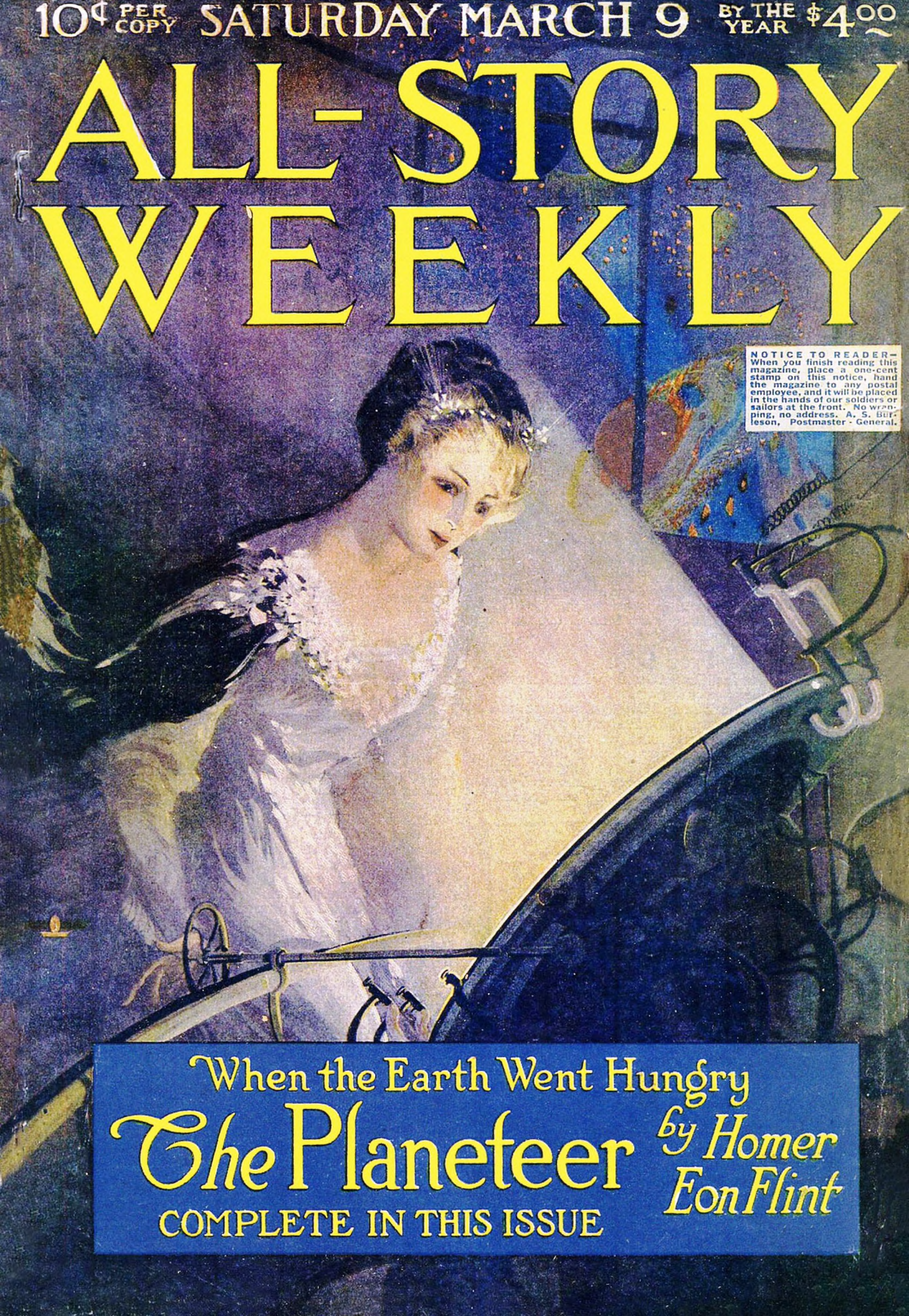
10¢ PER COPY SATURDAY MARCH 9 BY THE YEAR $4.00

ALL-STORY WEEKLY



NOTICE TO READER—When you finish reading this magazine, place a one-cent stamp on this notice, hand the magazine to any postal employee, and it will be placed in the hands of our soldiers or sailors at the front. No wrapping, no address. A. S. Burleson, Postmaster-General.

When the Earth Went Hungry

The Planeteer

by Homer Eon Flint

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

Missing Page

Inside front cover


GLUCK


MELBA


CARUSO


GALLI-CURCI


FARRAR


McCORMACK


PADEREWSKI


SCHUMANN-HEINK


HOMER


DE LUCA


MARTINELLI


ELMAN


JASCHA HEIFETZ


SOUSA


HERBERT

Their Genius made them great~ The Victrola makes them immortal

The poet and the composer endure on the printed page, the painter on his eloquent canvas. The achievements of the statesman and the scientist remain as lasting monuments of their skill. But what of the famous singer, the actor who has endeared himself to thousands, the beloved artist whose magic bow, like the lute of Orpheus, has swayed and charmed the multitude? Is their divine fire to be forever quenched? Is their voice of gold to be forever silenced?

Before the Victrola, this was the tragic fact. Now great voices need never die, great music need never perish.

Mankind loves to crown a Genius. The artists whose portraits appear on this page have won the applause and affection of the public for the beauty, the comfort, the entertainment, and the uplift of their matchless art, as expressed upon the stage and to that far vaster, world-wide audience who knows them by their Victor Records. As long as there are ears to hear, their Victor Records will preserve their living, breathing emotions, their infectious laughter, the exquisite, tremulous notes of their inspired instruments. Their art cannot die.

Victor Talking Machine Co., Camden, N. J., U. S. A.

Berliner Gramophone Co., Montreal, Canadian Distributors

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXXXI NUMBER 4

CONTENTS FOR MARCH 9, 1918

ONE NOVELETTE

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

SIX SHORT STORIES

VERSE

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

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

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

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

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

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

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines

Line Rate

Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $4.00 Less 3% cash discount.
THE ARGOSY COMB'N The Argosy . . . All-Story Weekly	1.50	
Railroad Man's Magazine	1.00	

April 6th Argosy Combination Forms Close March 11th.

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

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

$50 A WEEK UP. ALL THE FREE CLOTHES YOU WANT TO WEAR simply to advertise us. Write today for self measuring blanks, style charts, big book of samples, etc. Send no money. A postal card brings all. We pay expressage on everything. American Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 1501, Chicago.

WANTED—RELIABLE MEN AND WOMEN EVERYWHERE to sell Original Egg-Sub and appoint sub-agents. Guaranteed take place of eggs in baking and cooking. **8c dozen.** Big Profit. Original Products Co., 58 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: BIG HIT: OUR 5 PIECE ALUMINUM SET IS ALL THE RAGE. Cheaper than Enamel Ware. Sells like wildfire. Guaranteed Twenty Years. Retail value $5.00. You sell to housewives for only $1.98. Biggest seller of the age; nine sure sales out of every ten shown. Others cleaning up $10.00 to $20.00 a day. Answer this quick to secure your territory. Div. DX, 5, American Aluminum Mfg. Co., Lemont, Ill.

Men And Women Agents, $20.00 To $60.00 Weekly selling "Fletcher's Egg Conserve." Takes place of eggs, reduces cost to 8 1-3 cents per dozen. Free particulars, send 10c for package. M. B. Fletcher Production Co., 313 S. Clinton, Chicago.

AGENTS, CREW WORKERS AND DEMONSTRATORS. We have the biggest profit making line of Household Specialties ever offered. Every article a necessity. Write for samples and prices. Ho-Ro-Co, 101 Locust Street, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS WANTED—Agents Make 500 Per Cent Profit selling our Auto Monograms and Initials, Window Sign Letters, Changeable Signs, and Show Cards. 1000 Varieties. Enormous Demand. Sullivan Co., 1125 Van Buren Street, Chicago, Ill.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, Furnishing Everything: men and women. $30.00 to $200.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories," home or small room anywhere. No canvassing. Opportunity lifetime. Booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

WAR HAS CALLED MANY OF OUR AGENTS To The Front. Must replace them, also need few new ones. Products on market eight years; sell fast; repeat. War increases demand. Free samples, etc. Alfalfa, 840 Northwestern Building, Chicago.

HELP WANTED

A WAR JOB FOR YOU! Civil Service needs thousands. Men, women. Fine salaries; paid vacations; promotions. No "pull" needed. Free information, money back guarantee, and special offer to citizens over 18. Ask for book "QX," and name position wanted. Washington Civil Service School, 2001 Marden Building, Washington, D. C.

OF INTEREST TO WOMEN

LADIES—FASCINATING HOME BUSINESS TINTING POSTCARDS. Pictures, etc., spare time for profit. $5 on 100; no canvassing; samples 10c (stamps). Particulars free. Artint, 651E, 91 Meserole Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

STAMPS AND RARE COINS

WILL PAY $2.00 FOR 1904 DOLLAR, PROOF; 10 cents for 1912 nickels, S. Mint; $100.00 for dime 1894, S. Mint. We want thousands of coins. We offer up to $1,000.00 for certain dates. Send 4 cents now for our large Illustrated Coin Circular. Numismatic Bank, Dept. B, Fort Worth, Texas.

REAL ESTATE—FARM LANDS

MICHIGAN

OUR HARDWOOD LAND IN MICHIGAN MAKES YOU INDEPENDENT. 10, 20, 40, 80 acres; $15 to $30 per acre. Grains, stock, poultry or fruit. Down payment small; balance easy monthly payments. Big booklet free. Swigart Land Co., Y1245 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS THAT PROTECT AND PAY. ADVICE AND BOOKS FREE. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Send sketch or model for search. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

INVENT SOMETHING. YOUR IDEAS MAY BRING WEALTH. Send Postal for Free book. Tells what to invent and how to obtain a patent through our credit system. Talbert & Talbert, 4735 Talbert Building, 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.

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., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENT YOUR IDEAS. BOOKS, "HOW TO OBTAIN A PATENT," AND "WHAT TO INVENT," sent free. Send rough sketch for free report regarding patentability. Manufacturers constantly writing us for patents. Patents advertised for sale free. Established twenty years. Address Chandlee & Chandlee, Patent Attorneys, 407 7th Street, Washington, D. C.

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, The Argosy Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

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

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

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

STIRRING FICTION, WHOLESOME FUN, FASCINATING FACTS

Railroad Man's Magazine

Reading that reflects the romance, adventure and humor of life on the rail—all seasoned with the sturdy Americanism of this great industry.

Get a copy to-day—You will like it

All news-stands—Ten cents

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY

280 Broadway, New York

Learn
HIGHER ACCOUNTING!

The Profession That Pays Big Incomes

Do you know that accountancy has developed into a big, dignified and well paid profession? There are certified public accountants whose incomes are $10,000 to $25,000 a year. The United States Steel Corporation paid one accounting firm $250,000 for installing its cost accounting systems.

Never before have there been so many splendid opportunities for trained accountants—men whose training combines a knowledge of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Organization, Management and Finance. Few professions offer better opportunities to young men of ambition and intelligence. The tremendous business growth of this country has created a rich field for the expert. There are only 2,000 Certified Public Accountants to do the work of the half million concerns needing their services. The expert accountant is also needed today in every big executive organization.

Knowledge of Bookkeeping Unnecessary To Begin

We will give you whatever training, instruction or review on the subject of bookkeeping you may personally need—and without any extra expense to you. Our big, free book on the accountancy profession fully explains how we train you from the ground up, according to your individual needs, from the simplest bookkeeping principles to the most advanced accounting problems. All text material supplied in the course has been especially prepared in clear, easy-to-understand language, so you can readily master the principles by home-study.

Small Cost—Easy Terms

Write today and learn how our easy-payment plan places this splendid course of training within the reach of every ambitious person who possesses a real desire for personal advancement and the kind of organized "brain power" that commands big rewards in business everywhere. Mail the coupon now and get our free book which fully describes our expert training course and tells all about our Money-Back Guarantee, C. P. A. examinations, state regulations, salaries, and incomes and how you can qualify for a high-grade accounting position without interference with your present job. If you want to enter an uncrowded field that offers trained men a real opportunity for worth while advancement, send in the coupon and find out what we have done for others and can do for you.

LaSalle Extension University,
"The World's Greatest Extension University"
Dept. 332-H
Chicago, Ill.

Take Your First Step to Success —Send This Coupon

Train By Mail

Under the Direction of These Prominent Accountants

FACULTY

(Partial List)

William B. Castenholz, A. M., C. P. A.
Member American Institute of Accounts; Director Dept. of H. A. Former Comptroller and Instructor in Accountancy, University of Illinois; formerly Resident Manager Anderson, DeLang & Co. Certified Public Accountants.

William Arthur Chase, L. L. M., C. P. A.
Member, American Institute of Accounts; former Secretary, Illinois State Board of Examiners in Accountancy.

Andrew J. Quigley, C. P. A.
Member Am. Inst. of Accounts: Ex Chairman of Washington State Board of Accountancy.

John K. Laird, C. P. A.
Member, Am. Inst. of Accounts; Resident Mgr., Scovell, Wellington & Co., Certified Public Accountants, Chicago, Ill.

LECTURE WRITERS

(Partial List)

DeWitt C. Eggleston, C. P. A.
Department of Finance, New York

Frank C. Webner, C. P. A.
Specialist in Cost Accounting; former manager, J. Lee Nicholson & Co. Industrial Traffic Engineers Chicago, New York and Milwaukee

Walter C. Wright, C. P. A.
President, Audit Company, of Los Angeles, Inc.

The complete LaSalle organization consists of more than 300 business experts, professional men text writers, instructors and assistants, including recognized authorities in all departments.

Mail Coupon Today

LaSALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY,
"The World's Greatest Extension University"
Dept. 332-H **Chicago, Ill.**

Without cost or obligation on my part, please send me your book of "Accountancy Facts" and particulars regarding your Home-Study Course of Training in Higher Accountancy. Also a copy of your valuable book for the ambitious, "Ten Years' Promotion In One."

Name .....

Address .....

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

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXXXI NUMBER 4

SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 1918

The Planeteer

by Homer Eon Flint

A "DIFFERENT" NOVELETTE

TO THE PEOPLE OF CONSERVE ISLAND, *Greeting:*

The Editors wish to congratulate you upon having decided to learn what the rest of the world is doing. We hope that this book will be of help, and have taken unusual pains with the following rather free translation. However, we do not intend to thereby reflect upon your ancestors' action in completely isolating themselves at the time of the Great Change; we wish merely to urge that you master the world's language as quickly as possible. It is now two hundred years since Universo replaced all others, including your "English."

Massachusetts City,
July 3, 427 N. E.

THE UNIVERSITY OF DEAD LANGUAGES,
No. 11, North America.

CHAPTER I.

DANGER!

ABOUT half a mile below us and soaring steadily up in our direction, a white triplane caught our attention with a display of the red and green "trouble" signal. I turned the controls over to Ray, and she spiraled down until we were within a few yards of the stranger. A man thrust his head from the nearest port-hole.

"Hello! Aren't you Forbes, of the commissary?"

"Yes," puzzled. "What's up?"

"Bad news from California. Just heard it. Take me aboard." At that instant I recognized John Babcock.

Three minutes later the world's most famous inventor climbed down his transfer ladder into my cabin. Ray glanced at him and nodded instantly; I wondered when he returned the salute, for I didn't know they were acquainted. But then he never did wait for formalities.

"What's the matter with your wireless?" Without pausing for an answer: "Had you been listening you'd have heard that an earthquake struck California shortly after thirteen o'clock, and the entire Sacramento Valley dropped below sea level! San Francisco Bay covers it now!"

NOTE: A charioteer is a chariot-driver.

Ray and I stared in momentary stupefaction. I thought—the heart of the State—thousands of people—millions. Then Ray caught her breath quickly. "Did any escape?" to Babcock. He shook his head mutely. She turned abruptly and fled into the other compartment, sobbing as she closed the door behind her.

But this is what I was thinking: Why had John Babcock stopped us to give us this news? The loss of life was probably staggering, but what did that mean to him? There must be something worse. I waited.

"The water is as far north as Redding. The fault-lines seem to be along the foothills on both sides. The station on Mount Shasta—"

A shout from outside took us to the window. His companion was called from the triplane. "Fresno reports three feet of water. It has stopped rising. No reports from south of there. That means the San Joaquin is safe."

I caught an exclamation of relief from the other room. Ray had heard.

John went on quietly. "You will change your course for New York?"

"Let us take your machine. We'll transfer my fuel to your tank and make better time."

He thoughtfully helped me with my luggage as I climbed up into the triplane. "How about Miss Abbott?" he smiled grimly after me. I had forgotten her for a moment. In the midst of my confusion he helped her up the ladder.

"You're a nice one to desert me like that," she declared indignantly. But I saw that she was scolding to hide her emotion; moreover, curiosity was getting the better of her. She could see that John was adjusting my plane's parachute, while the tank was rapidly emptying. In a moment she broke out.

"What's wrong, Bob? You aren't going to run for the flooded district, are you?" She had glanced at the compass. I waited until John was aboard before replying.

The three of us watched the trim little cruiser floating, automatically controlled, softly down to the Indian Ocean two miles below. "Ray, I must ask you not to judge too hastily when I say perhaps it is just as well that so many people were drowned this afternoon." I waited, not daring to look into her eyes. There was worse to tell.

John helped me out. "You see, Miss Abbott, the Sacramento Valley was something more than the headquarters of a big population. It is their occupation we have in mind."

"Their occupation!" repeated the girl wonderingly. "They are farmers, aren't they? I forget what is raised there."

"Wheat," I answered. A quick light came into Ray's eyes. "Two billion people use the wheat that is produced by a few million farmers. A tenth of the world's crop comes from there, and this catastrophe has struck at a very awkward time. Harvesting was to have begun next month."

Ray was grasping it now. "And you mean that the world needs this wheat very badly," she mused. Then she looked up sharply. "Just how badly?" she demanded. She did not see as yet that that land could never be used for wheat again. But I had to answer her. I turned to John.

"Babcock, how are we to make this situation clear to Miss Abbott? You know her education has been so largely musical. She wouldn't understand the usual technical terms."

John turned from the window. My plane was out of sight. He started the wireless and transmitted a warning to shipping below before answering my question. His round face was very serious.

"I suppose you know, Miss Abbott, the world is facing overpopulation. Last year's census was twelve billion. That is six times the accepted estimate at the beginning of the last war. Right, Forbes?"

"Close enough," I replied. "Needless to say, although the people have increased, the earth has remained the same size. A century ago there was plenty and to spare. To-day it is very different. Fact is, the past four centuries of unbroken peace have had exactly the bad effect that many predicted. Without wars to keep up the death-rate and with no industrial worries to hinder, most people have done little but to raise big families."

"I don't understand at all!" protested the girl. "Are you trying to tell me that

this alarming situation is due to the peacefulness of to-day, to the very qualities which we find so pleasant?"

"Yes and no," John hurried to explain. "No, because Forbes is wrong. According to actual figures, people do not raise such offensively large families. There is another reason for the big population. Are you really interested?"

Ray nodded quickly and John went on. "At the end of the last war, then, the various governments faced the problem of explaining to their peoples why they had fought and bled and starved for years. Lies could not fool them as in the past; the people of the Central Powers now saw that their governments were mere parasites, while the Allies finally realized that the 'democracy' for which they had struggled was no democracy at all; it was little more than 'each for himself and the devil take the hindmost.' They had won a victory for their democracy, but it left the poor poorer and the rich richer. In short, every nation became a republic at once."

