, 1912 (six numbers); "The Gods of Mars," *All-Story*, January to May, 1913 (five numbers); "Warlord of Mars," *All-Story*, December, 1913, to March, 1914 (four numbers), and "Thuvia, Maid of Mars," *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*, April 8 to April 22, 1916 (three numbers). None of these stories has been published in book form, but we can supply the magazines containing them for twenty cents each.

"HERE'S THANKING E. K. MEANS"

TO THE EDITOR:

I am writing this letter to Heart to Heart Talks as an offering in payment for several hours of the greatest enjoyment I have had for many years.

I was for years a reader of the *All-Story* and other Munsey publications, but after I started a bookstore (second hand) expressly to enable me to get a lot of educational books that I would otherwise be unable to obtain, I quit reading nearly all magazines for the last three years, and have been studying very hard.

I noticed my husband, two or three evenings ago, chuckling while he held in his hand an *All-Story* two or three years old. He threw out his hands and cried, "Well, I'll be dinged if that fellow Means isn't the funniest man alive!"

"Why?" I asked, for I had no idea who Means was at the moment.

"He's the fellow who writes the Tickfall stories," he replied, grinning, as he resumed his reading.

Then I remembered E. K. Means, the comedy writer, and I walked out into the store and began to sort out from among several thousand second-hand *All-Stories* the numbers containing the Tickfall stories, and have since been visiting my beloved South again. We have no real negroes here. Colored people we have in plenty, but the dear old beloved "black mam-mies," who pillowed my head and crooned me to sleep are entirely conspicuous by their absence; so it was like a refreshing shower after a long, dry spell to learn that such dearly beloved darkies as Mr. Means describes still reside on our earth.

I have read about one dozen of the real Simon pure negro stories, and have laughed and cried with my dear old-fashioned colored people, and last night I read "Diada, Daughter of Discord." I laughed until the tears ran like rain, and then, when the worst was explained, I flopped right down and cried for the poor cannibal woman turned loose to be the sport of children of the Southland, white and black. I was so glad that no real harm came to her, and I can't help wondering what disposition *Captain Lemuel Manse* made of her, for I feel quite sure that she would not fit in on a Southern plantation.

I can't help thinking that every character in Mr. Means's stories is real, for it does not seem possible that a man could portray the character of master and man, white and black, as he does unless he had just lived through the experiences. Why, I can just hear *Hitch Diamond* saying "gwine," with slight accents where they belong; and let no man think that negroes in Mr. Means's stories are one bit exaggerated. But, of course, unless you were brought up among them and knew and loved every one of their silly songs and crazy superstitions—in fact, had a few of them yourself—you could never appreciate his word-pictures of a negro's mind. And still I believe that very few white people ever really fathom their subtle twistings and turnings trying to please "de white folks," watching their every expression for laughter, joy, or pain.

Just reading Mr. Means's stories has sure "gib" me "de trabble" itch, for when an old black mammy decides to adopt you, no one but your mother can take her place. Twenty years I have been banged around without mine, but some day I will have her here with me again to look out for me.

It is a terrible thing to live in a negroless country. I would almost brave the dangers of Little Moccasin Swamp right now to have a dear old black face bending over me, and a dear pair of black hands fussing around and putting things to rights, as my white ones can never do.

ELLA P. HAUST.

314 East Missouri Street,
El Paso, Texas.

TWO FAMOUS STORIES

TO THE EDITOR:

I am writing to let you know that I still think the *ALL-STORY* the best magazine published, and to tell you how glad I am that Fred Jackson is going to give us another of his good stories. I have just finished "The Stroke of Twelve" and "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar," and think they were fine.

"Too Much Efficiency" was very good, but the best story you have published since "Jack Chanty" was "On a Stallion Shod with Fire." A few years ago, in the *Cavalier*, you published two serials, "The Golden Gate" and "The Strength of Samson." I would like to know if I can get them in book form.

Why not give us some stories like "Greater Love Hath No Man" and "Jack Chanty"? And has the *Night Wind* forsaken us? Why not let him come back? We would be very glad to read some more about him and *Lady Kate*.

Mrs. W. R. ALMON.

Duncan, Oklahoma.

NOTE: "The Golden Gate," by William Brown Meloney (*Cavalier*, January 25 to February 15, 1913), has been published in book form, under the title, "The Girl of the Golden Gate," by E. J. Clode, New York, \$7.25 net. "The Strength of Samson," by Charles Neville Buck (*Cavalier*, February 8 to March 1, 1913), by W. J. Watt & Co., New York, under the title, "The Call of the Cumberlands," at \$1.25 net.

A JACKSON GREGORY FAN

TO THE EDITOR:

The other day I picked up a *Munsey's Magazine* for November, 1914, which contained the story entitled "An Outsider," by Louis Joseph Vance. And in an advertisement there was a list of forty-four big novels which appeared in the *All-Story Cavalier Weekly*. When I read that such authors as Arnold Bennett, Harold McGrath, Caroline Lockhart, Henry Kitchell Webster, Louis Joseph Vance, and Arthur Stringer were contributors, I knew at the first rattle of the box that I had certainly missed some mighty good stories.

I never dreamed that "The Girl of the Golden Gate," by William Brown Meloney; "The Full of the Moon," by Caroline Lockhart, and "The

Vanguard," by Edgar Beecher Bronson, had appeared in the *All-Story Cavalier*.

"The Girl of the Golden Gate" was a dandy seller out this way. I suppose "The Stain," "The Pirate of Panama," "The Forest Maiden," "Under Handicap" were also.

Why don't you get these authors to write again, especially E. B. Bronson, William M. Raine, Caroline Lockhart, Henry Kitchell Webster, Arthur Stringer, and Mary Roberts Rinehardt? There are a few others that I can't recall the names of just now, which I am sorry to say, because I would like to let them know that they're not forgotten. I hope you will "feed" more from these authors, as I hate to be an exception to such a rare treat.

At last I have read "The Outlaw," and it was fine, but I have read better stories by Jackson Gregory. I liked "Sand" and "The Square-Dealer" by him. Will you please let me know if you have these in stock, and the price?

Why in thunder don't you kick Zane Grey hard and make him come through with one of his unbeatable stories of the West? I'm glad that a story of the old-time West is coming next week—namely, "The Holy Scare," as I've been wishing for a story by George Washington Ogden for some time. I hope you have a large bundle of Western stories in your safe for 1917.

Is that sequel to "The Brass Check" ever coming. I'm kinda losing patience also on that sequel to "The Return of the Mucker." I hope I'm not asking too much.

From one who has never kicked, and who, I guess, never will. I wouldn't mind hearing from some old readers of the magazine.

Here's wishing you a prosperous 1917.

If I had time I would write more. I could talk all night on any *Munsey* magazine.

24 Ninth Street,
Watsonville, California.

NOTE: "The Square-Dealer," by Jackson Gregory, was published complete in the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*, August 21, 1915. "Sand," by the same author, in the same magazine, December 3 to December 26, 1914 (four numbers). We can supply the magazines containing these stories for twenty cents each. Three other stories by Jackson Gregory have been published in book form: "Under Handicap" (*Cavalier*, November 1 to 29, 1913), Harper & Brothers, \$1.35 net; "The Outlaw" (*Cavalier*, April 4 to May 2, 1914), Dodd, Mead & Co., \$1.00 net; and "The Short Cut" (*ALL-STORY WEEKLY*, September 16 to October 14, 1916), Dodd, Mead & Co., \$1.40 net.

"STILL GOING UP"

TO THE EDITOR:

Whew! What a magazine you sure are putting out for ten cents! How can you afford it? I

thought the last time I wrote you it had reached the zenith, but you are still going up. The reason for this outburst especially is the two stories in the issue of December 23, "Annie-for-Spite," by Fred Jackson, and "The Story Without a Title." These two were some corkers. Fred Jackson has surely made up for (as you say) his two years' absence. If he has any more up his sleeve like the former story, tell him kindly to come forward with the rest.

And the "different story" was some story! Both of them sure get my goat.