John sighed, as though in longing for those strenuous times. "Well, the great change came soon after that. The war had shown everybody that if a government could conduct warfare better than individuals or corporations, perhaps it would also operate things more efficiently in times of peace. There was a great deal of experimenting, of course. They had to set a new standard of incentive."

"But what was gained by the great change?" the girl wanted to know.

The inventor hesitated helplessly, then asked: "Do you know what is the average income to-day, and what is the average work-day, in hours? What do you pay for sugar?"

Ray was nonplused. "Sugar is two cents now, I think. Nearly everybody works three hours a day. The average per diem is between eighteen and nineteen dollars, isn't it? But why?"

"Just this," returned John. "Before the change, four-fifths of the people were working long hours at very low pay. Eight hours and five dollars were considered excellent at a time when sugar was eight or nine cents a pound."

"Are you sure?" from Ray incredulously. She appealed to me, and I spoke up enthusiastically. This was more along my line.

"Efficiency, that's the answer. You've no idea how wasteful the world was before the change. They built two railroads where one was enough. Millions of people were engaged in advertising, legal business, and the police system, all of which became utterly unnecessary. Therefore these same people could work in really useful industries and thereby reduce labor for all."

"But that doesn't explain why we have so much more income now."

John answered this. "Because cooperation is far more productive than competition. We have no idle people, either poor or rich; no idle land, no idle machinery of any kind. Everything is being used to the best advantage. Is that clear?

"Well, in those days a man was continually pressed to make a living, continually tempted to shorten his days with a 'strenuous' life; whereas to-day our welfare is guaranteed for life. We work because we like to. Do you know what was the average lifetime before the change?"

I saw that Ray did not know, so answered: "Thirty-eight years."

"What!" she gasped in intense astonishment. "That—that's unbelievable. Are you sure?"

"Entirely. Men who lived to be over a hundred were a greater rarity than men of two hundred are to-day. Our average last year was eighty-four." But I hastened to add, "John shouldn't give economic conditions all the credit. Much of this longevity is due to Fulgrath's solvent."

"The treatment that keeps the arteries soft?" said Ray. "My great-grandfather uses it; he's a hundred and fifteen. And that's why the world is so densely populated!"

"Exactly," came from John. "You can't blame people for wanting to raise a few children, and for caring to live in this agreeable world as long as they feel young. At the same time, try as we may, we cannot make the earth produce enough to feed any more. And the spring crop of babies is as large as usual—half a billion."

Ray thought this over for a minute or two, looking down at Abyssinia as we passed at a height of three miles to avoid the Madagascar traffic. The people down there had probably heard of the wheat catastrophe. My bureau would be swamped with anxious inquiries. At length the girl turned to me, her face now very grave.

"You haven't answered my question, Bob. Just how badly off are we, anyway?"

I caught a grim glance from John and faced the girl squarely. "The world must go on short rations to-morrow."

CHAPTER II.

THE COLLISION.

A STEADY stream of tourists could be seen on the lower levels, following the course of the Nile to the Nyanzas. Shortly we were out over the dreary wastes of the desert; and I stood at a south port-hole and thought of the situation, revolving schemes in my mind until I was mentally weary. In reaction I turned to John's remarks on the great change.

What was the use, thought I bitterly. What had it all come to, this wonderful ideal in its realization? The world had made astonishing strides, only to stumble against its own heels. Starvation in the midst of plenty, merely because we were living according to the highest possible standards!

It occurred to me that before the change Ray Abbott and I could not have taken this little Melbourne-to-Cairo jaunt without arousing talk that would ruin the girl's reputation. But to-day, thanks to good mothers and earnest teachers, men are just as jealous of their chastity as women. A young couple can be trusted anywhere alone; society has long recognized that.

Of course, as John would point out, economic conditions do have some bearing here, too. The world is enjoying far greater ease and comfort; but instead of turning to sensuality we are using our time and money for higher pleasures than those of the body. Come to think of it, even before the change it was the poor, not the rich, who had big families.

There is improvement also in the standards of being a "gentleman." Formerly his pet ambition was to tell some heroic lie to save a woman's tender feelings. To-day he is expected to live his life for humanity; a good deal better than the old standard of living off the labor of others.

Again, I thought of the astonishing progress of invention since the agreement. This triplane was good for four hundred miles per hour, could be brought to a standstill in mid air, guided straight down to the ground without a jar, and rise straight up afterward. The early specimens in the museums could not exceed a hundred and fifty miles an hour, and had to start on the run on the ground. In landing they occasionally smashed the outfit and spoiled the aviator.

John would contend that these improvements are the result of improved conditions. Naturally, each adult being able to own one, the planes have been highly developed. Considering that the early models were so expensive that not a man in ten thousand owned one, no wonder they were inefficient.

But our engines are as far ahead of the old ones as they outclassed the ancient steam-engines. Our fuel is another marvel which was to be expected with the progress of so many years. I was not yet ready to admit that spectacular advances could ever equal the influence of steady improvement.

To me the great change is a very natural phenomenon, and a constant wonder that the ancients were so slow to look for it. It was such a simple step. Big money, as it was then called, was steadily outgrowing little money. It was only a question of time before the few great "trusts" would become one giant trust; people only needed to see that the difference between owning the trust and being owned *by* the trust was a matter of actually controlling the government instead of leaving the job to a few obliging party leaders.

As a result of it all, here were the three of us hurrying to New York to help solve the riddle which had come up. Ray Abbott, for several years a favorite photophone soprano and now busy with a class, all of which promise to do as well as she, was the younger. I was nearly forty and

John three years my junior; but Ray was not quite thirty, a graceful, vigorous girl just under six feet in height. Her features would be considered too large in a woman of ancient height; but the only real beauty in nature—the glow of perfect health—diffused her skin. Dark-blue eyes, widely separated by a slightly upturned, though perfectly straight, nose, reflected every thought that passed through her mind with the most fascinating changes of light.

I never could decide which I liked best, those eyes or her wonderful hair, a blond heap which seemed always struggling to burst its bounds and become a cloud. We were not engaged—although I certainly wished we were—or I'd have kissed that hair a hundred times a day.

She was wearing a simple one-piece aviation costume, rather striking as to color scheme. Aside from that I can't describe the gown. Ever since women gave up following "styles" altogether, and each adopted a design to become herself, it has been admittedly easy to distinguish individuals, but a discouraging task to analyze the decoration itself. I can only assure you that all of Ray's creations suited her physique perfectly.

Everybody knows how John looks. His round, cheerful face, with its great play of expression, varying from boyish innocence to intense shrewdness, is as familiar to each of us as our own. Any man who falls short of the six-foot-six standard of the day consoles himself by reflecting that Babcock is only six feet and, to be frank, inclined to the stout rather than the trim standard.

I have never ceased to marvel at his astonishing progress. Given a complete technical education, he swiftly developed a practical edition of his father's artistic temperament. The greatest inventor of the world's most inventive century, John gave me the impression, when I met him for the first time, of a boy just beginning to mature. How I saw him become great before my very eyes you may read as I go further.

Of myself, the less said the better. Rather above the average in height and below in weight, I am remarkable chiefly for an ascetic cast of countenance, inherited from a long line of such folks. In other times I would have been called an aristocrat; but the present situation found me where my overdeveloped talents for efficiency would naturally lead. I had already realized one ambition: I had become the head of the American division of the Commissary Bureau.

Our pilot was Harry Mapes, a youngster with a tremendous admiration for John, which had led to his being selected from among thousands to work with the inventor. His specialty was heat analysis; so he got the most out of our craft.

Before night fell we were above the Atlantic. In response to my message with John's outfit, an official fuel balloon was waiting for us at the Cape Verde Islands. We were continually interrupted by aerograms from the bureau, as well as from various officials, including the chairman himself. But even to him we replied that nothing could be done until after a conference in New York. We did not eat dinner until nearly midnight.

Afterward we sat in the rear cabin and kept a studied silence. John was poking a small prism glass toward the Milky Way; and Ray idly kept tab on the purple lights of the mail planes on the next level, comparing their flights with the schedule. I remember she broke into my thoughts with some mention that "the antarctic plane is ten minutes late," and I was just getting my mind to working again when John gave an astonished exclamation.

"Look at Saturn!" he was saying, and thrust his glass into my hands. Next second Ray had another, and John was showing us where to look. I expected, of course, to see the famous rings of the great planet, but was astounded to observe a tremendous yellowish-white cloud behind the familiar disk. The rings were greatly distorted, and even as I watched, the strange cloud grew in size and the rings began to break up.

Ray was speaking excitedly. "What can it be, John? Did you just notice it?"

"It happened within the past half-hour, I am sure," he declared. "I saw nothing of it earlier. Can't be that the old fellow has burst!"

The truth had occurred to me as he spoke. There could be only one adequate cause for

such a catastrophe. "We are seeing something big, comrades; the biggest event since our moon was formed. Saturn has collided with a dark star."

We little dreamed what far-reaching effects this phenomenon was destined to produce.

CHAPTER III.

ON SHORT RATIONS.

IT turned out that I was not quite right. Before we reached New York the observatories announced that the collision was due to a slightly luminous star which had been under observation for two or three hours before the event. Apparently it was one of those countless irresponsibles of space which are continually falling into the sun's influence. This one, which might be termed a planetoid, had drawn the one chance in billions and taken a slap at our distant and unobtrusive neighbor.

Within a few hours Saturn was enveloped by an incandescent cloud, five or six times his former size. Clearly the wandering blunderer must have had a much greater velocity than the planet, to produce such terrific results; but it was not until several days later that the astronomers learned that the planetoid was a double one, a "binary," traveling as fast as a comet. Striking earth's big brother squarely on the right cheek, the impact of one of the two stars had turned the planet into white-hot gas and almost brought him to a stop. The other half of the binary was continuing sunward, unchecked.

After the excitement had died down, we made ourselves as comfortable as possible in our chairs and dozed until dawn. Once we slowed down alongside a relay plane, bringing another pilot to relieve Harry and John. Ordinarily, I would have driven, but I needed to be fresh for the conference.

By seven-thirty, the Delaware coast coming into view, we finished a rather pleasant breakfast and watched our pilot gingerly feel his way down through the traffic. Even with the best of regulations, it is a heroic task to come down from the high-speed levels in the vicinity of New York. We should have descended a hundred miles back but for our haste. Bad news seems to draw planes as efficiently as a celebration.

You will appreciate that the California wheat disaster was somewhat too delicate a matter to be handled in the usual way over the photophone. That system is excellent for general affairs, such as elections; but in a case which might require quick and drastic treatment, with explanations later, nothing but a closed conference would do. It was held in the south wing of the central chambers, and only the chairman, the council, the chiefs of the various bureaus, and my eight directors were present.

Not waiting to even state the problem, the chairman informally urged me to suggest a remedy. I simply pointed out what you already know, that with every available inch of land put to the best possible use, the world was nevertheless in dire need of the wheat which had been lost. I said that perhaps the people could be induced to relinquish land now used for other purposes, and the surest way to make everybody see how serious the matter stood, would be to cut down the distribution of flour. This, I argued, would also provide a margin in case of accident to any other harvest.

The chief of transportation wanted to know if his department could do anything to reduce the pressure. I assured him that he was handling his end perfectly. The Asiatic chief of my bureau said that all precaution was being taken to prevent accidents within his field; and for a few minutes silence ruled.

It was broken by the judiciary chief. His great age made him a compelling figure as he paused for a moment, tall and erect, before speaking.

"There is nothing in the regulations to prevent the step which Comrade Forbes recommends," he stated in his booming, resonant bass. "But my judgment is that the people will criticise the administration. Such a restrictive measure is not in accord with current ideals. It flavors of antiquity."

But the Italian chairman rose to my support. "On the other hand, your honor," he declared, "we have a double responsibility. We must not only prevent any drain on our supplies, but we must firmly impress every

one with the necessity for a radical change of some sort."

Others indicated their approval, and a vote was taken; and so in secret session we acted in what we believed to be the best interests of all when we ordered the now famous retrenchment of the year of the new era, 410.

Of the public attitude toward the action, but little needs be told now. For the first few hours after the announcement the phone wires were kept hot with indignation meetings; but the only actual intimation of anger came from four or five widely separated spots in Africa and Asia, where folks had grown to hope that famines were no more. But by the next day all trouble had blown over, and we knew that the world would wait patiently to hear our next proposal.

In the mean while I was busy receiving suggestions from thousands of sources. My bureau gave them the closest attention; but of the many remedies proposed, few were worth considering at all, and these had already been discarded by us after careful investigation. I concluded that, to use a phrase which was very popular with an ancestor of mine, it was "up to me to make good."

One afternoon Ray called in person to sympathize and to advise, after a glance at my face, that I take some mysterious treatment for the nerves. I obediently followed her to take to the lake, where I found she had brought an antique rowboat, no doubt a copy of some museum relic. The ridiculous notion struck me at a weak place in my dignity, and I allowed her to row me out into the middle of the water, while my assistants stood on the bank and fumed.

Ray had the wonderful good sense to say nothing, and I lay back in my seat and nearly fell asleep, so quickly did the soothing motion of the boat take effect. And then, in one of those semiconscious moments of inspiration, the big idea came to me. Not full-fledged like the melody of a song, but the basic notion of a remedy for the threatened disaster.

Ray again showed a powerful sense of fitness by controlling her curiosity as I excitedly grabbed the oars. I hurried out of the boat, intent on the scheme in mind, and rushed away to my laboratory without another glance at the poor girl. It was not until the next day that I recalled this, and at once got Ray over the phone.

The photophone was not as handy, of course, as the portable visiphone which we now use. One stepped into a small booth, and, facing the mosaic mirror which filled one side of the room, adjusted the calling dials on the right wall. As soon as the party answered the call, one immediately saw a full-length reflection of the interior of the other booth, complete in natural colors, lighting and all; so that it was much the same as a face-to-face conversation. A similar mirror on the left made it possible for three parties to talk at once. Of course there were more elaborate booths for official business.

One talked in his natural tones, there being no need to place receiver to ear or to keep near a mouthpiece. The diaphragms were conveniently located at the right. Conversation was distinct and of natural strength; so that there was all the value of a personal visit, minus only the actual bodies themselves.

By this time Ray had returned to her home in California and was at work with her pupils. She would not let me apologize. "I was too gratified to be offended," she smiled; "I knew my treatment had worked." There was a peculiar tremor in her voice which I often catch in my mother's, a kind of solicitous nervousness which always seems to come from a full heart. It encouraged me greatly; I made up my mind to propose at the first opportunity.

But during the next few months I was exceedingly busy with the working out of my idea. I judged that I owed first allegiance to my office; personal affairs must wait. Besides, there were many devices to be tested in the most thorough manner imaginable. My scheme was to solve a great problem; it should be worked out with appropriate care.

Through it all I kept my own counsel. I pledged my assistants to secrecy, and am sure that no outsiders learned of my plan. Perhaps I was wrong here; we might have

made quicker progress with more advice. But I reasoned that, since we had displeased the people in secret, we should remedy matters in like fashion.

During this time I heard little of John Babcock, knowing vaguely that he was at work in his Venezuela laboratories, perfecting several inventions. But I was not surprised when the photophone director one day announced that the inventor wished to "acquaint the people with a bit of good news." John was always behaving unconventionally; besides, his remarkable success gave him the photophone wires whenever he wished. People liked Johnnie, and admired and respected him as well. I stepped into my booth knowing that it would be well worth while.

John's booth was evidently right in his workshop, for he had left his door open and part of his apparatus was in sight. He was dressed in full-length overalls, which at that moment were badly soiled. But for that matter, his face and hands also indicated that in his eagerness he had not stopped to clean up. His haggard face showed that he had probably worked for days without rest.

"I've found it, folks!" he jubilated. (I dare say half the waking population was listening to him as he talked.) "Don't worry about food. There will be plenty for all and to spare. Take my word for it —I can't go into details now—bound to work out all right! Gee, but I'm glad!" And the boy, as he now appeared, grinned happily and dodged out of the booth, to return in an instant with a curious cone-shaped object, of some aluminum alloy; apparently a model of some kind, small enough to be held in the hands.

"This is what 'll do it!" he shouted at the door of his booth. "Don't ask me how—I'll give you the particulars as soon as it's all worked out. By-by!" And he rang off, leaving a very puzzled world to wonder what he meant, and to smile to itself and say: "Wasn't it just like Johnnie?"

For my own part, I had no doubt as to his sincerity. I also believed that he would accomplish what he promised to do, for his record was so far unbroken. The only possibility of failure was some flaw in materials for which he could not make allowance. I was decidedly relieved by his announcement; but of course did not let up in my own work. The problem was serious enough for the greatest of effort.

I merely renewed my attention to every detail. There would be no flaw in *my* work. And meanwhile people made little objection to two-thirds of a loaf.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOUBLE PROPOSAL.

AT intervals the observatories reported on the progress of Saturn, the one-time planet whose collision with a double star had turned it into a sun, just like old Sol on a very small scale. The big wanderer was to be seen every night, and his increasing size caused us some alarm. But the astronomers assured us that the course he was taking was far from our vicinity.

They figured that this new sun would seek a new path very near that of Jupiter. In fact, even to the naked eye Saturn was rapidly approaching the round ball of his nearest neighbor. Each night a decidedly perceptible change in position could be noted, and before long the two great bodies were separated by proportionately the same distance as existed between earth and moon.

So we really anticipated the announcement that Jupiter and the new sun had formed a combination. Held by mutual gravitation, they formed a couplet, revolving around one another like the ends of a dumb-bell with an invisible handle. It was a queer sight. One night Saturn would be visible on Jupiter's right; the next, behind him; but of course both planets were mutually disturbed. Jupiter danced just as much as his flaming companion.

I had several conversations with Ray via phone, but still refrained from visiting her. The result was, in time, an uneasy feeling which soon amounted to an obsession. I must call on Ray and learn my fate. Things could not go on like this much longer. I was hopelessly in love; un-

certainty did not improve matters one bit. So, when the Christmas holidays gave me me an excuse to close my desk, I called up Ray and asked if I might come for a day or two. She was far from surprised. "I was almost sure you would call. What's your great scheme in leaving me alone all this time? Trying to make the heart fonder with a dose of absence?"

Now, I was entirely accustomed to the prevailing frankness of women, but somehow I fancied an undertone in what she said that made my heart leap. Could it be? I wondered, dizzily. And then she calmly remarked: "Johnnie Babcock is coming, too. We'll have a chance to renew our peculiar acquaintance."

I stepped out of the booth with an assortment of feelings which would be hard to classify. I had not thought of Johnnie! And yet, when I put my memory to it, I recalled that he scarcely took his eyes off the girl all the while we were in his plane.

Not that he stared, but his glance kept coming back to her as a bird, just learning to fly, periodically returns to the nest.

I felt somewhat like an ancestor of mine who had half his fortune in one "bank." The bank failed. It spoiled his faith in banks and he invested what was left in government bonds. Well, thought I, a faith like mine—and I had never considered any other girl — ought to be invested where it would be appreciated. I would try my very best to interest Ray in my security.

The day after Christmas found me flying to the Yosemite, where Ray's home and studio were located. There is no denying the advantage of quick transit through the air. One's work is located at home, unless one is engaged in manufactures. There is but little loss of time in the system; yet I often wish we could have preserved one of our great business cities in its entirety. For instance, Broadway was once a brilliant thoroughfare, noted throughout the world for its bustle and extravagance. Now, its quiet, factory-lined course offers a marked contrast.

I reached the place ahead of John, who had lost some time getting fuel en route. So, although Ray assigned me to the choicest room, I could not take much credit for that. When John arrived, it was twenty-one o'clock, and both he and I were eager for bed. Nothing of consequence was said during the little meal our friend had ready for us; and I made up my mind before I fell asleep to make some headway with my suit the next day.

John and I ate breakfast alone, Ray having gone out, said her folks, to test the snow. We wandered into the empty studio and amused ourselves on some of the instruments. In a few days the place would be alive with returned pupils, making the rooms ring with the voices Ray was training. The girls came from all parts of the globe.

Ray came in shortly to suggest a good old-fashioned snow-shoe trip. Her house being located on a knoll on the plain above Yosemite Falls, we quickly made our way down to the brink, where we watched the famous cataract plunging from its icy bed, and wished we could stay until a big storm came up. Ray glanced at the sky and judged that our wish might come true.

After a while we started back up the stream, pausing at a score of points to admire the various villas along the route. It seems incredible that our forefathers could have overlooked this beautiful home spot; but of course it is the final perfection of our aeroplanes which makes it possible for folks to live where the air is pure and God's inspiring beauty right at hand. Today we take it all as a matter of course.

We selected an eastern branch of the creek and soon reached higher ground. From here we could overlook a portion of the wonderful cañon itself, catching sight of a solitary pedestrian making his way over the otherwise deserted road. By this time we were getting hungry; and John and I spread out the contents of a lunch-case which we had carried by turns.

We were in a small hollow on the lower edge of a group of dwarf firs, sheltered from a wind which was becoming stronger every minute. But the warm food took off the chill, and soon we were in a talkative mood.

"Last year at this time I would have prophesied almost anything but this com-

bination just now," I said at last. "Remember how we got acquainted, John?"

"Ridiculous interrogation," he came back. "My life has taken a fresh start since then." Unconsciously his head turned so that he could see Ray. And suddenly I caught the girl looking at me, whereupon she burst into a rollicking laugh. I am no good at taking a joke, as a rule; but I saw that my face had given me away. The cat was out of the bag; I laughed with her.

"Oh, what's the use of ignoring the facts?" I exclaimed. "John, you're head over heels in love with Ray, and so am I. Draw, and defend yourself!" And I involuntarily smiled at him. The likable boy!

Ray was in no wise disturbed; her face showed actual relief. As for Johnnie, he was startled for an instant; then grinned as usual, reached for a sandwich, and after a dark pretense of poisoning it from an imaginary vial, guilelessly handed it to me.

"When shall we be married, Ray?" he inquired nonchalantly, ignoring me. We all tittered nervously, and I could see what an effort it cost him. As for myself, I could not control the violent beating of my heart, and I know my face grew pale and tense as I listened for Ray's answer.

The girl was looking out over the snow, smiling for a moment and then becoming very serious and grave. But when she spoke, it was lightly. "If it would settle matters, I'd marry you both," she declared; "although that would be contrary to—to everything. Fact is, I'm not decided at all. I want to marry, and it would be one of you two; but which one, I wish somebody else would decide for me."

"I'm a champion decider," I proclaimed. But she shook her head. "You're prejudiced. I could tell almost in advance which way you'd decide. No, it's for me to do, of course. I feel something like the girl in the story, who put off her suitors so long that at last each of them got tired waiting and married another girl. I'm afraid not to decide, for fear I get left."

John broke in eagerly: "I'll give you an option on the next forty years." But Ray turned him down. "You'd want me to deposit a kiss for that option," and she blushed slightly. Then she was silent for a good many minutes.

When she spoke again: "Bob, I've known you almost all my life. If there's anything in a good inheritance, you've got it. You are a decided success in your work, and a big credit to the Commonwealth. But the very steadiness of your development has handicapped you; it is not easy for you to make any great advance. Your reserve and dignity, while conserving a lot of power, also make you less approachable than John.

"I've known him only since last summer, yet I like him immensely." And she colored a little, yet smiled easily and went on: "Oh, hundreds of girls would say the same. You are easy to like. You are so frank and boyish—full of life and energy. I've often wondered that some forward girl didn't land you when you were very young." This rattled Johnnie a bit, but Ray kept right on:

"At the same time, you also are successful. You're even more prominent in your field than Bob, but of course his work is the more indispensable. I've been over this ground again and again, and I can't decide. I know all too well that it makes me appear very egotistical to be picking and choosing in this fashion; but a girl ought to do the best she can, not because of her own pride, but because of what she wants to do for her children." And when she said this, she looked us straight in the eyes and did not blush.

We were silent for a while, and I had a vivid picture of a similar situation in ancient times. Impossible! you would declare, were you living four hundred years ago; impossible for a girl to honorably love more than one man. You would talk of the "great passion" and pronounce Ray immoral. But to-day we know that passion is largely a matter of propinquity. Reason is dominant.

What I said was: "John Babcock, from now henceforth we are bitter, bitter enemies." I scowled at him darkly; he glared at me ferociously. I continued: "Ray is going to marry the one of us who makes the greatest effort within — shall we say,

two or three years?" She looked at John inquiringly, and he nodded vigorously.

"Then it's time I told you something new. I also have a surprise coming soon." And they looked at me with fresh interest. "We won't beg Johnnie to divulge his discovery until he gets good and ready; although it's barely possible that we have the very same idea. You propose to remedy the food shortage? So do I."

Ray jumped in delight. "Well, now we *have* got a 'working basis.' I'm to marry the one who does the most to—to prevent famine, am I?" She giggled in her excitement. "That's fair enough. My, but I'll be a proud wife!" Then she added: "And right now, a conceited soprano."

The first new flakes of snow put an abrupt end to further talk. We hurried back to the house, and there passed the evening quietly while the storm raged outside; then got a few hours' sleep and arose before dawn. We ate breakfast and were ready to start by the time it was light enough to fly through the snow.

Ray did not mention our problem, but silently watched us get into our coats. Then she went to the door with us; and there very simply kissed us, first John, then me, and saying nothing but her quaint Californian "*Adios, señors,*" she smiled confidently into our eyes and softly closed the door behind us.

We walked toward our machines. I was mighty sorry to go, and I looked at Johnnie. His face was a study. Suddenly he looked up, and held out his hand. "Good luck, Bob," he murmured; and I gripped his hand hard as I wished him the same. Never were rivals friendlier.

We started off nicely; and first, as planned, swept out over the falls and dropped down until we were opposite the water. There we held the machines stationary with our horizontal propellers while we watched the astonishing force of the up-valley wind as it blew the mighty cataract first to one side, then to the other. Then the storm divided the falls in half; and once, such was its power, it held back the entire flow for several seconds, damming up the water like an embankment. It was an exciting thing to watch this in mid air from a distance of a few yards, considering the danger of being blown into the falls.

But we volplaned safely down toward the east until we got a fresh start, and soon crossed the crest of the great mountains. Here John turned to the south, while I kept on east; and the last I saw of him for the time was a fluttering handkerchief from a window.

I reached my side of the continent in ten hours.

CHAPTER V.

GETTING OFF THE EARTH.

THE new understanding filled me with a determination to not only succeed, but also to do it soon. I put in from fourteen to sixteen hours at my work. Most of my routine affairs were handled by assistants; the great scheme filled my mind. It had passed the experimental stage, and I was now at work on the estimate of its huge cost. It was an immense task.

John must have been similarly inspired, for in about a month it was announced that he would make a preliminary report. It was easy to understand how, with so many friends to place their incomes at his disposal, he was able to rush his plans to completion. In fact, his speed disappointed me. How could he have accomplished so great a thing in so short a time?

At the appointed hour I, like most of the public, was in my booth. The connection was made on schedule, and showed Babcock on the floor of his laboratory. He was wearing an ordinary aviation suit. Harry Mapes and several assistants were in the background.

Johnnie came right to the point. "First I am going to disappoint you by admitting that I am not yet ready to tell my big idea. But perhaps you'll be interested in this fact: in ten minutes we start for Mars, to see how they do it there."

He paused, well knowing that a thrill of surprise ran over the world as he made this astonishing statement. Then he went on, visibly controlling his excitement: "It's a comparatively simple matter. Do you remember Thauber's experiments with cen-

trifugal force, in 255? If you've forgotten, I'll explain briefly.

"Centrifugal force is in proportion to the square of the speed. For instance, if the earth rotated nineteen times a day instead of once, an object on the equator would have no weight. Its centrifugal force would balance the force of gravitation. Now, at ordinary speeds this force acts only within the limits of the object which is in motion, but Thauber proved that when a wheel of sufficent strength was revolved at extremely high speeds, centrifugal force went outside the rim of the wheel and actually repelled small articles dropped toward the wheel, several inches before they reached the rim.

"Well, I have merely adapted this principle on a large scale. All that was needed was a steel strong enough to stand the strain. Now we'll take a look at the apparatus."

At this signal the assistants opened the big door to the proving-grounds. It was the world's first glimpse of the Cone.

Imagine a gleaming metallic building with a diameter of almost exactly fifty yards, and each side the same. Standing on its base, then, it formed a perfect equilateral cone. Along its visible surface were placed a number of windows; and about three feet from the ground, directly opposite, a wide door. John paused for a minute while we took it in, then came close to the mirror and said:

"You remember that I've been working on a wireless photophone for years. That also is ready for use, and there are two booths inside the Cone. I'll connect you with the ground floor," and with that he threw a switch. Next instant I was looking at the inside of the great sky-car.

By the time my eyes became accustomed to the dimmer light, John had opened the broad door and entered from the yard, followed by Harry and two others. The inventor eyed us questioningly and asked: "Can you see and hear the same as usual?" You can imagine the chorus of "Ayes!" that came to him. Of course, the image in his mirror was a composite one; a characteristic portrait of the combined peoples of the earth.

But he was busy pointing out details. In the middle of the floor of the Cone was a gigantic machine of peculiar yet simple design. It consisted of three tremendous fly-wheels, each direct-connected to an electric motor. The lowest wheel was a horizontal one, set in a depression in the floor; while a massive framework supported the other two, both of which were then vertical. That is to say, these three wheels "pointed" in as many different directions. At the moment they were all revolving, silently save for the subdued hum of the motors themselves.

"The source of current," explained John, "is a compound battery of Burgess-Ames static cells. They are located in the upper part of the Cone. Any electrician can explain to you how we control the discharge from these cells, as well as the theory of their unlimited capacity. These have been charging for the past ten days from a fifty-thousand kilowatt generator, running continuously."

He pointed out the switches and other controlling devices located on the framework of one of the upright wheels. "The operation is, as you will see, quite simple. By varying the speed of these wheels we can produce any desired degree of centrifugal force in any desired direction. The speed is limited only by the ultimate strength of the material in the wheels. I used Kent's formula for the platina-steel, refined with nitrogen in a Ball furnace and heat-treated in the mercury vapor arc. I can count on a peripheral speed of one hundred and fifty thousand miles per hour, although a third of this is all I really need."

While the inventor was talking, Harry was operating the controllers on the opposite side of the big floor. The hum of one motor grew a little sharper, while the others seemed more subdued; and I saw that one of the vertical wheels was spinning much faster. The thing was dawning on me now.

"You see," explained Johnnie, "the vertical wheel is now developing a force which is so placed as to oppose the gravity of the earth beneath our feet. Before it spins any faster, I'll cross the floor." He ran past

the whizzing wheel, and as he did so I noticed that he leaned heavily toward it. Yet, so great was the invisible force already produced, he lost his balance and staggered against the wall of the Cone. The hum grew to a pronounced whine, and John quickly closed a small switch. Apparently this exhausted the air from the motor, for the whine instantly subsided into a mere murmur.

"And now, comrades," smiled the inventor in our direction, "if you see us appear to be a little anxious, kindly remember that we are about to do something that has never been done before. We are going to leave the atmosphere." As he spoke, he was moving the handle of a controller, while one of his friends went down a long line of switches, methodically closing them one by one. Johnnie eyed an indicator on the frame of the motor, and spoke again.

"Twenty-five thousand miles now—Comrades, let me introduce you to Harry Mapes, Theodore Parker, and H. E. Robertson. Harry is an expert gas analyst, Parker an electrical engineer, Robertson a mathematician.

"We four figured that you good people might try to deter us with well-meant objections. We have plenty of food, an immense quantity of compressed air in the upper compartment, plenty of reserve oxygen, and neutralizing apparatus to purify the air of carbon dioxid. The walls are double and separated by vacuum space, on the same principle as a hot-and-cold bottle. We aren't afraid of the interplanetary cold; anyhow, we have electric heaters. The Cone itself is made of the same material as the wheels, so that the centrifugal force cannot damage its construction.

"Wherever the force sends that wheel, the whole Cone must go, obviously enough—twenty-nine thousand. We are now considerably lighter than air and would float in it the same as a cork in water; but I have provided anchors on the under side of this floor to hold us fast to the earth. The idea is, to insure a fast start."

He was silent for a minute, and I could hear my heart pounding. Jove, what an adventure! Off on a jaunt which would make a circumnavigation of the globe look like a Sunday stroll! I envied the boy and his companions, envied their wonderful nerve—

"We'll not say good-by or even *Adios,*" smiled Johnnie. I knew whom the last word was intended for. "You can see just as well as though we were at home. Thirty-two thousand; ready, boys?" Each man had taken the safety-clasp off a large three-pole switch.

I judged that they would control electromagnets connected with the anchors. Johnnie turned to a window straight ahead of our mirror and opened its shutter. A flood of sunlight bathed the floor.

"All right, then; one-two-three, pull!" Each man gave a sharp jerk; the Cone twitched sharply, and I saw the ground receding through the window. I had a slight feeling of nausea, exactly as though an elevator had started too swiftly. The Cone was going at great speed. The four men were staggering with the effect. Harry had stumbled to his knees.

Johnnie managed to get to the switchboard. His voice was muffled and strained, but it did not hide his pride and triumph.

"I'll connect you with the booth on the grounds," he shouted, glancing toward us; and as he snapped a thumbpiece the view instantly changed to the solid earth again. It was a startling effect; I clung to the side of the booth to steady myself.

The new outlook was directly toward the laboratory. Slowly it panorammed to the zenith (operated by Harry's father, I afterward learned) until the blue sky filled the view. Then I caught sight of a round, black disk, rapidly diminishing in size. It was the base of the Cone, shooting away from Mother Earth.

A moment later it had faded to a tiny dim spot in the brilliant blue. Next second it was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

MEN ON THE MOON.

WHEN Johnnie restored the connection to the Cone, we saw that a railing had been put up to keep the voyagers away from the dangerous

force. Harry was distributing hot chocolate. They next opened several windows, and by means of levers panoramed our mirror to get the various views.

They were already beyond the atmosphere limits, and no details of the Venezuelan topography were distinguishable. The earth was covered with a haze: only the general outline of the northern coast and the deeper shade of the Caribbean could be made out. The Cone was now going incredibly fast.

Two peculiarities certainly should be recorded. The sunlight was intensely bright, disagreeably so; in fact, our friends had already fitted snow glasses to their eyes. Now I could see why the floor and walls of the Cone were colored black. Even then, enough light was reflected to damage the eyes of all who were watching from earth, had not Johnnie thrown a lever and thus swung a dark glass screen over our mirror, smilingly saying as he did so, "Didn't I tell you we had arranged for everything?"

The other oddity was the absolute blackness of the sky itself. All of the stars were visible, appearing much brighter than we had ever seen them before. Johnnie gave us a connection to the other mirror, near the top of the Cone, and we had a fine view of the Milky Way. If we had ever thought it contained millions of stars, now it seemed to have billions—all this difference because there was no atmosphere to hinder our sight; and this fact also accounted for the brilliance of the sun. It is hard to realize that air is not perfectly transparent; but it is merely less opaque than water, and otherwise much the same.

Johnnie was talking when he restored the connection to the other mirror. "There will be little to see for a couple of hours. Better go back to work, or to sleep, or whatever you are doing. I'll call you later." Our view immediately jumped back to the laboratory. Johnnie's father and brother were in the booth, having evidently been watching the mirror as we were. The younger man spoke: "We have the sender and receiver in an adjoining building. They are automatic and will respond to any call."

My first thought, on stepping from the booth, was of Ray. Without doubt she had witnessed this extraordinary adventure. What did she think now? Would this spectacular affair weigh heavily in John's favor? Every woman is supposed to admire this kind of courage; many of them would marry a man for this quality alone. I was decidedly down in the mouth.

And then she called me to the phone. "Discouraged?" she laughed, with her disconcerting way of reading my thoughts. "Don't worry, Bob; Johnnie has done a big thing and perhaps will do bigger; but I have any amount of confidence in you. Are you ready yet with your idea?"

"I can't show off for two or three months," I responded gloomily, although I must admit that her manner lifted my feelings several notches. Then I perked up a smile and added, "My hated rival has outstepped me. Re-venge!"

"That's the spirit! Now get busy and show us what you are made of." I took her at her word, ran to my desk and worked nine hours without a break.

In this way I missed Johnnie's next call, and so did not get to see the earth at full. They told me it was a wonderful yet disappointing sight. The immense globe filled nearly a third of the heavens with its luminous, decidedly curved surface. Fancy the moon brought down until she nearly filled the sky from one side to the other! But on the other hand, the details so familiar to any one who has studied a school globe were almost entirely lacking. The atmosphere is like a window curtain: the people inside can look out, but people outside cannot see in. Only the deep blue of the oceans and the tips of the highest mountains were clearly visible. The rest was yellowish-white, tinged with reds, browns, and greens.

When I did finally respond to one of Johnnie's calls, I saw that he and his friends had rigged up hand-rails along the switchboard and across the "safe" portion of floor. Moreover, the men were clinging to these rails almost continuously. Johnnie had already explained this, and so it took me a few moments to guess the reason.

Since cutting loose from the earth, the Cone and everything it contained were free from the effects of gravity. They no longer had weight, in the usual sense of the term; the Cone was now a little independent planet in itself. The rails were needed to keep the men from floating—yes, that's the right word—floating through the air toward the Cone's center of gravity.

There was a ladder leading from the floor to the ceiling above. One of the men appeared at the opening, and to my alarm jumped down without touching the rungs. But he did not fall—he gently sank through the air, and landed softly. Had he not caught the ladder he would have rebounded to the ceiling—

Johnnie and Parker were then at work on a calculation. In a moment they had finished, and began adjusting the controllers to correspond with their figures. John explained as they did so. "We are now at such a height that the moon, which you in the longitude of New York can see rising in the east, is on a level with the floor of the Cone. The centrifugal force in the vertical wheel is still acting against the earth's attraction, but the moon is pulling vigorously to the side. It is just behind your mirror."

He thought of the other mirror and quickly connected us.

I saw the moon as it had never appeared before. With no atmosphere between it and my eyes, its sharp features stood out like print. It was almost new, of course, the eastern side being very slightly illuminated. This was in accord with the well-known law that earth and moon show opposite phases.

Even as I watched, the moon's disk grew steadily larger. Johnnie was at my elbow, so to speak. "The horizontal wheel is barely in motion. I am letting the moon pull all it will. As soon as we get up enough speed I'll use that wheel as a brake. See?"