Enjoyed *Tarzan* very much. It is funny I appreciate his (E. R. Burroughs's) *Tarzan* stories so much and cannot get interested in his Martian stories. Is it not about time for *Semi-Dual* to appear? I enjoy these tales best of all.

Also, I have enjoyed Achmed Abdullah's stories immensely, and sincerely hope because *Mr. Vandewater* has married, the stories will not stop. Also, is it not time for the writer of "The Honeymoon Detectives" to get busy? I believe the author's name was Arnold Fredericks. The heroine's name was *Grace Duvall*. Please, if possible, answer some of my questions. Your mail must be packed sky high, and I sincerely hope ninety-nine per cent of it is from boosters.

With best wishes for your continued success,

Mrs. K.

Baltimore, Maryland.

NOTE: Mrs. K. will be glad to learn that we have in hand both a *Semi-Dual* and a "Honeymoon Detectives" story, which will be published in the near future.

LETTERETTES

Have been reading the ALL-STORY for one year and a half, and think it the best magazine on the stand.

I am only nineteen years old and a university student, but I certainly appreciate the ALL-STORY because I am very fond of Burroughs's stories.

I think "The Matrimaniac" the best story going, outside of *Tarzan*, "Mid-Ocean," "The Scarlet Ghost," and "Greywold," and that style of story.

Also adore baseball and football stories.

MISS MARIE GIBSON.

622 Kirtland Street.

East End, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for two years, but before that I read the *Argosy* and *All-Story* when they were ten cents a month, in fact, about twelve years ago; and I think I would sooner go without my dinner than miss the ALL-STORY.

As to authors, I like them all, and especially E. K. Means. Don't lose him. I read his first, and nearly laughed myself sick over them. I have read a great many stories that I liked in the *Argosy* and ALL-STORY, but I don't remember them by the titles, as they always slip my memory.

I hope you will never give up printing the ALL-STORY, as I consider it the best in fiction magazines.

MRS. R. W. FISCHER.

6718 Leeds Street,

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Began reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY September 23, 1916. Just think only a month! Oh, well, no use crying over spilt milk. I sure do like this book all right!

I like E. K. Means's stories, E. R. Burroughs, Charles G. D. Roberts—in fact, I like 'em all.

Have read all the *Tarzan* stories except Burroughs's latest, which will be in the ALL-STORY November 18.

Count me as an enthusiastic reader.

J. BEHRINGER.

438 West Micken Avenue.

Cincinnati, Ohio.

When are we to have a sequel to "Breath of the Dragon"? That was *some* story. I hope a sequel will appear soon.

An ardent ALL-STORY fan,

MRS. MORRIS RUEL.

Bisbee, Arizona.

I have been reading the stories appearing in your publications from time to time, and wish to express my personal appreciation of the *Semi-Dual* stories, by J. B. Smith and J. U. Giesy. They are such readable, interesting, and uplifting stories; in fact, when one finished one of them there seems to remain with him the sensation of reality and the desire for living nobler and better, and the determination to do so.

Keep publishing them!

J. L. EASTERLY.

Helena, Montana.

Enclosed please find check for four dollars, for which continue my subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I am an ALL-STORY fan, and have missed only one or two numbers. I like serials best, and have not as yet found a single issue that had a story that was not worth the price of your magazine. Such writers as Zane Grey, E. R. Burroughs, Varick Vanard, E. J. Rath, Jackson Gregory, and Fred Jackson suit me. "The Yellow Furlough," by Alfred D. Pettibone, was fine. I hope to see more stories by these writers.

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Various Headaches

"It is necessary in order to treat headaches properly to understand the causes which produce the affection," says Dr. J. W. Ray of Blockton, Alabama. Continuing, he says: "Physicians cannot even begin the treatment of a disease without knowing what causes give rise to it, and we must remember that headache is to be treated according to the same rule. We must not only be particular to give a remedy intended to counteract the cause which produces the headache, but we must also give a remedy to relieve the pain until the cause of the trouble has been removed. To answer this purpose Anti-kamnia Tablets will be found a most convenient and satisfactory remedy. One tablet every one to three hours gives comfort and rest in most severe cases of headache, neuralgia and particularly the headaches of women.