He explained that he would not stop the vertical wheel, but would allow it to turn slowly so that it might act as a gyroscope to counteract the tendency of the Cone to turn around the horizontal wheel.

And so from time to time I watched the growing size of the satellite, inspecting its well-known features with fresh interest. After a few days it appeared larger than in earth's most powerful instruments, the narrow line of sunlight on its eastern edge filling the entire width of our window. We appeared to be heading for the middle of this match, a spot just between Mare Crisium and the crater of Langrenus.

I saw that we—of course I mean "they"—would not land for a few hours; so went to bed after giving word to be called at six. The day had been voted a holiday, so probably every one on earth got a view of the event. The moon was now, at a guess, about ten miles away, and the edge of the Cone was still at right angles to the surface. I wondered how the inventor was going to get its base downward.

He pointed out the third of the great wheels, which thus far had taken no part in the operations. "I call that the steering-wheel," he explained. "You notice that its framework is like a gigantic set of gimbals, such as are used to support a mariner's compass. We can point that wheel in any direction, while it is not running; and as soon as it is started its gyroscopical force will keep it in place."

By means of levers they directed this wheel toward the further edge of the moon, and soon the rim was revolving swiftly. At the same time the other two wheels were slowed down. Watching through our window, we could see the bright crust move slowly out of sight; and then the black night of the universe took its place. We could not see what was happening underneath, and for a while I was very nervous. What if the steering-wheel could not stop the sky-car as it dropped?

But soon light appeared through the deadlight in the floor. Johnnie was watching progress, with every other man at a switch, ready to throw on more current if needed. But shortly the inventor saw that he was using too much power; the Cone was not dropping quickly enough, and they slowed the wheel a bit.

The light grew steadily brighter—of a sudden, I caught sight of the tip of a crater through the window—a mountain-top in the distance. Johnnie signaled for

a bit more power; and with his eyes glued to the deadlight, waited a moment and then signaled for power off. There was a shivering jolt, and next instant Johnnie snapped open every window-shutter. The Cone was flooded with light. It had landed on the moon!

CHAPTER VII.

—AND IN IT!

JOHNNIE turned toward the mirror and smiled easily, while the others began throwing off the power; and every one of them was grinning, and finally they all began to bow. Suddenly it struck me that everybody on earth was applauding as vigorously as I. The world was congratulating them.

"It will take several minutes for the wheels to stop. Recess!" and the inventor threw a switch. I put in the time wondering what would be found. Of course, the world's best telescopes, especially those of the compound-reflecting type, had brought the satellite very near. Any object the size of a man would have been seen long ago. But the actual material of which the moon was made—the secret of its puzzling lightness as compared with the earth, was now to be told. There were no sleepy scientists that night.

Johnnie was completing the connections for the other mirror when next we saw him. He had placed the device so as to fill one of the window openings.

I saw the great plain which stretches south toward Langrenus. I knew better than to expect any extraordinary sight, but was nevertheless disappointed. The utterly barren, featureless waste of desert that met my eyes was absolutely devoid of vegetation. Its surface was broken into irregular mounds and ridges of lava, but aside from this it might have been one of the gravelly wastes of southwestern America. The surface was scarcely worth looking at.

Soon we were back in the Cone. The men had brought down several cages from the "loft"; and now I saw, as I had expected to see, a number of pigeons and rabbits, together with a few chipmunks. Johnnie was at work in the vestibule of the big outer doors, adjusting the fastenings and levers. By simply closing the inner door of the vestibule he obtained an air-tight compartment about eight feet square. Into this he placed one each of the animals and closed the double glass door upon them.

Meanwhile the other mirror was so placed as to command a view of the interior. We were now to see whether there was enough air on the moon to support life. Johnnie cautioned us first. "If you're at all squeamish, don't watch this." Then he moved the levers in the walls which opened the outer door—

Well, I do not need to go into details. The poor beasts died, the first to be sacrificed to the advance of human science for two centuries. I was glad when we were switched to the other mirror. Johnnie was reading some instruments.

"Two hundred degrees below, centigrade," from the thermometer. "The barometer is away down at the bottom of the scale. It will not register negative pressures. There's no air at this particular spot; that's certain."

He stifled a yawn. "I see nothing to be gained by staying here any longer. We ought to go to bed for a while, however, before looking any further. But—just a moment." Shortly he had us looking out of an upper window.

We saw an immense reddish globe, several times the apparent size of the moon. For a moment I was puzzled, then gasped as I recognized the earth—I had a very weird sensation, such as a disembodied spirit might feel on gazing at the human shell which was once its home—we could make out no details whatever.

About nine hours later the call came again. There was now a big change in the appearance of things. Night had come on the moon—the fourteen-day night of intense cold, void even of twilight or dawn. The travelers were making preparations for departure; all the wheels were going, the adjustable one the faster. Shortly Johnnie gave the order to cast off. The anchors let go, and with a jerk the Cone flew off at an angle.

Using the other wheels as levers, Johnnie threw the Cone in a new direction. Watchers on earth, through scopes, saw it disappear around the eastern edge of the moon. As the inventor explained, "We all want to know what is on the other side. We'll go up high enough to see the whole of it."

The next time I looked, the mirror had been placed over a deadlight, looking straight down. The Cone was hovering over the center of the great disk, at a height of perhaps a hundred miles. The surface was brilliantly light, except for a strip of shadow on the western edge. The moon was, as seen from the earth, just approaching her first quarter—the most striking feature was its apparent flatness. There was much less of the characteristic globular appearance than on the other face.

I learned that the travelers had gotten a good profile view of the moon shortly before. "This bears out the theory, held by many astronomers," commented Johnnie, "that the moon, having always the same face turned toward the earth, is not a globe but more or less egg-shaped, with the sharp end earthward. If we accept the nebular hypothesis, then certainly the moon was at one time molten, and earth's gravitation could have had this effect—but look at the craters."

I most certainly was looking at them. This face of the moon was simply filled with craters. There were thousands of eruptions of various sizes on the side we knew so well, but here were five times as many. There was nothing else to be seen. No plains, no seas, no ridges such as distinguished the other side. This surface —have you ever seen a snap-shot of a pool of water in a heavy rainstorm? Like that, the rims of the craters looked as though gigantic raindrops had fallen on the moon, and splashed.

I watched at intervals of half an hour, as Johnnie purposely descended very slowly. They minutely examined every section of the surface, and soon were competent to declare that there was no sign of human existence, or even plant life. When within a mile of the ground, I watched with the keenest interest.

The Cone settled down within the great circle of a crater about a hundred and fifty miles in diameter. The rim rose to a height of perhaps ten miles, jagged and rocky, enclosing a central basin composed of lava-like formations. Great fissures ran everywhere; and a little to one side of the center was a pit, perhaps a quarter of a mile in its greatest diameter. From above it was perfectly black, indicating a great depth.

"We could learn nothing by landing among those fissures," remarked Johnnie to his friends. "I propose that we drop down that pit a little way and see what we can see. Are you game?"

Harry looked disgusted. "Of course, there's nothing at all game about flying around in space with a wild inventor; oh, no. Go as far as you like." The other two men snorted in agreement, and Johnnie steered for the pit.

The Cone sank smoothly into the center of the huge space. The sunlight was almost, but not quite, straight down; the light continued unabated. Johnnie held the pace slow, and yard by yard the Cone dropped silently into the moon—nobody spoke for several minutes, and the tension became severe. My nerves were on edge. It was an uncanny proceeding!

Suddenly, without any warning, the light went out. My mirror was absolutely black. I involuntarily shouted in dismay and horror—what could have happened?

Then came Johnnie's voice, a little strained but still matter-of-fact. "We passed into the shadow. I should have warned you." As he spoke he turned on the lights in the Cone; and a world breathed freely again.

They had stopped the Cone. Johnnie operated the steering-wheel enough to bring the car over to one wall and stopped it in mid-space at a distance of a couple of feet. Then, going into the vestibule, the inventor rigged up some queer apparatus, came out, and closed the inner door tightly. Then he opened the outer door, and operated several levers.

We could not see what he had done, but after he had closed the outer door he went into the vestibule and returned with a large pair of tongs grasping a big fragment

of crumbly rock—a portion of the very heart of the moon. Only Parker's presence of mind prevented Johnnie, who was strangely excited, from taking the specimen in his bare hands. Had he done so, his skin would have welded fast to the stone, cold as it was with the terrible cold of the universe.

Johnnie's hands fairly shook in his eagerness as he flipped the stopper from a small bottle. Carefully separating a tiny fragment from the stone, he allowed a drop from the bottle to fall upon it. Instantly the specimen disappeared! Johnnie and his friends began to sneeze and to cough violently; Harry rushed the big stone to the vestibule and closed the door upon it. When he returned, Johnnie was exclaiming exuberantly.

"I knew it! I knew it! That's why the moon was so light!—and my scheme will work!" He grabbed Harry by the shoulders and danced him around like a schoolboy. In a moment he thought of explaining.

"Don't worry about this gas; the neutralizers will take care of it—and listen, you on earth: I'm not going off at half-cock by telling you part of my plan before I'm sure of the whole thing. We've got to go to Mars first. Excuse me, please?"

CHAPTER VIII.

ON TO MARS.

THE Cone made a very auspicious start for our next planetary neighbor, first finding a level spot approximately in line with Mars and then, with the steering-wheel, laying a perfectly straight course. When the anchors were finally released the sky-car started from the moon at the highest safe velocity. At the same time the vertical wheel's speed was greatly increased, and shortly the Cone was flying at an unprecedented rate.

Johnnie reminded us that the communication apparatus required a great deal of power, all of which might be needed later; and so we heard from them only once daily for a few minutes at a time. On these occasions we learned little that was not already known of interplanetary space. The four men, when not reading or enjoying limited acrobatics, indulged in a great variety of games to kill time. By means of a simple receiving device they enjoyed the more important daily news as transmitted by a powerful machine operated at Babcock's plant.

One day Robertson came down from the loft carrying some peculiar instruments. Johnnie examined them curiously, explaining meanwhile that, in his hurry, he had merely asked a museum to send him four of the least ancient of their repeating rifles. I recalled an almost forgotten bit of history.

Firearms were once very common throughout the world. During the last war, the rank and file were armed with them, although most of the actual damage was done with large machines, called cannon, for throwing huge projectiles. It is astonishing how much ingenuity the ancients displayed in these devices for destroying life, and what little thought they gave to conserving it.

Clearly our friends could not make out the action of these weapons. Johnnie consulted some literature sent by the museum, but said, "The curator writes that the method of using these rifles is a lost art. All he knows is that the fuel for them will be found in this carton." Johnnie tore open the container and displayed some tarnished brass cylinders, each having a rounded plug at one end—evidently the ancient bullet.

"Can anybody tell me how to operate this thing?" he appealed to the world at large. "Here! Don't all speak at once. I don't want suggestions: does anybody *know?*"

There was not a single reply. Think of it! Twelve billions of people, and not one knew how to manipulate a specimen of the old world's most deadly hand weapon. As a comment on the efficacy of the great change in having removed the causes of the situations which called for force, nothing more needs be said.

But here was a problem, and Johnnie met it by gingerly fingering the weapon. To make it short, between them the travelers discovered the way to use the devices

without serious accident. However, one rifle did become accidentally discharged (I believe this is the correct word) but the bullet flew harmlessly across the room. That is, it started across, but was caught by the force and flung away at right angles to its path. From the great dent it made in the steel wall, it was believed to be quite powerful. They were very careful in handling the things.

Each time we saw and talked to them we were also shown the steadily growing disk of Mars. Of course this renewed everybody's study of the planet. Recent work with compound telephotoscopes had added immensely to our knowledge. The much-discussed canals, whose relationship to the changing seasons of Mars was once disputed, became as familiar to us as the rivers of America. The great cities, once called oases, were studied intently for fresh proof of a still-existent life. Our instruments brought us within fifty miles; there was little doubt that intelligent beings of some kind once lived there, and perhaps—

The new combination called by some "Jupiturn," which had formed when the now white-hot Saturn had come within Jupiter's influence, was also watched with great interest. It will be remembered that Saturn was actually falling toward the sun when it was attracted to and held by its big brother. But that doesn't mean that Jupiter stopped the stumbling planet: gravitation is a mutual affair.

Think of it this way: Jupiter's velocity and Saturn's were now combined inseparably. The sun was no longer pulling on the one alone—it was pulling on the pair of them, because they were revolving around one another. So you see that, although Jupiter's speed in his path around the sun had not increased or decreased, Saturn's sunward motion had brought him much nearer. He was no longer able to hold to his old orbit, but was steadily swinging in toward the sun, his path describing a giant spiral in space.

There was some slight apprehension on earth when this was announced. Several feared that the giant planet might come so near as to get the earth into its power. But the astronomers laid this bogy. Jupiter was doomed to take up an orbit between us and Mars, and, although our next-door neighbor, would be a ruly one. It was easy to figure; the Newtonian law showed that every heavenly body will find a path in space where its centrifugal force will balance with the existing gravitational influences.

Mars would not be affected by this sunward motion, although Jupiter would pass just ahead of him. The distance would be just enough to insure Mars's safety from disturbance. It would be a couple of years before the change took place.

I am going somewhat into detail on these points, because they have a very important bearing on what follows. You ought, also, to know that the remaining half of the double star, or planetoid, which had caused the original mischief, was now speeding for the sun. They found that it was following a hyperbolic path, and thus, after swinging around the sun, would fly off into space again, never to return. On its outward way it would pass near the earth, but not dangerously close.

I had finished my estimate, and was now at work on a life-size model. It was spring; the approaching harvest promised to be the same as usual over all the world. People seemed reconciled to short rations, and I felt safe in delaying my announcement until I was perfectly sure. Had there been any signs of discontent, I would have taken chances and placed the scheme before the public at once. But I was ambitious to win the only girl I had ever loved. Can you blame me for wanting to be *sure?*

I kept my plans as secret from the world as I am withholding them now from you. With the exception of a few reliable assistants, nobody knew of the station on the coast of Brazil where I was trying out my scheme. There was a time when an enterprising "reporter" would have spoiled it all for me; but people have acquired a vast respect for the experimenter and a wonderful ability to mind their own business. Score again for the change.

Ray and I had a few photophone visits, and from each I gained a fresh inspiration

to do my best. I longed to call in person, but I thought it unfair to Johnnie, under the circumstances. Most certainly he would never have taken advantage of my absence. Ray understood, and did not invite me.

Time dragged heavily in the Cone until Mars's gravitation began to be felt. Then there was rapid progress; the day soon came when Johnnie tipped the Cone until its base was "down," and set the vertical wheel going to brake their terrific coast. And when Deimos, Mars's outer moon, was passed at a distance of about twenty miles, the whole world was on hand to wonder at the tiny black satellite and gaze at its mysterious parent.

Obscured as always with its film of thin air, Mars's surface was more or less indistinct. The south polar cap was still visible, this being the planet's spring season in its southern hemisphere. As we approached, the nearly circular patch called Hellas appeared a light yellowish-green in color, while the pointed expanse of Syrtis Major was a rusty blue. As for the canals, they ran straight through Syrtis, as well as in the surrounding regions; so if the "sea" ever held water, assuredly it contained none now, if the canals were really canals.

As we watched the planet revolved beneath us, Johnnie purposely using his steering-wheel to offset the effect of gravity. Thus the Cone hovered stationary, and soon several double canals came into sight: I recognized Euphrates and the two great cities to the east. We constantly drew nearer, and soon lost the globular effect as the surface flattened out. Johnnie was steering for latitude 40 in the south temperate zone.

By this time we were near enough to make out Mars's only mountain system, the chain on the plateau south of Fastigium Aryn. To the west of this was the great "gardens," as they had been called for centuries. Johnnie used his glasses continually, and informed us that there was every sign of cultivation in this vast district. He could make out no forms of growth, but the great diversity of coloration, laid out in definite patches, showed that somebody had planted something methodically. I was in my booth for hours.

Judge of our excitement when Solis Lacus appeared at our left. This tremendous oval, once thought to be a mere patch of vegetation, all now knew to be the capital city of Mars. In fact, the more recent text-books call it Marsopolis. We were less than thirty miles high when it came into sight, and by the time it was directly below us we were only five miles away. Johnnie had connected us to the deadlight, but we knew that he and the others were watching with powerful glasses. Suddenly Harry broke out:

"Flying machines!" And billions of eyes strained to see. But we could make out nothing with our unaided sight. Johnnie had stopped his braking wheel, and we were now carried along by the gravity, thus accompanying the city. A little farther down, and all of a sudden, so swiftly that the mere thought sends the blood jumping through my veins even now, an aerial machine darted across my vision not a hundred feet below the Cone!

Soon we could make out hundreds of them. Peculiar flapping arrangements, with wings arranged in stories like an ancient multiplane; some of them were so fragile that I could see light through them as though they were almost transparent. At first we could make out nothing of their operators.

Then our attention was attracted to the surface. The atmosphere was clearer now. We could easily define the streets, which ran with the utmost exactitude in parallel lines. There were no cross streets: the buildings appeared to completely fill all the spaces. At a rough glass, the structures stretched for ten miles without a break. Evidently the streets were merely to give access to sunlight.

This idea was borne out by the multitude of aircraft. They darted here and there like flocks of birds. I had thought that the earth's supply was hopelessly confused, but here it was infinitely worse. For several minutes I did nothing but marvel that there were no accidents. It occurred to me that the Cone's arrival must have been observed, and that probably we were looking upon all the planet's machines.

The excitement was too severe for any

one to speak here on earth, but Johnnie was coolly examining the instruments. "Pressure about the same as on Mount Everest," he commented, and "Ten above zero, centigrade. If the air is the same as we have at home, we can stretch our legs, boys."

Harry was already placing three animals in the vestibule. The mirror was not shifted, so the world waited in anxiety for several minutes. Could we live in that air? At last Johnnie closed the outer door, opened the inner one, and took out the rabbit. It was still alive, though panting feverishly; but the pigeon and chipmunk were both very active, as though they enjoyed the change of air.

"Good. We'll touch bottom in a few moments. I'm going to shift the mirror to one of the windows, so that you can see all that happens." Johnnie suited the action to the word, and I was soon gazing out over Marsopolis at a height of about a hundred yards.

There were no very tall buildings. Apparently they were all factories, with the exception of a group of reddish structures about three miles distant, set up on a slight eminence. These had already been seen from earth, and long ago styled "the Capitol." But I was looking eagerly for the Martians themselves.

I had my own theory as to their probable characteristics. My idea was the small amount of air, and the necessity for lots of breathing to get enough oxygen, would require the Martians to develop extra large lungs. Again assuming that they were constituted similarly to us, the very slight gravity would permit them to grow to immense heights. But the same reason would make it unnecessary for them to have much bulk. In short, they would resemble the greyhound type, long, big-chested, fragile as to limb.

I could have shouted aloud for joy when I saw, not a hundred yards away, one of the machines come to a swift, fluttering landing in the large, open space or plaza toward which we were settling. For in a moment a Martian stepped out of the machine. He proved my theory.

He was looking up at us, and meanwhile signaling rapidly to others who were out of sight. His height was simply astonishing: he was all of twenty feet. His head was exceedingly long and tall, but I could not then make out the features. His chest was exactly as I had guessed—immense as compared with the rest of him. The torso and arms and legs were preposterously thin; he was nothing more or less than my greyhound, standing erect. Otherwise he was an anthropoid mammal—a man!

Harry was operating the controls, and succeeded in landing with scarcely a jar. But our eyes were glued on the buildings surrounding the plaza, and the vast crowd of people under the walls. From the distance they made a confused mass, all moving in an excited fashion that made it impossible to distinguish details.

I heard Johnnie unlatching the inner door of the vestibule. He and Harry were preparing to step out immediately. There were no preliminaries; you would have thought these two were about to take a stroll along the seashore, for all the care they took. I could not see, but heard Robertson come up to them and speak quietly.

"You'd better take these." I guessed that he was offering the rifles. "I don't like the looks of that crowd. Maybe they're armed. Better take them."

There was a moment's silence; then Johnnie impatiently exclaimed: "Oh, I suppose so. 'Safety first,'" he added, quoted a saying which has come down from our ancestors of four hundred years ago. We heard the inner doors close; then there was a pause. Next instant men stood for the first time on Mars.

CHAPTER IX.

WERE THEY HUMAN?

AS I gazed I heard Johnnie reminding Harry to step carefully, because the light gravity would change a hasty stride into a veritable leap. It seemed ages before they appeared in front of our window. Both were panting violently, their faces suffused; they took very cautious steps, but smiled at us reassuringly.

Johnnie said it was their intention to merely show themselves; and then faced the crowd.

And what a crowd! Their aspect was astonishing, to put it mildly. They were near enough now for us to see that none were less than thrice the usual height of a man, and apparently all of far less weight. Had they six limbs, I might describe them as spidery. Their bulging chests helped that impression.

They were about fifty yards away, and we could hear them faintly. Whatever they were saying, it had a most unpleasant minor undertone which filled me with uneasiness. If these people were not actually hostile, they were certainly very sour about something else. I know most of the world got that idea.

The fellow whom I had first seen, together with half a dozen others, came from the center of the group and stepped toward us. Their enormous strides brought them at hand in two seconds. They stopped twenty feet away, while our two representatives faced them in the immediate foreground. It was the most dramatic moment since the creation itself: interplanetary diplomacy was about to take place. Can you conceive of a greater chance for Johnnie to pose?

But he was making a rather poor showing, panting violently as he was. Harry was equally distressed; but the Martians were perfectly composed. And what extraordinary beings! You are probably familiar with the kinemagraphs which Parker and Robertson brought back, but they do not give the full impression. I shiver every time I revisualize those terrible faces.

Picture a head as tall as a half-grown boy, and as slender! The upper three-fourths was forehead, if I may call such a hideous malformation by so plain a name. The eyes, set one on each side like a bird's, accentuated the depth of the head and called striking attention to the complete absence of a nose, unless the small central orifice served that purpose. But the mouth! Could any nightmare have devised a worse object than that grim slit, set as it was just below those unwinking eyes? It perfectly belonged to the thin, pointed chin which jutted out half a foot in front of the rest of the "face."

When I examined the eyes closely, I saw one reason for my feeling of uneasiness. No trace of emotion could be seen in those large, staring pupils. No ancient vulture ever had half that cruel, hard expression. They were examining Johnnie and Harry with the same coldly scientific interest you might give to an insect.

Suddenly the leader opened his hideous mouth and began to speak. I cannot describe the sound adequately, but it resembled a far-off rumbling more than anything else. At first I thought that some machine had started in the distance, but our friends were listening intently. I tried to catch definite sounds.

It was impossible to divide the sounds into word groups. The Martian spoke for a few seconds, waited, and then spoke again. When he did this the third time, I saw that he was repeating the same thing. Yet there was no hint of question, declaration, or command in his voice. It was flat and colorless, with the minimum of modulation. On the other hand, terrifying.

Apparently they had no teeth, for the dental consonants were entirely absent. The gutturals seemed to predominate. The rumbling was so devoid of resonance that it had almost wholly timbre quality. Harshness was its greatest element.

Johnnie came to the conclusion, expressed for our benefit at the cost of much breath, that the men wanted to know their immediate desires. Accordingly the inventor went through a prearranged pantomime with Harry. First Johnnie made motions, illustrating with a pencil that he wanted a similar object from Harry. Harry nodded extravagantly, at the same time producing another pencil and handing it over. Having thus established the nod for "yes," Johnnie then asked if he wanted the pencil returned; and when Harry vigorously shook his head, Johnnie forthwith pocketed the pencil.

When they paused, there was a lot of rumbling among the stiltlike men. They imitated the nodding and shaking of the head, and then watched Johnnie in grim silence. He offered the pencil to one of the

group, who unhesitatingly reached out with his preposterously long, thin arm and grasped the thing in his disgusting excuse for a hand. It was like feeding an octopus to thrust the pencil into that writhing mass of wormlike fingers.

The group examined the pencil with every indication of having never seen such a thing. Finally the leader handed it back with that same peculiar certainty of movement which added to the horror of his aspect. Johnnie produced a pad of paper, rapidly outlined a globe with a tiny Cone on its surface, and showed this to the Martians. They inspected it, whereupon Johnnie made a tentative nod. Instantly they all fell to nodding violently.

Next Johnnie made another sketch, starting with a large, glowing orb and placing concentric circles of various sizes at the approximate locations of the various planets in the solar system. Having drawn a tiny Cone on the fourth of these globes, Johnnie pointed to the third, and indicated that he and Johnnie came from there. Then he handed the paper to the Martians. They rumbled monotonously over it.

"If they are as intelligent as they are supposed to be," said Johnnie, "they'll know enough astronomy to make that out." I knew he was thinking of the biological theory which assumes that Mars, being a smaller planet than the earth, cooled off sooner, and thus became fit for life sooner. Therefore the Martians would have progressed farther, all other things being equal.

Suddenly the leader of the stilt-men began experimenting with the pencil. In a moment he had drawn a tiny oval next to the sphere which Johnnie had designated as the earth!

"He's drawn the moon!" jubilated the inventor for our benefit. So they knew—I forgot to say that the mirror was so connected that, while we could hear and see what was happening, the Martians could not see or hear us. So they could not know that we knew.

With the foregoing experiments as a basis, Johnnie and the Martians between them worked out a fairly effective sign language. Neither made any attempt to master the other's enunciation: it was a matter of physical difference, and perhaps impossible to overcome. Instead, they relied upon eye and brain alone. I cannot fill these pages with the details; they have been published in the etymological journals, and also duplicated by the kinemagrams.

Johnnie stuck to his policy of not going away from the Cone. "If they want us to go to see their high muck-a-muck," he chuckled, "I'll tell 'em to bring him here. I guess the first men to cross from the earth are as important as their chairman, or whatever they call him."

So the first day passed with considerable progress made. The two adventurers scarcely moved from the door of the Cone, even eating a pocket lunch outside; and by nightfall were more or less inured to the rare atmosphere. They made the Martians understand about sleep, and reentered the Cone without ceremony.

The four men ate heartily, the while exchanging notes with the chairman and other intercontinental officers. What had been learned was too disconnected to form any conclusions upon as yet; and shortly our friends retired. The Martian night being almost the same length as the earth's, all enjoyed an excellent rest; nevertheless, they divided the time into watches, and each kept one for safety's sake.

CHAPTER X.

MARS'S DILEMMA.

I WAS disappointed that they did not try to learn something of the Martian night life, for this was a disputed point; but appreciated their weariness and went to sleep myself. The following morning Johnnie met the "committee" within an hour after the tiny sparkling sun, its rays only half as strong as on earth, rose in the east in the good old way. He and Harry kept up the show of being the only passengers.

During the day they patiently worked out their scheme of communication. In some places the work was very tedious, and not many citizens followed it through-

out. Harry summarized it for us that night.

"The canals are, as we felt sure, waterways connecting the frozen polar caps with the irrigation districts. Their northern and southern hemispheres have their alternate summer and winter, just as we do; but their winter must be a terrible thing. They are warm-blooded, just as we are; they all migrate from one hemisphere to the other as the seasons change, to avoid the cold.

"The population is the same to-day as it was thousands of years ago. I know this sounds extraordinary, but it seems to be the truth. The people are divided into two distinct classes: the rulers, with some of whom we were talking; and the workers, whom they exhibited to us."

I was at the phone when this exhibit was brought forth. The workers appeared to be of the same general type, but not so tall. They were slightly more bulky, but flabby in make-up; each wore a uniform. Their heads had less height and more width than their masters'; their chins not nearly as prominent, and their eyes infinitely milder. I never saw a greater exemplification of gentleness and patience than in the expression of their dovelike pupils.

"Apparently this condition has existed for countless centuries," Harry went on. "There appears to have been several revolutions long before humans appeared on our earth; but they were put down ruthlessly. Since then a group of approximately three thousand families has kept the rest of the population, numbering millions anyway, in subjection. There are occasional outbreaks, but never wide-spread."

The chairman put in this question: "How do you account for this lack of progress, Babcock?"

Johnnie said there was only one way. "Everybody knows that Mars is a lightweight planet. Did it ever occur to you that iron, and all the heavier ores, would be very scarce here? Well, iron is as rare as platinum on earth. I would trace it all to the scarcity of mountains and the volcanic activity which is responsible for ores.

"Anyhow, this lack of iron means a lack of machinery. They do nearly everything by hand, like the ancient Chinese. The rulers own every bit of the metal, and use most of it in their fliers. This gives them the advantage over the workers, being able to keep close watch on them without danger to themselves. Apparently progress stopped here at about the stage represented by the year 1700 A.D. on earth."

Harry broke in: "Without machinery to do their work for them, the workers have never had a really good argument for revolting. There was little to be gained—work would have to be done in the old way, regardless."

"The canals serve a double purpose," pursued Johnnie. "They not only irrigate, but transport workers from field to field as they are needed. The manufacturing is all done in these cities. Of course, there is no idea of a wave-motor here, because these tiny moons would not cause a tide even if there was enough water; so they still get their power from below the surface. I can't make out whether the fuel is liquid or solid; possibly it's gas.

"And that's all we learned to-day, except one thing: they have powerful instruments here, likely more efficient than ours; they know that our moon keeps one face always toward the earth, and that Mercury and Venus behave the same toward the sun. But they know almost nothing of the surface of the earth. Our atmosphere accounts for that." And with this the report came to an end for that day.

I called up Ray and talked over these facts, to which she had also been listening. "How can Johnnie possibly learn anything of value to us in such a God-forsaken world?" I wondered. "Did he tell you anything of his plans, Ray?"

"He called me up just before he started," she replied hesitatingly. "Said that his plans were automatic, in a sense, because his discoveries would decide each new step for him. That is nearly his exact words. I got the notion that he is going somewhere else after visiting Mars; I don't know why, but I did."

"Wherever he goes, I hope he makes a discovery that will solve our food problem," I answered. Ray looked worried. "Aren't you satisfied with your own scheme?" she asked.

"It looks all right to me now, but I'd feel better if I knew there was a handy alternative in case of failure. It's too serious a matter not to be sure of success."

Now, I've never been able to recall Ray's next words, exactly; but they heartened me up immensely. There must have been more in her tone than in her phrases. But I left the booth convinced that if I failed it would be my own fault; and if I won— I shut my eyes to stop dreaming about the prize. I busied myself with the details of my model during the most of that night.

The next day Johnnie startled us with this news: they had been awakened in the middle of the night by a strange noise. They decided it was tapping, as though some one wanted to get into the Cone; they examined the outside thoroughly by the light of the reddish glow from the surrounding city. But they found nothing, and were on the point of giving it up when Robertson chanced to look at the deadlight.

Two Martians were staring up into the Cone. From their faces and uniforms, Johnnie knew them to be of the working group; and both he and Harry instantly surmised that these men wanted some sort of help. It was impossible to remove the deadlight, but that did not hinder the sign language. Evidently these two men had watched the working out of this system from a distance, and with little difficulty made our friends understand what they wanted.

The rulers were harsh and cruel, they said. Evidently they did not give the workers enough to eat, and especially were they lacking in something else, not so easy to make out, but, Johnnie thinks, fuel for warmth. He gathered that a secret rebellion was being planned, but was at a loss to understand what he could do about it until one of the Martians, by a clever bit of acting, indicated that the Cone would make an excellent fortress with which to storm and capture the food warehouses.

Harry's sympathies were instantly aroused; these men were so simple and guileless that it angered him to think of oppressing them. Moreover, their enterprise in tunneling to the Cone was proof of their sincerity. But Johnnie put his doubts in these words: "If we help overthrow this overbearing government, it may be that these poor fellows will suffer in the end through being unable to manage things. We don't know."

So he decided to await further knowledge, and told the visitors he would let them know later. They were keenly disappointed, and went away sulky, like children. After they left a number of others came up and peered suspiciously into the Cone from time to time, until the thing got on Parker's nerves, and he covered the glass.

"I'm going to get at the bottom of this," Johnnie told us as he and Harry prepared for another day's conference. The "delegates" were already at the door. "These tall-domed fellows give me the creeps; and if they aren't doing the right thing under the circumstances, I'm going to chastise them." And he grinned as he changed our mirror connections.

There was double the number of Martians on hand this morning. Also, unless my fancy deceived me, they had an even more cold-blooded look about them; I got an uneasy feeling that they were planning mischief. But the "talk" proceeded without any irregularities for a couple of hours; and I gradually forgot to watch for something to happen.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BATTLE.

WE learned that the little planet was in a very bad way. Crops were exceeding poor, due to the fast-diminishing supply of water. Instruments on earth had long ago shown us that the canals were not as prominent near the equator as formerly, but it was hardly supposed that Mars was drying up. The stilt-men declared that the sun evaporated the water faster than the ground could soak it up.

And now I come to the disagreeable part. Apparently the rulers had for centuries systematically put the workers to death upon reaching a certain age of inefficiency. Food

could not be spared for the unproductive. But what shocked us most, the rulers had recently decided to sterilize half the workers, to provide against new births!

It was hard for me to conceive of such a barbaric condition of human affairs. We on earth thought ourselves badly off when our bread allowance was slightly reduced; but here was a vast group of unfortunates who were to be surgically unsexed, all because a few thousand rulers insisted upon being parasites. You will agree that had not the rulers decided against progress in the earlier days, a genius would inevitably have sprung up from among the workers to devise a remedy for their predicament.

I reflected that, at one time in the earth's history, there were people who stoutly maintained that we must always have caste and class; my own ancestors were of that mind. I shuddered to think of what would have become of earth's humans had these ancient aristocrats continued to govern. And I thanked God again that workers had been encouraged on our planet; and because of their progress we now had a single glorious class, with peace and security for all.

It was not quite noon when Robertson, inside the Cone, saw a Martian looking at him through the deadlight. The fellow darted out of sight; and Robertson, thinking it queer, hid behind the machines and kept watch on the glass. Shortly the fellow returned, peering cautiously; and Robertson saw that he was not a worker, but one of the others. The tunnel had been found.

Johnnie was immediately notified by means of a tattoo code. He and Harry reentered the Cone, and quickly decided that the situation was very grave. Looking out of the window, they saw that the news had reached the "delegates," and messengers were flying everywhere.

Johnnie excitedly restored our connection to the inside mirror. "If there is really a rebellion in the air," he exclaimed, "these bosses may spring a surprise on us that I haven't allowed for. Keep your eyes open."

The four men swiftly barred the vestibule and unrolled the coiled shutters which Johnnie had provided on the outside of each window. These shutters were of metal slats affording an outlook but good protection. Johnnie reconnoitered through them all and reported that the square was being filled with a great crowd of Martians, mostly rulers. The flying machines had been removed; queer-looking apparatus like enormous catapults had been set up all around the edge.

Johnnie was puzzled. "I can't make out their purpose," he said, and pondered for a while. Suddenly he gave an exclamation. "Boys! They must have seen these wheels and guessed what they're for. They haven't enough iron to make them here. Understand?" and he shouted in his excitement. "They'll destroy the Cone, if necessary, rather than let us take it away!"

And as he spoke he leaped for the controllers. He took some risk of burning the armatures, so swiftly did he start the motors. But time was needed for the great wheels to reach their effective speeds, and meanwhile the world waited in dread for the offensive. Would it be some new and dreadful chemical, which could flux the walls of the Cone and overwhelm our friends? Or would it be some subtle gas, like a nitrogenous ether, which could penetrate the shell and kill the travelers?

In the midst of these conjectures the original group of rulers appeared at the door and rapped for attention. They had with them a new figure, which Harry afterward described as "the ugliest, meanest-looking stilt of them all." Concluding that they had brought their chief at last, and optimistically hoping that a peaceable understanding might be reached, Johnnie finally decided to face the delegation. However, Harry insisted on going with him; and, as it afterward turned out, remained hidden in the vestibule, armed with one of the ancient repeating rifles.

Parker watched the conference through the shutters. "They're trying to induce Johnnie to be one of them, I think. They're making him some sort of a big offer. Perhaps they're offering him a moon," grimly. Suddenly the electrician muttered savagely: "Confound the skinny devils! Are they hypnotizing the boy?"

Johnnie afterward said that he had a feeling that he was being mesmerized, a drowsy, contented sensation that required all his will-power to shake off. He roused from it to realize that these cruel monsters were simply gaining time for their plans, and without apology turned and darted into the vestibule.

Even as his feet touched the floor, he felt the hand of the chief ruler on his shoulder. Think of that bunch of tentacles writhing in your face! No wonder Johnnie dreams of it at times. He broke loose, though, and turned to find three of the fiends trying to crowd into the doorway. Parker was ready to open the inner door, but feared to do so before the outer one was closed. The Martians barred the way.

Then Harry used the rifle. His first trial resulted in spattering the sides of the vestibule with the contents of one Martian's skull. His second struck another squarely in his bulging chest, and neatly divided that Martian into five sections. But he completely missed the chief himself, who had followed the main group at a galloping run for the edge of the plaza.

Next moment the two men were safely inside. And then the bombardment began. Evidently the machines were designed for throwing stones, and though probably made of wood, were of great power. Immense masses of rock, weighing several tons, were hurtled against the Cone. Each impact crashed above our heads like a clap of thunder. The Cone shook and crackled with the strain; the reverberations threatened to burst our ear-drums.

"The Cone can't stand this!" shouted Johnnie above the uproar, as he reached to throw more current into the wheels. "More juice for the prime vertical!" he yelled to Parker. But the electrician shook his head and mutely pointed to the horizontal wheel. For a moment Johnnie stared, uncomprehending.

Then I also caught the idea. They were going to use the sidewise force to dislodge their antagonists. I watched the increasing velocity excitedly, listening in dread to the smashing thuds on the Cone. No structure could long withstand such a bombardment. The racket was diminishing a bit. "Fifty thousand miles a minute on the rim," read Johnnie from an indicator; then ran to a window and peered out.

"Good God, what a sight!" he stammered. He backed away from the window. The last of the stones descended, and for a second there was only the hum of the motors. Then Johnnie threw open a shutter directly opposite our mirror.

We could hear no sound, but I have always had a mental image in my mind of the roar that must have come up around that square. I could see a confused mass of Martians, fliers, and catapults, churning and grinding together like the contents of a concrete mixer as the fearful force rolled them away from the Cone. Back they swirled at an awful speed, a dense cloud of dust arising. In an instant the seething wave smashed against the walls of the surrounding buildings as they in turn crumbled and collapsed under the strain.

The chairman's voice finally crossed to the Cone. "Stop it!" he shouted with such vigor that Johnnie heard above the din. In a moment the lower wheel was slowing and the power running into the prime vertical. Harry slammed the shutters to cut off the sight, and all four men wiped their foreheads shakily.