FOR SICK-HEADACHE

If a patient is subject to regular attacks of sick-headache, he should take two A-K Tablets when he feels the least sign of an oncoming attack. These tablets are prompt in action, and can be depended upon to produce relief in a very few minutes. Such patients should always be instructed to keep their bowels open.

Influenza or LaGrippe

It is quite refreshing these days to read of a clearly defined treatment for Influenza or La Grippe. In an article in the "Lancet-Clinic," Dr. James Bell of New York City, says he is convinced that too much medication is both unnecessary and injurious.

When called to a case of La Grippe, the patient is usually seen when the fever is present, as the chill which occasionally ushers in the disease has generally passed away. Dr. Bell then orders that the bowels be opened freely with salts, citrate of magnesia or other laxative. For the high fever, severe headache, pain and general soreness, one Anti-kamnia Tablet every two hours is quickly followed by complete relief.

A Remedy for Pain

"The efficiency of any drug," says Dr. C. P. Robbins, "is known to us by the results we obtain from its use. One of the principal symptoms of all diseases is pain, and this is what the patient most often applies to us for, i. e. something to relieve his pain. If we can arrest this promptly, the patient is most liable to trust in us for the other remedies which will effect a permanent cure. One remedy which I have used largely in my practice is Anti-kamnia Tablets. Many and varied are their uses. I have put them to the test on many occasions, and have never been disappointed. I found them especially valuable for headaches of malarial origin, where quinine was being taken. They appear to prevent the bad after-effects of the quinine. Anti-kamnia Tablets are also excellent for the headaches from improper digestion; also for headaches of a neuralgic origin, and especially for women subject to pains at certain times. One or two Anti-kamnia Tablets every two or three hours give prompt relief."

Acute Rheumatism

In the hands of one observer we find that a certain drug has been used with the utmost satisfaction; others have found the same remedy to be a great disappointment. All physicians however agree that every method of treatment is aided by the administration of some remedy to relieve the pain and quiet the nervous system, and Dr. W. S. Schultze expresses the opinion of thousands of practitioners when he says that Anti-kamnia Tablets should be given preference over all other remedies for relief of the pain in all forms of rheumatism. They are also unsurpassed for headaches, neuralgia and all pain.

Indigestion-Dyspepsia

Are you distressed after eating? Do you have nausea when riding in the cars, or on the train or boat? Take one A-K Tablet and get relief.

When to Take Anti-Kamnia Tablets

As a Pain Reliever—In headache, migraine, coryza, la grippe and its after-effects.

As an Anodyne or Sedative—In indigestion, gastralgia, dyspepsia, hysteria, insomnia, car-sickness, sea-sickness, worry and sight-seer's fatigue.

As an Antipyretic—In intermittent, puerperal and malarial fevers, bronchitis, pleurisy, etc.

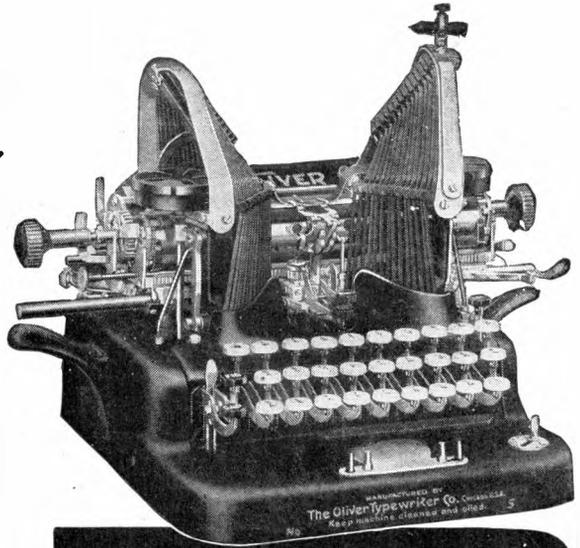
As an Anti-Neuralgic—In acute or chronic neuralgia, facial neuralgia, earache, toothache and pains of sciatica.

As an Anti-Rheumatic—For the pain in acute or chronic rheumatism and gout.

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