The Cone tugged at its anchors. Johnnie waited until he could be sure of a good start. The instant he was ready to cast off, Parker discovered two Martians at the hole under the deadlight. They had some sort of a contrivance with them. Parker stuttered in consternation and stumbled away from the glass.

I could get a one-sided view of the fellows. They were on the point of discharging their apparatus when Johnnie cast off. Up flew the Cone, and at the same instant a large projectile was emitted from the tunnel. It rushed straight for the glass.

CHAPTER XII.

THE M-RAYS.

SUCH was the great speed of the Cone that the projectile from the tunnel never reached its mark. For the first second or two it gained, then lost speed,

slackened, and finally dropped completely behind.

But no sooner was it lost sight of than an exclamation from Robertson drew attention to the windows. They told us afterward that the Cone was absolutely surrounded by fliers. The one which we could see was a gigantic affair, flimsily but delicately designed; and apparently manned by only one aviator. At its bow was the M-ray machine.

Now you will appreciate that I, like other humans, can only guess as to the nature of these rays. My guess would be no better than yours; but I was at least a first-hand witness. There was only a fleeting glimpse, and the blinding radiance of those crimson beams prevented seeing much else. The path of the rays was distinctly visible in broad daylight, like the beams from a search-light at night.

In less time than it can be told, the nearest of the fliers approached to within a few hundred yards. As it came on, the Cone flew straight up. I saw the rays being aimed, and their path steering in our direction. I was not afraid; I did not know, then, what they were. I saw the rays from this machine swinging in a giant arc. In a moment they would have struck the Cone, but its terrific speed took it above the path of the light. Had it not done so, the whole world would now be vastly changed.

This is what happened. Looking through the deadlight, our friends saw the converging crowd of fliers trying to stop their headlong flight toward the spot where the Cone had been. For the most part skilful driving prevented damage, but they could not keep the rays from striking. Whenever the crimson light hit a flier, the flier vanished. It passed into vapor instantaneously. One second there would be a giant flapping machine, the next a pinkish cloud of smoke, and it was gone. The M-rays worked that quickly.

There were two machines which approached one another at right angles. To avoid colliding with others, both drivers turned aside; and to avoid one another, they dodged under and over. But the rays could not be turned—there was no time. Then there were two swift puffs of the pinkish steam, and in another instant these were dissipated into thin air. Not a vestige remained of either huge machine!

Johnnie busied himself with the machinery to regain his composure. In a few moments he turned to us and spoke very solemnly. "We have escaped from what is probably their most efficient weapon. Until we can devise some way to neutralize it, it will not be safe for men to visit Mars again. Nice, amiable people!"

Such was the first and last visit of man to Mars. Johnnie admitted that the journey was practically wasted. "Like an old-time excursion to a penitentiary," he put it. They watched the planet's receding disk with few regrets.

The Cone had started off in a direction which would have carried it to the sun, had not the steering-wheel been so adjusted as to get the benefit of Deimos, Mars's outer moon. Johnnie exerted all possible pressure with his wheels, and the resulting thrust was enough to almost dislodge the little satellite from its orbit. But it gave the Cone a fresh start in another direction. Going faster than any comet, it was headed straight for Jupiter.

During the next few hours Johnnie was besieged with objections to this new flight. Astronomers and physicists declared that the giant planet, the most brilliant object short of the moon, was still in a semimolten condition. They called it rank folly to visit a place too hot to—

There is no use of my going into these arguments. Johnnie turned them all aside by counter-claims, pointing out that no man had ever seen Jupiter's surface, because of the veil of air. He said that the Cone's insulated construction would protect them; they'd be careful. Anyhow, they were going, and on their way.

The Cone's trip to Jupiter was considerably shortened by reason of the recent changes which had occurred in the big planet's orbit. He and Saturn were steadily gliding nearer and nearer the earth's path, so that the Cone had less distance to travel. Moreover, Johnnie's practise with his apparatus had shown him how to get

tremendous speed, such as could only be attained in space, where no air exists to impede progress.

The inventor was in constant communication with the small group of scientists who agreed with him about Jupiter, and was advised by them of the approach of various asteroids. He used each as a fresh lever, and within six weeks was within sight-seeing distance.

Through telescopes on earth, Jupiter seemed a terrible object to visit. Saturn's flaming mass, less than two million miles from the planet, seemed altogether too near for comfort. What if the Cone should become entangled in its powerful attraction? The old notion of the hereafter would come true.

But the vast distances which at all times separated the Cone from Saturn and the dozen satellites made its approach to the great planet comparatively easy. That is, it looked easy to us who were given frequent glimpses through various windows; but I noted that Johnnie and Harry relieved one another frequently in the operation of the giant car, and continually checked their figures with those of the astronomers. We afterward learned that they more than once narrowly escaped being smashed on one of the many moons.

And so, feeling their way with the steering-wheel and frequently testing the power of the prime vertical to make sure that it could break their fall, the Cone dropped swiftly toward earth's big brother, the biggest of the sun's whole family. Have you any idea what it means when I remind you that Jupiter has eleven times earth's diameter? For one thing, it means that he has one hundred and twenty-two times as much surface. One might say that an acre on Jupiter is nearly a quarter section, as compared to one on earth. Or, if streets were relatively as wide in a Jovian city (suppose there were a city), it would take about five minutes to walk across.

As the sky-car neared the great disk, people on earth kept constant watch for glimpses of the unknown surface, but the varicolored atmosphere was as yet too dense. We had to be content with a close-range inspection of the various satellites. Of the five which occupy the space between Saturn and the planet, one at least was thought by some to be habitable. However, you can get all these details from the records.

When Fidus, the smallest and nearest of all the moons, was passed, I figured that there should soon be indications of the Jovian atmosphere. You will recall that a planetary giant like this has everything to correspond; his air is nearly twenty-five thousand miles deep.

The first sample was hurriedly analyzed; and Harry exuberantly announced that it was practically the same as that of the earth, except that hydrogen was present in considerable quantity and carbon dioxid hardly at all. A few thousand miles down showed a bigger percentage of oxygen; and the farther the Cone proceeded the denser the air became.

Of course, air is subject to the same laws as any other gas. On earth, at sea level, air pressure is about fourteen pounds to the square inch, but only a third of that much on top of Mount Everest. On the other hand, at the bottom of deep mines the pressure mounts up quite high.

The Cone was now near enough that the reddish tint, which of late years had come to appear conspicuously in the planet's yellow glow, had all but disappeared. Clouds now definitely interfered with any direct observations. At first these clouds moved with inconceivable swiftness, carried along by the planet's amazingly swift rotation, which gives him a fresh day every ten hours. But Johnnie adjusted the Cone to follow the surface and soon was traveling with the clouds, dropping slowly so as to avoid friction.

Of course the barometer was useless, but the thermometer was of value in showing a steadily increasing heat. Johnnie purposely steered clear of the hot middle zone, planning to land in about forty-five degrees latitude, south. Instruments on earth had long ago shown that the poles were frigid, although the equator is hot.

Passing through several strata of clouds, none of which actually obscured the sunlight, but rather pleasantly diffused it, the

Cone steadily sank lower and lower, and finally emerged into the actual surface air. Johnnie speeded up the vertical; and hovering thus, at a height of two miles, we were given a place at the deadlight, and gazed downward.

Men looked for the first time on the soil of Jupiter.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN AMAZING WORLD.

THE entire population turned out to see which was right—the majority of scientists who claimed that the big planet was a kind of semisun, still molten if not actually glowing with heat; or the minority, who maintained that the crust of Jupiter, as a whole, was solid.

Well, the first thing that caught my eye was a volcano at the extreme edge of my vision. The next thing I saw was a genuine, unmistakable river directly below. I rubbed my eyes, but it was there; on its banks were grass and trees; green stuff, everywhere!

There was life beneath us! Even though the crater was smoking and a gleam of lava showed red on one side—life! The idea was wildly exhilarating. We were merely disappointed when our belief in Mars's habitability was so rudely verified, but we rejoiced as though we had found something long lost to know that earth's big brother was habitable.

"And why not?" Johnnie was arguing with Robertson. "Granted that all the planets were formed from a common nucleus, each should be practically as livable as the earth. Why, we may even find bipeds here."

"But this spot may be the only oasis in a desert of lava," objected the mathematician. Johnnie only laughed. "Strange that we should hit upon the only oasis, isn't it? No; if part of Jupiter is like this, probably most of him is the same."

And they guided the Cone gently down toward the west side of the river. I bore in mind that, since all the planets revolve in the same direction around the sun, as the earth does, also revolve on their axes in the same fashion, the points of the compass are the very same as on earth. Meanwhile I kept my eyes open for signs of life.

"Do you notice that the trees appear to be about the same height as those at home?" remarked Johnnie as the Cone hovered just about the surface of the stream. I had already marked this item, because I had assumed that vegetation would all be dwarfed by the effect of gravity, which is nearly three times as great as on earth. But Johnnie had hit upon the explanation.

"The air pressure accounts for their normal size. This enormous amount of air has the same effect upon these trees, apparently, as ordinary air pressure has upon a balloon. It reduces their weight: it balances the gravity, at least to some extent."

Harry was analyzing another sample of the air. He declared that, aside from its great density and the presence of a few unknown gases in small quantities, it was practically the same as that in the Cone. It would sustain life.

The Cone came to a gentle halt upon an immense sand-bar at a turn in the river. There was nowhere else to land. Both banks were thickly grown with a dense tropical forest, very like those of equatorial Africa or Brazil. The river, perhaps a mile wide, ran with remarkable swiftness through a boulder-strewn bed a few steps away. The water seemed quite clear—that is, if it indeed were water. Looking up at the current we could see, in the distance, a great range of mountains; on the summit of the highest—a veritable Mount Whitney—was the undeniable white cap of snow.

"After a while, I'll show you the view from another window," said Johnnie. We looked toward the south. No wonder we doubted our eyes. The mouth of the stream was but a few miles away, emptying into the rippling waters of a bay. And beyond that the horizon; but between it and the bay was the everlasting, glorious blue of an unmistakable ocean!

Had not astronomers followed the Cone so carefully with their instruments, certain folks would contend to this day that Johnnie had played a tremendous joke on us. The thing was so much like Mother Earth.

It was midday when the Cone landed. The temperature was then a hundred and fifteen in that particular region. Of course, it was neither summer nor winter, for Jupiter has no seasons. The reason is, his polar axis is almost straight, while the earth's is decidedly slanted. And also remember that nightfall was only two and a half hours away, because of the planet's ten-hour day.

"We'll have to hurry if we want to explore before dark," urged Johnnie as he placed the live stock in the vestibule. A moment later the air of Jupiter was exposed to the beasts; and we noted with elation that, aside from panting quickly as might be expected, there were no ill effects. One of the rabbits made quickly for the bank and began nibbling at a blade of grass with every indication of enjoyment.

Nevertheless the men used the vestibule so as to keep the Cone at its usual pressure; and Harry and Robertson stayed behind while the other two explored. The mirror was right behind them as they took their first steps.

We could see that it was somewhat of an effort for them to move their legs, and of course they breathed with difficulty, but on the whole were far less convenienced than on Mars. "It isn't so bad," offered Johnnie after a while. "I could run if I had to," and he broke into an easy trot down the sand. But he quickly turned about and came back, shouting with what seemed unnecessary loudness. But of course the heavy air carries sound very easily. "It's like running in water," he panted. "No wonder it's warm; this is like a tank of compressed air."

They stepped to the river and returned shortly with a sample of the water. Harry was ready with his chemicals and soon pronounced the liquid "rich in free carbon dioxid and slightly alkaline, but otherwise it's plain H_2O. It ought to be filtered if used in large quantities." Without any further delay they drank to Jupiter's health in his own natural beverage.

Then Johnnie sprang his surprise. "The spot where we got this sample," casually, "is evidently the watering-place of many animals. We found a beaten path leading down across the sand, just beyond that bend."

Our interest was intense. For, if there were animals, why not other beings? Johnnie said they could not make out what type of creation from the tracks, except that in one or two soft places the tracks were very large and strangely shaped. Harry and Robertson were eager to learn more; and soon left, each armed with a rifle and provided with camping articles for use in case darkness overtook them.

We watched them go down to the stream's edge, after which they followed the path Johnnie mentioned, disappearing from sight in the heart of the jungle. I could not see ten feet in that tangle of greenery.

During their absence Johnnie made tests of the earth on the neighboring bank, announcing later that it was rich in nitrogen and other valuable elements. "I see no reason why cultivated plants wouldn't grow here as well as anywhere," and he began to plant an assortment of seeds, also a clipping or two which he had thought to bring along.

Shortly twilight began. As might be imagined, the dense atmosphere reflected so much light that the day lasted much longer than five hours. It offered a strong contrast to Mars and the moon, where there was practically no twilight at all, due to the lack of air. However, it was soon dark enough for us to distinguish a new type of radiance in the air; Saturn's yellow glow was not predominating. We could make out his wispy flaming mass on the opposite side of the sky from the sunset.

Suddenly there came the sound of an explosion. Johnnie leaped to a northern window and looked out anxiously. As he did so, we heard four more shots. Almost instantly these were followed by five in swift succession. A ghastly silence. Nobody spoke or moved, but stood waiting for further sounds. Johnnie strained his eyes at a window. Before long, "I'm going to see what happened," he blurted out; and was on the point of loading another rifle when the two explorers came into view, sauntering coolly down the path in the twilight. They cut across the sand to the vestibule and entered leisurely.

"What did you see? Did you kill something? Was it beast, bird, fish, or man?" The questions were fired at them before they could get their breath. They were decidedly surprised. "I didn't suppose you could hear the shooting," said Harry. "We thought we'd have a surprise to spring on you in the morning."

He hesitated a moment. "Perhaps you had better wait till then anyhow. You wouldn't believe us if we told you." And no more could be gotten from them.

They were very hungry, however, and, after eating, became enthusiastic about the beauties of the country. Among the souvenirs they brought with them were odd lemon-colored fruits, shaped like our peaches but with seeds of the plum type. They said that they could not place a single variety of all they saw growing. It was all foreign to the earth.

"The astonishing thing is that we found all stages of growth going on at the same time," said Harry. "A tree would be in full bloom right alongside of another of the same species, leafless. And we would pick fruit from another. It is more than I can explain."

But Robertson guessed it. "There are no seasons here, that's why. The sap runs as it pleases. You know how fig-trees behave, with several crops a year. Evidently all forms of Jovian vegetation follow entirely independent cycles."

Saturn continued above the horizon most of the night, giving an effect of arctic twilight which made artificial light unnecessary save for reading or writing. Two of the moons were in the sky, as well.

"This explains why the surface keeps so warm regardless of the distance from the sun," remarked Johnnie. "The night is so short, the heat does not get lost by radiation. I suppose it never frosts here. Of course, the density of the air acts like a blanket, to keep the heat in. I had the idea, at first, that there would be a fresh cycle of vegetation every day, but these warm nights prevent that."

Toward dawn the air was full of strange noises. Evidently the larger beasts preferred these hours in which to roam. Some of the bellows that came from the watering-place would have rattled windows less tightly fastened. The population was filling up for another day.

The thermometer was still high—a hundred and one—when our friends arose from a nap to find the sun just rising. "If we want more temperate weather, we'll have to move nearer the pole," said Johnnie.

One of the mirrors was mounted upon a small carriage; wires were run from it to the big apparatus in the loft. Parker stayed behind, and the other three crossed the sand-bar and carried the mirror over to the water's edge.

The ground was literally churned with fresh foot-prints. Some of the marks indicated elephants or other animals equally large; while others gave me the impression of hogs about eight feet high. In places there was a well-defined hoof-mark such as only a horse would make. But nowhere was there a sign of humanity.

The trail was beaten four feet wide, and worn deep into the ground. On either side rose the rank, steaming undergrowth and the typical parasite-covered trees of the Amazon jungle. Of course we on earth could not get the odors or the damp hot-house heaviness of the air, but the mirror did absorb an absolute wilderness of sound. Shrieks, twitterings, raucous howls, and deep-throated grunts came from all directions; while the bird-life kept the upper branches in a constant flutter. It was astonishing that so much life could be crowded into so small a space.

After fifteen minutes' travel we turned a bend and came upon Harry's surprise. It barred the trail completely and loomed before us like a huge blue boulder. Johnnie cleared a path around the carcass, and returned to express his belief that the animal was some land-roving variation on the sea-cow. It was all of twenty-five feet long, and would have been a formidable thing, indeed, had not its hide been so comparatively soft. Apparently in confusion, it had charged our two explorers; they had fired to avoid being run down.

There was little to be learned by going further. The trail went on for miles through similar jungle, said Harry, and aside from glimpses of the mountains would

show us nothing new. Accordingly our friends collected a quantity of specimens on the spot.

An hour later "we" left the sand-bar.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TWO SCHEMES.

FROM what had been learned so far, Jupiter appeared to be an unattainable haven of refuge for the earth-bound crowds. Of course it was idle to think of migrating to the planet; the immense cost of the Cones made such a plan unthinkable. Even though they were built at the highest possible speed, we could not make them a tenth as fast as the population would increase.

So people gave a sigh of regret and wondered all the more why Johnnie's party remained for about three weeks, making rapid excursions to every part of his surface. Few but scientists followed their wanderings closely. But we asked them again and again about humans; and they continually replied "no," although there was proof of every other kind of life save anthropoids.

Finally Johnnie steered his car slowly, so as to avoid friction, out of the great air blanket, passed the satellites and, using Saturn as a "base," hurtled back toward the earth. He announced that, upon his arrival, he would state the proposition he had promised. "In the mean while if anybody else has a plan dealing with food-shortage, I suggest that he prepare it so that the voters can take their choice."

This idea was adopted by the council, the chairman hinting that certain parts of the earth were showing signs of unrest and impatience. By this time, however, I was positive that my scheme would succeed; and spent the interval in working out the best form in which to present it. But Johnnie, I afterward learned, spoke his piece absolutely off-hand: a good example of the fundamental difference between us.

Thus it came about that, in less than a year after Ray and Johnnie and I had come to our memorable understanding on the heights above the Yosemite, the Cone arrived safely on the terrestrial spheroid within three and a half seconds of the time scheduled by the astronomers, who had calculated the car's path with their usual precision. At the behest of the general council, a committee had first passed on the several hundred plans which had been offered, and had come to the same conclusion as I—they were all impracticable.

And so, when the people took a recess the next day at six o'clock, New York time (to make it convenient to the largest number of people), it was to hear only two speeches: that of the world's greatest inventor, and that of the man whose department was fundamentally responsible for the situation. At half past five I called up Johnnie and surprised him at breakfast.

"I was thinking that we have been rather childish in not confiding in one another," I had to say. "What if we have the very same scheme in mind? One of us is going to look rather foolish."

He shook his head smilingly. "Not likely, Bob. You and I were cast in different molds. Anyhow, your seniority gives you the first place on the program, so don't worry." He walked to the table, picked up his bowl of cereal, and resumed eating in a way which showed that he wasn't worrying, anyhow.

"I was chuckling over something else," he added, as though there was a great joke on some one somewhere. "Did it occur to you that my temporary popularity could be made to turn the vote in my favor? In this way, I mean: suppose I were to tell that Ray is going to marry the winner?"

I was thunderstruck. It had never occurred to me. Of course it was true; sympathy for the hero of the hour would influence opinion. And Johnnie had harbored such an idea! For an instant I felt my respect for him waning; then I caught his twinkling eye and realized that here was a stronger character than my own. For he, knowing how to be a sneak, refused to use this knowledge. Suddenly I felt very discouraged; for, in the bottom of my heart, I wanted Ray to have the best man.

The boy's uncanny intuition broke into my thoughts. "Don't let it worry you, old man," in all sympathy. "There are

two measures of a man: his personal stature, and what the world gets from him. Too many details for us to work out alone. Let's leave it to the people."

Then I rang off; and for the tenth time I wished that Johnnie had been my younger brother, rather than my rival.

At six the chairman introduced us with a brief account of the situation, describing generally the shortage of wheat, the work of the committee, and the hitherto undisclosed schemes which were now to be presented. Without any delay—for the entire world's time was being used—I stepped into focus and began:

" Fellow citizens: I have been at work ever since the Sacramento Valley earthquake to devise this plan; so you may be sure it is a mature one. On the other hand, before bringing up this new notion I first made sure that all existing means were being utilized to the most efficient extent.

" For instance, by making use of several hundred thousand acres of roof surfaces in various parts of the globe, I have been able to add nearly one per cent to the wheat output. Several rocky ranges in Hindustan, Peru, and Western America, which were once given up as sterile, have been partially converted into stepped farms, conveying the soil from near-by valleys. I have also made several fruit orchards into combined fruit-and-vegetable ranches, by replanting the trees; in this way adding a little to the spare land for wheat.

" I have also used a new crop-intensifying spray with good results. Of course, super-fertilization, artificial ozone, and weather regulation have been utilized to the limit. I say all this to convince you that nothing, absolutely nothing, short of a revolutionary plan will deal with the problem."

At this time I reminded them that the world's surface is about four-elevenths land, and the remainder covered with water. I pointed out that we already utilized the tides for power, and used the surface of the water for freight transportation, but that the ocean's great irrigating power had not been touched.

" So I propose that we grow our wheat on the ocean." I paused exactly the right length of time to let this idea soak in. " I need not point out the vast field which this opens up; you want only to be told how it can be done.

" My experiments were conducted on the coast of Brazil. To be very brief, I used (after a great deal of study and experiment), flat-bottomed scows of a half-acre in extent. These scows, filled with earth ' mined ' from selected localities, I planted and cultivated in the usual manner and towed out to sea. I found that comparatively little power is needed to convey a whole fleet of these scows.

" The crop yield, if anything, was even better than that obtained on land. It is due to several reasons. First, I had absolute and instant control over the irrigation. Second, I was able to place the scows where they could have the best effect of the sun, when desired, or of the rain when needed.

" Finally, I built warehouses for these scows, which complete the solution of our problem. These warehouses are arranged with elevators and traveling cranes, so that the scows, during inclement weather, can be stored in tiers or stores in perfect safety. The same buildings are equipped with the planting, cultivating and harvesting machinery.

" In harvesting, the scows are simply towed under a reaper, which extends the full width of the boat. The grain is immediately conveyed by endless belts to the threshing machines. And so on, through all the details, the crop is handled in half-acre units. You can imagine the advantages in the saving of time, while the care of the scows costs less than we sometimes lose by fire on land.

" Let me point out that grain grown on the sea is very clean. Also, the salt water in no way impairs the flavor. I scattered this particular crop over all the world, and you have all eaten of it without detecting any difference.

" Now, as to cost: the maintenance will be slightly less than the present rate, so we need consider only the initial expense. There are three distinct items: the mining and transportation of the soil, the making of the scows, and the building of the warehouses, together with their machinery.

"Of course it is not necessary to supply any great amount of equipment at first, since it can be added to from time to time as the population increases and other demands are made upon the land. Nevertheless I have calculated the total cost to produce as much wheat as will be needed to support us a generation hence; for it has been calculated that the population will then be so large as to require all the land surface for other purposes. This total cost will have to be borne sooner or later, and we don't want the next generation to accuse us of extravagance.

"The entire cost, then, will be eight hundred billions of dollars. At the present rate of increase, the population will have to spend about twenty billion a year. I could go into a great deal of detail, but think you will be practically satisfied to know that the committee has gone over my plan very thoroughly and approves of it at every point. For one example, however, I aim to manufacture the scows from sheet metal, stamped in one piece in a huge press. All other items would be carried out in the same wholesale fashion."

And with that I thanked them, bobbed my head and stepped away from the mirror. But I could not escape the applause. It was very embarrassing; I had never heard such a thing before, that is, on such a scale. There were so many people clapping at one time, the resultant sound was a single bass note, of trombone quality and especially cheery.

Then the chairman dryly remarked that a stranger from another world would have something to say. Johnnie immediately stepped into view and began as I did, without preamble and, I noted with petty satisfaction, without brushing his hair.

He said:

"I propose that we move to Jupiter."

CHAPTER XV.

"DO IT NOW!"

"IT'S not as hard as it looks," Johnnie remarked calmly as soon as the excitement had somewhat abated. "We can really move to Jupiter and do it with uncommon ease; but before I tell you how, I'd like to point out a serious flaw in what Mr. Forbes has proposed, in order that you may be the more seriously interested in what I have to offer.

"First, I admit that the scow idea is first rate. I see no reason why it shouldn't work perfectly, neither does the estimate look especially forbidding to me. But, I insist, it has its limitations. It is quite true that there is far more water than land on this globe, but a vast proportion of this water lies in ice-covered regions. Therefore there is a practical limit to the life of this scheme.

"Without doing some very elaborate calculating, I can only guess that the Forbes plan will serve the world for three or four generations. What will we do then? Of course it's a long way ahead; nevertheless, time goes right along, and in the mean while the human race will miss its only opportunity to claim a bigger planet.

"Now, I warn you that the question of 'how' cannot be answered quickly. It calls for a lot of explanation. But I'll be as brief and yet as exact as possible. To begin with, I'll state that the Cones themselves will not solve the problem, except indirectly."

Then he rapidly summarized the events leading up to Jupiter's present position. He began with the advent of the double star, one element of which, striking Saturn, had nearly stopped him in his course and caused him to fall, a flaming sun, toward Jupiter. By mutual gravitation the two had then combined to form a new couplet, while the other half of the blundering planetoid had continued sunward.

Thus Jupiter, partaking of Saturn's great fall, but retaining his own velocity, was now swinging steadily inward on his orbit; and the astronomers had announced, as you will recall, that this great spiral would ultimately become a nearly circular orbit just outside the earth's.

"Remember that Jupiter is immensely larger than the earth. His atmosphere is three times as deep as our entire diameter. Another thing: his new orbit will in no way interfere with the earth, where she now is.

"Now, the Universal Astronomical So-

ciety has aided me in calculating the details of what I am going to propose. It is this: let's move the earth to Jupiter!"

Had he suggested an ice-pack for the sun he would have created a smaller sensation. The world held its breath in amazement. In a moment Johnnie was smiling and saying: "Before you call me crazy, hear me to the bitter end. Remember, the society has verified all my figures.

"You realize that the whole solar system owes its stability to the nice balance which exists between the sun's pull and each planet's centrifugal force. The one just offsets the other; so that a planet can neither fall into the sun nor fly on indefinitely in a straight line. For instance, the earth is traveling at eighteen and a half miles per second in its three hundred and sixty-five day orbit around the sun; yet this orbit is, practically, a circle, instead of a straight line, simply because of the sun's gravitation.

"Here's the point. If in any way we could increase the earth's speed, we would thereby cause it to seek a wider and larger path. The greater the speed, the greater the centrifugal force; whereas the gravitational effect would be unchanged.

"My whole proposition is based on this law of Newton's. So long as the earth's velocity remains what it is now, we will continue in this orbit. But let that velocity be increased, and the orbit is enlarged. Jupiter's new orbit is to be just outside ours; so that, if we can increase our speed enough, we can take up a fresh position in about the same region as he.

"I spoke a moment ago of the double star, the remaining half of which is now nearing the sun. This planetoid is being constantly observed. It is a small affair, a trifle less than two thousand miles in diameter; probably its mate was of a similar size, and its damage to Saturn was due wholly to its speed, which is several hundred miles per second."

He quoted the astronomers' declaration that the planetoid, upon leaving the sun, would cross the earth's path on March 5. The crossing would be at quite a distance and without endangering the earth.

"Now, I propose that we tamper a bit with that star. You remember how, when the Cone used Deimos as a starting-place, the rebound of the centrifugal force nearly threw the little moon out of its path. Well, there are forty Cones nearing completion, and their combined power will be enormous.

"My plan is to go out and meet that star just as it leaves the sun. By lining up the Cones on one side of the thing, we can exert enough force to change its orbit slightly. Of course this effect will be very small on a body with such great momentum as this speeder has; but that is my very idea in setting to work at once. A tiny displacement at that distance will become a large one by the time it reaches the earth.

"On March 5, then, the planetoid will cross behind the earth, outbound, at an angle of about forty-five degrees. If we alter its course by exactly the right amount we can bring it near enough to the earth to draw us out of our orbit!" Johnnie paused for a moment, well knowing what a staggering thing he was proposing.

"The planetoid's gravitational effect would be very small indeed," he resumed quietly; "but for the fact that we shall bring it quite near. You know that gravitation is in inverse proportion to the square of the distance. That is to say, bringing the star to within a thousand miles will make it four times as effective as at two thousand, and so on.

"To make it short, we have calculated that the Cones can readily make this alteration in the star's path, steering it near enough to have the desired effect upon the earth; which is, to add to our velocity. Passing us at an angle of forty-five degrees, it will cause us to exceed twenty-one miles per hour as against our present eighteen and a half; and thereby take us far enough out to get into Jupiter's path.

"It is only a matter of delicate figuring. By steering the planetoid to exactly the right distance, at exactly the right longitude and latitude, figured to the ten-thousandth part of a degree, we can adjust our destination to a nicety. We need not actually touch Jupiter. Our velocity will be enough to keep us from succumbing to his gravitation; but we must aim so as to

strike well within the limits of that wonderful atmosphere. The earth will then become a new satellite, revolving around Jupiter for the rest of her existence. Of course, once in that magnificent air, our planes will do the rest.

"There is really only one problem: the moon must be eliminated. Revolving around us as she does, she would certainly collide with the big planet and spoil it all, for us. You know, of course, that such a collision would turn them both into another Saturn."

Johnnie paused to take a long breath. Harry entered the booth with a small refrigerator case, from which the inventor quickly removed, with a pair of forceps, a small piece of stone. I recognized at once the grayish substance which he secured from the wall of the crater in the moon.

"This material is in the same condition as when I found it—frozen. If I allow it to become as warm as this booth, it will turn to a muddy liquid, which some of you would recognize. It is nothing more or less than crude chlorid of nitrogen.

"The moon is made of it." Johnnie returned the specimen to its case. "I had a theory to that effect years ago. There was no other way to account for the moon's lightness. Of course, this chloride is not pure. It is two-thirds adulterated with almost every known element, but their presence does not alter the character of this chemical.

"Chlorid of nitrogen is an extremely powerful explosive. When pure it is very dangerous, decidedly unsafe to handle. As found on the moon, it is almost inert because of the adulteration. That is why the moon, from the beginning, has escaped all harm.

"You see my drift. All we have to do is to upset our satellite's smug complacency. The Cones can readily carry enough chemicals there to refine this chlorid, after which it is only a matter of apparatus to explode it. The moon would be blown into fragments. These would have terrific velocity, and anything traveling faster than a mile and a half a second would never return. It would be done after the planetoid passed.

"Now as to Jupiter himself. Our explorations showed that the two polar regions extend nearly to latitude seventy-five, while the torrid zone is about twenty-five degrees wide. The remainder is now fit to live upon. As the planet gradually becomes cooler, in time nearly all of it will be habitable. As for becoming acclimated, we felt far less discomfort than we would in going to Africa to-day. The district between fifty and sixty degrees, either hemisphere, is ideal.

"The soil is rich beyond belief. There are about equal parts of land and water. There is room enough for the human race for hundreds of generations. Some of us have complained that our present civilization has become monotonously tame. Well, there is plenty of excitement on Jupiter. Another race of pioneers will be needed to clear those jungles. There are enough prehistoric animals to satisfy the most adventurous soul. But above all, remember that there is one hundred and twenty-two times the surface of the earth.

"Finally, I have only this to say. March fifth is not only the first chance the earth will get to make this leap for a new life: it's the last chance. There is no likelihood whatever of such means being offered us again. This planetoid solves our problem.

"In short, if we move to Jupiter we must do it now!"

CHAPTER XVI.

WE VOTE ON IT.

DURING the next few days the world was in a state of excitement such as even the great change did not arouse. People discussed the two plans during every spare moment. Of course the detailed data in both cases had been scattered broadcast in pamphlet form.

My proposition did not get much attention. It could wait; Johnnie's scheme could not. It was "yes or no" before March fifth, and everybody knew it. They bombarded the scientists for verification of Johnnie's theories and figures, and had to be assured over and over again.

Many did not appreciate the exactness

of modern mathematics. The old story of Leverrier and Adams, the two ancient astronomers who figured out the location of an unknown planet, was revived. People marveled again at the intelligence which could calculate, from certain irregularities in Uranus's orbit, that some other planet was causing these disturbances; moreover, the location of Neptune was thus prophesied with such accuracy that the observers had only to point their telescopes where the mathematicians directed and within an hour the planet was found.

And since that day progress had of course carried the science much farther. The two spiral orbits of Jupiter and the earth, as described by John Babcock, were calculated within extremely narrow limits; but even though a small error should occur it could not make a serious difference in the result. The earth was sure to glide into the limits of Jovian air.

The planetoid's orbit insured this. Its path made a great loop around the sun, never coming nearer our orbit than seventy million miles. Thus, on its outward trip it would not cut squarely across our orbit, but at a decided angle. The Cones' operations would cause it to actually follow and overtake the earth. The power of the Cones, together with the star's inertia, were easily and minutely calculated. The planetoid could be steered as nicely as any plane.

Fresh samples of the ore were brought from the moon, and experiments proved Johnnie's theories. The chlorid would do all that was expected of it. Of course it was only necessary to explode the outer crust of the moon, not the entire mass; the force of the explosion would disintegrate the whole and dissipate it into space.

Some fear was felt that these fragments might strike the earth. But we were shown a plan for so placing the "mines" as to form a cross over the center of the face. By causing the explosion to follow these lines, the moon would be separated into sections, each of which would fly away from the center. Thus we would be protected.

Johnnie produced hundreds of photographs to prove to the skeptical regarding Jupiter's habitability. He explained how the tremendous gravity had held captive so much air; but that this very density of atmosphere offsets the gravity and also holds in the heat which, on earth, was largely lost by radiation during our comparatively long nights. Johnnie showed that the big planet is in a stage corresponding to our recent pleistocene age; mankind should have appeared long before, in the ordinary course of evolution.

These and several other questions were disposed of without difficulty. The public interest in Johnnie led to many popular articles about him and his work. One writer enthusiastically bestowed the title, "Doctor of Dangers"; it struck the people's fancy and became Johnnie's nickname.

When the election day arrived, a week later, there was no doubt that the public was sufficiently well informed to cast an intelligent vote. We had perfect faith in mathematics; we had seen for ourselves via the phone. It was too momentous a matter to be left to a representative vote.

Of course you know how it turned out. The balloting was completed in a few hours, thanks to the photophone, which made every booth a polling-place. There could be no false voting. And so it was by a fair, honest, intelligent vote of the whole people which, by more than two to one majority, elected on January tenth to move the earth.

The first Cone took flight three hours later.

About this time a remarkable thing occurred on Mars. He grew a pair of tails, They were brilliant streams of pale red light, emitted from what appeared to be a volcano about five degrees south of Marsopolis. It was all the more puzzling because of the well-known scarcity of mountains. The beams were nearly as long as the planet's diameter; and instead of spreading out, formed in parallel lines, like a pencil. From the color they were generally supposed to be the dreadful M-rays, which had so nearly put an end to the Cone.

We called it only a coincidence; we did not know, then, how closely they would be intimately related with our own af-

fairs. We went about our usual business, putting in our spare time in astronomical study. Of course there were numbers of skeptics, including a few religious enthusiasts who gathered small crowds to protest against "this defilement of nature, this competition with God." It is curious how the trend of progress provokes lapses toward superstition and faith-worship. We shall probably never entirely outgrow these outbursts.

Johnnie was exceedingly busy with the details of the great steering. The Cones were all *en route* within a week, each heavily charged with power, and carrying four men. Johnnie superintended the journey toward the sun, to insure their taking care to avoid its enormous pull.

They met the planetoid when it was almost exactly on the opposite side from the earth. The Cones gathered on the sunward side of the star; and thanks to the photophone, we were all able to watch the operations.

All three wheels were used in the work. The horizontal one was kept revolving so that its gyrostatical force might hold the Cone in place. Then, both the vertical and steering wheels were brought into line with the sun and planetoid. Their force was raised to the highest point by the swiftest safe speed; and thus, pressing against the star in one direction, and the sun in another, they tended to separate the two orbs.

Something had to give. Nothing could withstand the terrific push of those wheels. Bit by bit the planetoid shied from its orbit; at first it amounted to only a few yards per hour. But the unremitting pressure, together with the unbreakable laws of inertia, increased this variation in geometrical progression. By the time the star had come half-way, it was thousands of miles out of its course.

As originally calculated, the planetoid would have passed somewhat beneath as well as behind the earth. So the Cones operated against its southern hemisphere, forcing it up as well as to the side. Moreover, it was necessary that the earth be carried a little higher, if it were to jibe precisely with Jupiter's orbit—a painstaking bit of trigonometry.

When February passed and March fifth grew near, folks began to get a little nervous. We were not told just how near the star would be brought; we only knew that it must pass quite close to be effective. But we were not afraid of March fifth, itself. We were in the same state of mind as when we mail an important letter.

The act is unimportant; the significance enormous. No; we were nervous because of what March fifth might lead to.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STAR-MOVER.

THE puzzling phenomenon on Mars still excited our curiosity, especially as of late the flaming tails had become considerably larger. Soon it was clear that they were directed toward the two little moons, Phobos and Deimos. All told, it was but three weeks before the rays reached their goals.

It was a wonderful sight, and only credible to those who had seen the M-rays work. No sooner had the light touched the moons than they were turned into fire. They collapsed, flattened, then spread out in an exploding puff of pinkish flame. It was the destruction of those flying-machines on a gigantic scale. Few saw Phobos die, but the world watched when Deimos was struck. It was all over in a few minutes. Absolutely nothing whatever was left of what had once been two solid satellites, save two great clouds of fire, which quickly spread and faded until, after a few days, even this evidence disappeared. Clearly it was a deliberate act of the Martians, but none the less a baffling mystery.

On the night of March fourth, the red planet showed up quite close to Jupiter and Saturn. Of course millions of miles actually intervened. You will recall that the astronomers figured that the big planet's slanting path would cross just ahead of Mars and without disturbing him vitally. But the distance from the earth was so great that the two could hardly be distinguished.

Mars's tails had all but disappeared. However, to add to our bewilderment, a new outbreak of the same nature was taking place at the planet's north pole. It bid fair to become larger than the first displays. First two tails, and now a plume. We gave it up in disgust.

The planetoid was scheduled to pass the earth the next day. Its path would carry it over a spot on the Pacific Ocean southwest of Chile. Several photophone stations were erected aboard freight liners at this point, to insure that all should have a clear view. Fortunately it would be moonlight—seven-thirty o'clock—when the passage should occur.

Have I mentioned the star's velocity? Travelling at nearly three hundred miles per second, its advent would be a brief one. I confess to a personal uneasiness at that time. I did not know just how near it would come, and I did not like to think of the consequences should some slight mistake be made. A collision—not pleasant to contemplate.

At seven o'clock we were called to the phone. "There are a few Cones at the disposal of any nervous citizens," was the announcement. These had already been promised. It is noteworthy that several hundred elderly folks, of rather unimaginative dispositions, had applied for space in the sky-cars; but it is far more remarkable that curiosity, or pluck, or both combined, kept every last soul from making any use of them. When it came to the test, we were all true to our modern training.

At seven-fifteen the planetoid became visible to the naked eye. Of course, I was in my booth through it all, and saw the passing as well as though I had been aboard the ship in person. The tiny black globe appeared low on the southwestern horizon, growing momentarily larger in appearance. As it approached, the director of the central observatory made an announcement.

"It will be necessary for the star to pass within a very few miles," he stated. "Its mass is so small, its pull will be just barely enough for our purposes. There will be no danger to our atmosphere, much less to the earth itself."

This reassured us somewhat. We watched with unmixed curiosity as the star grew steadily nearer. Before long we could make out its revolving motion, which was peculiar in that it was retrograde; that is, from east to west. Its brown, irregular surface, entirely devoid of any interesting detail, was a disappointment compared with that of our beautiful moon. As it came nearer, it mounted a little higher in the sky.

We had an uncomfortable five minutes. The star gained rapidly, growing always larger and nearer, blotting out one constellation after another with deadly efficiency. Shortly I was hoping that it might pass a good deal higher than it seemed to be going. Its western edge was scarcely above the horizon. Now the big disk, plainly globular in form heretofore, was beginning to flatten out. Then it appeared as the moon did on its opposite face. But no sooner did the star gain one aspect than it assumed a newer and more fearsome one.

Undoubtedly we were to all but graze it! Imagine that black, silent monster rushing over our heads! I was thankful that it was going so fast; it could not stop to make trouble. But there was something nerve-racking about knowing that the thing was actually catching up with us, coolly overtaking us as though our globe were motionless. It made us feel small.

To relieve the tension I left the booth and walked around for a moment, returning at precisely seven-thirty-two, the scheduled time of the passing. At first I was puzzled to account for things. I thought that something had happened to the apparatus; for, to my alarm, the screen was entirely blank. There was nothing to be seen—the surface was black as jet!

Next second came the voice of the director. "We have turned a searchlight on the planetoid. Just a moment." And suddenly I realized that the great sphere had cut off the moonlight. I had forgotten that it would cause an eclipse. Afterwards we learned that the star was ninety-odd miles away at the nearest point. Never before had the earth come so close to a heavenly body, excepting only meteors.

The great white disk of the searchlight played on the black surface. It was too

close, and travelling too fast, for us to make out any details. There was nothing but a dull blur to be seen. I wondered that it did not whiz. And then we heard the hum.

You know there is a little air, a very little, even at a hundred miles. Not enough for the planetoid to develop serious friction, but enough to make a sound. It was like a rubber band vibrated by the breath, a faint bass note of very pleasing sound. It grew louder and stronger—a throbbing cadence about it; I forget its pleasing note and began to fear. If it became much louder—too near. Then I recalled that it takes time for sound to travel, and that the star was already passing!

The darkness continued for a few moments, then it began to abate. The rounded edge of the planetoid was approaching; the surface surrounding the searchlight's beam was grayish now. In a moment the current was turned off; it was starlight.

I had barely time to notice that the hum was dying down, when suddenly the moon flashed into full radiance. But the world did not care.

After awhile the world thought to applaud. We gave the Cones a heart-felt cheer. We could not see what had happened to the earth's orbit, but we took it for granted that this monster, now rushing on to the east, had done the work. And we were frankly glad it was all over.

Not long after that, came the tide. Of course, the astronomers knew this must happen, but they expected it would occur like the lunar tides, delayed six hours by reason of the water's inertia. They never guessed that gravitation takes time to operate, and that the nearer the planetoid, the sooner the tide.

Suddenly the director of our mirror exclaimed hurriedly for our benefit. "You must take a look at the horizon." His voice was vibrant with excitement as he adjusted our mirror.

We saw the wave approaching. It was hundreds of miles away, but its tremendous crest, higher than a chain of mountains, loomed far above the level. It was coming at a terrific rate.

I caught sight of a plane leaving the deck just ahead of the mirror. Then I noted others already in the air. The crew was taking flight. Three seconds later the wave struck.

The mirror began to rise, slowly at first, then with swiftly increasing speed. In a few seconds it was rushing upward as though in a cone. Then it began to toss. We could see the surface of the wave ahead of us, churning and tossing as though in a grip of a hurricane. Up we flew, flung first to one side, then another; the great ship behaved like a chip in a pond. The sea roared and crashed furiously. A great wave surged over the deck and momentarily blotted out our view. But the mirror held fast.

There was an instant's lull. Next second the ship gave a sickening lurch; the mirror keeled over on its edge, then upside down. There was a deafening rush of water.

Later we learned that the tidal wave, originating in the neighborhood of New Zealand, crossed the Pacific and broke against the shores of Chile and Peru. It gained in height and speed as it proceeded; and when it struck the continent, an unbelievable amount of destruction was done.

But Callao and Valparaiso were completely destroyed, together with about a hundred smaller towns. If there was any loss of life, it was due to stubbornness; and of course every home was in the mountains. Nothing but factories and shipping suffered.

Six hours after the passage of the planetoid the astronomers were able to announce that (1) the earth was moving at a rate in excess of twenty-one miles per hour, (2) she had been pulled considerably outside her old orbit, (3) she would undeniably and absolutely continue according to schedule, and ultimately become one of Jupiter's satellities. The star-mover had succeeded.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RACE IN SPACE.

THEN came the most terrifying news that had ever been told. Through the director of the central observatory, we learned that the meaning of Mars's

new plume had been deduced. The announcement was made by phone.

"Several weeks ago," stated the director, "we agreed among ourselves that the two tails which Mars formerly sported were due to a deliberate purpose upon the part of the authorities there. Whatever their control over those amazing M-rays, they were evidently using them, as we have seen lately, to get rid of their two moons. We agreed that their purpose was similar to ours; the moons would be in the way of their future movements. But we could not see what they could accomplish by it.

"Within the past week it has been explained by their display of the plume at their north pole. As you have seen, it points always in the same direction; to their 'ear,' with respect to their motion around the sun.

"This plume is an artificial volcano. It is shooting a stream of Mars' solid mass into space. They undoubtedly knew just how much velocity to give the material, for we have measured its speed and found it to exceed the planet's critical velocity. None of that tail will ever return to Mars.

"It is a gigantic rocket. Our warlike neighbor is now going slightly faster. Instead of keeping in his usual orbit he, like the earth, is entering upon a somewhat larger one. By so doing, Mars is going out to meet Jupiter, so to speak; they are planning to get there ahead of us!"

My heart gave a genuine leap of fear; I am not ashamed to admit it. What if the earth and Mars should collide! There could be only one result, another star like Saturn.

And then the director resumed. "Don't forget that we knew this a week before our little experiment with the planetoid. There is no danger of the earth colliding with Mars; we calculated his path and allowed for it, the same as we allowed for Saturn and the satellites. The star was steered so as to give us the proper direction. We shall reach Jupiter in safety."

But I left the booth in a stupor of despair. I recalled the terrible nature of Mars's "civilization" and what it might mean to us. Was there room on Jupiter for both races? Could we successfully combat those dreadful rays with centrifugal force? My heart sank as I visualized a Cone, surrounded by a fleet of ray-machines.

I pictured the race of man, grown peaceful and gentle under centuries of highly developed civilization, taken in hand by these ruthless warriors, these repulsive stilt-men, and kept captive for their benefit. I could imagine a rebellion, glorious in its purpose, failing in a sea of blood—boiling under the heat of the M-ray!

Was this to be the end of the human race? Had we overcome the baser elements in society, developed our intelligence, and put peace and plenty into the everyday life of several generations, only to become the property of these horrible creatures? I could not conceive of them as humans; mere reason and an anthropoid frame do not make a human.

At any rate, I could be thankful that my own theory had been disproved. I had thought it possible that the Martians were planning to destroy Jupiter's air. Having noted the Cone's work on the planetoid—their instruments were doubtless capable of this—and having deduced what we were planning to do, they might have taken the attitude of dogs in a manger. They could have determined to keep us away from what was denied to them.

But it was ambition, not revenge. They had taken a great step, which could not be retraced.

If you will hold your right thumb and forefinger together, you will roughly indicate the two orbits of Mars and Jupiter respectively. Assume the finger to be the big planet's path; the thumb, Mars's. Pretend that the sun lies away off to your left.

Now you will see that Mars, which had originally been due to just escape Jupiter's influence, by merely going a little way farther from the sun would get into the giant globe's grip. That is just what happened; but such was the nearly equal speed of the two planets that Mars only very gradually reduced the millions of miles which separated him from Jupiter. The little red planet followed the big cream one like a puppy after its mother. It was months before the distance was reduced by half.

The fate of the moon was spectacular in the extreme. Perhaps, however, you will be interested in the means used to destroy her. It was a gigantic task, relatively far more work than the steering of the star.

Every available Cone worked for weeks in carrying chemicals to the moon. It required thousands of tons, and each round trip took a week. Upon reaching the moon a Cone would drop into a crater; and using long cables which carried wiring in their makeup lowered the refining elements into cracks, fissures and pits, as far as possible below the surface. The containers for these chemicals held apparatus for releasing the contents and thus forming the refining compound.

But the refining itself was not done until after the last Cone deposited its load. In this way several hundred craters had been provided with the means for simultaneously producing billions of gallons of chlorid of nitrogen. All that was needed was the wireless discharge that would release the chemicals. This was operated from aboard the last Cone; I don't know whether it was Harry or Johnnie who closed the switch.

It was easy to see that the action really occurred. In theory the refining would result in three separate compounds: a gas which would comprise part of the separated adulterants, a residue of solid matter comprising the other impurities, and a liquid overlaying this. The liquid would be pure chlorid. In three hours' time the moon was covered with a dense fog which could mean only one thing: The chlorid was being formed.

The actual firing of the discharge was made quite a ceremony. Many people insisted that Johnnie have the honor, but he would not hear of it. "The chairman is the man to perform that operation," declared the inventor. "Shooting the moon is like ancient capital punishment. I'll not have its blood on my hands!"

We laughed at this reference to our poor, dead old moon. All that we cared for was its safe destruction. Of course, we would miss its beauty, especially on summer evenings when we felt sentimental. Did I mention the system of mining the moon? The craters selected for the purpose formed a giant cross upon the face which was turned our way. The intersection was in the center of the disk.

The only essential thing was that the discharge occur when the moon was "behind" us; that is, to the rear of the earth as it flew in its orbit. A day was selected when the moon was at her first quarter; we voted it a holiday and flocked to our booths to see.

The chairman spoke a word or two of our confidence in the work of the "moon-killers," as he called the Cone operators. Then he reminded us that there was no danger whatever, that the loss of the moon would not appreciably alter our motion, and that we should be treated to a remarkable sight. With that he threw the switch.

It required some time for the rays to reach the moon. Then a tiny spark of light appeared in each of the craters. The spark grew rapidly; it became a small bluish flare, spreading rapidly until the entire crater was filled. Before I could decide whether the flare had any well-defined form it had spread across the plains to meet a similar flare from another crater. In an incredibly short time a gigantic cross, outlined in intense flame, was formed across the moon. Its incandescence hurt the eyes.

When next I looked the moon's surface was changed. It was now decidedly larger and a most terrifyingly brilliant thing. A glance was all I could give it—as well try to gaze at the naked sun.

In short, the moon, which was actually exploding before our eyes, appeared to burn instead. This effect was due to the distance, which reduced the apparent speed of the flames. From close at hand its action would have appeared instantaneous; but from the earth it was like a huge globe of fire.

And so our satellite burned. The flames grew steadily whiter and brighter; they spread in height until the visible area of the moon was three times its former size. Great irregular flares shot off from the circumference. People with keen vision already reported seeing fissures through the glare. Strange that we could hear no sound! But sound requires air to travel in.

At the end of a week the moon nearly filled the eastern heavens. The velocity of the flames and fragments was then figured at five miles per second; but the brilliance had decreased to a whitish glow. The moon was rapidly disintegrating into the space from which it had come. The cloud of fire had broken up into several sections, the nearest four of which were steadily flying toward the earth from what had been the moon's center. But, because of the method of placing the "mines," these four fragments passed safely by us, each bearing away at an angle and, after overtaking the earth, continuing in straight lines indefinitely. Ultimately they became planetoids.

As time passed we did little else in our spare time but watch these two phenomena: the spreading, waning moon, and the growing Jupiter. The former satellite, after the various fragments had been blown into the heavens, left behind in their stead a cloud of fiery vapor, resembling several well-known nebulæ. With the naked eye it looked like a rather serious spill on the Milky Way. But Jupiter's tremendous beauty attracted more attention, our admiration being tempered by the uneasiness we could not avoid whenever we glanced at his red retainer. With his wonderful plume Mars was our bugaboo!

Of course these events did not improve the food situation. Nothing occurred to reduce the population, nor did the crops increase materially. On the other hand, folks were healthier than ever. But there was little complaint, although we had been obliged to reduce the wheat allowance to about one-half what it had been two years before. You will understand that the vast cost of the Babcock project left no funds for trying my plan. We were all looking forward to our new home; we weren't worrying about the old. A great many people took up Fletcherism with new enthusiasm and excellent reason.

A time came when it was possible to detect a difference in the weight of things by day and by night. This effect of Jupiter's gravity could also be seen on Mars, who was steadily, though slowly, closing the big gap. At midnight—and each night was now brightened by Saturn—we could get this situation with perfect clearness since sun, earth, and Jupiter were then in opposition. Rather, the big planet would be seen well to the east, being "ahead" of the earth at this time. Refer to your finger-and-thumb illustration again, and imagine the earth located a few inches to the left of the second joint of your thumb. Only by now the forefinger will represent both Jupiter's and Mars's orbits.

The event of our reaching Jupiter had been set for December 24, at twenty-two o'clock, central time. During the preceding fall the earth, because of its superior velocity, steadily gained on its destination in the same proportion as its aspect grew larger. In September Jupiter loomed up in the east like the great pinkish globe that he appeared in the instruments; while Saturn periodically swung between him and the earth, filling our nights with brilliance. Mars could be spotted nearly at the zenith, a new red moon in appearance, his wonderful markings standing out in all their sinister suggestiveness. He still maintained his rocket.

And this takes us up to the week before our "landing." On December 17 the marvelous globe of our new habitation filled a large part of the sky. His tremendous girth was out of sight only during the day. Each evening he arose in his astonishing splendor like a nightmare moon, completely blinding out our view of any fixed stars until dawn. On this date we were so near that Saturn, whose orbit lies at a decided angle with Jupiter's equator, swung round his circle almost over our heads.

The day before the great event I flew to Ray's home above the Yosemite.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAST LAP.

"I DON'T feel as nervous as I did when the star passed," remarked Ray. We were standing in her little observatory, listening to the astronomers' announcements from the other side of the earth. It was noon and Johnnie had just arrived.

"You are justified," he retorted in his usual insolent fashion. "As I remember it,

you didn't have two protecting cavaliers on hand then." But under his banter I caught, for the first time in my acquaintance with him, an undeniable undertone of anxiety.

Ray noted it at the same instant. She watched him constantly after that; and I made a mental note to maintain my own coolness. However, I had such faith in our mathematical science that I felt practically no uneasiness. Why not turn this faith to advantage in my own cause?

"In seventeen hours we are due in our new berth," the inventor remarked presently. He spoke hurriedly, as though anxious to keep the talk going. "Just now, of course, we can't see where we're going; but to-night our mirror will be of service to the very folks who are sending these bulletins." He paused as the photophone announced, from the Tokyo observatory, that all of the seven outer satellites had been passed in safety.

"There remain only Saturn and the five inner moons," concluded the astronomer. "Mars is just at the meridian—which means directly opposite us and going in the same direction. He looks a little larger than our old moon. I'll let you see for yourselves shortly."

Ray broke the silence which followed. "How much faster does the earth travel than Mars?"

"Under the old conditions three and a half miles a second," I was able to answer. "But since the change in our respective speeds his rate is only half a mile less than ours."

"But you notice," eagerly Johnnie broke in, "that we have already caught up with him. From now on we shall be in the lead."

Again I caught the disquieting note in his voice. Was it us he was trying to assure, I wondered, or was it himself? It did not seem possible that he had lost faith in his own calculations.

"Anyway," Ray put in, having evidently noted the same thing I had seen, "it's not so important which reaches Jupiter first. The great thing is to get there without bumping into one of these conceited moons."

"Oh, we'll get there all right!" exclaimed Johnnie with such confidence that I quickly revised my notion of his uneasiness. On the other hand, was he so good an actor as to fool me with his bravado? No.

Just after lunch we were given photophone glimpses of the sky on the other side of the globe. We marveled as usual over Jupiter's growing size, and were disappointed that we could make out no details. "Just wait until we get down into that atmosphere," reminded Johnnie.

Then we had a look at Saturn, the great flaming sun whose orbit, a million and a half miles from Jupiter, was such as to presently bring him quite close to us. He made a forbidding sight; he was so near that artificial light was unnecessary.

Next the mirror was focused on the vast expanse of space separating Saturn from the great planet. "We are now approaching," explained the astronomer, "the region of the original five satellites. You can make out Callisto, the outermost one, not far from Saturn. He is destined to cross our path just ahead of our transit.

"It so happens that the other four are at present in eclipse; shortly they will emerge from behind the planet." We eyed Callisto with some slight misgivings, hoping fervently that nothing would happen to delay his passing; but it was toward Saturn that we turned the more anxious eye.

"I'm glad there's a wide margin in our favor," said Ray. "That tremendous ball of fire must have a powerful pull. What if there has been a miscalculation and we should be drawn into it?"

She said it to draw Johnnie out; I could see that, and watched him narrowly.

"I'll show you the figures, if you like," he hastily volunteered; and drew a sheaf of papers from his pocket as he spoke. "Even if we should veer five thousand miles too far to the east we should still have enough centrifugal force to counteract Saturn's gravitation."

Ray said that she wouldn't understand the calculations, anyway, and apparently Johnnie considered that she was reassured, for he turned to the mirror again. I noted, however, that he gazed at Saturn; and this involuntary action of his did more to upset my own equinamity than anything else

could have done. For an instant I feared for the outcome.

Then I mentally reaffirmed my faith and quietly proposed that we go for a walk. Ray glanced at me quickly, as though to make sure of some former conclusion, and led the way down through the snow-covered villas to the falls.

Later in the afternoon we followed the wall of the cañon toward the west until it became twilight. When we turned back it was seventeen o'clock; but Mars arose in the east and lighted our way with a dull red glow as we trudged through the snow back to the house.

Ray asked Johnnie a good many questions about the Martians. For one thing: "Don't you think it possible for us humans to devise a complete code of communication with the rulers, as soon as the two journeys are finished, and ultimately come to a peaceable understanding with them?"

Johnnie shook his head energetically. "There is something insurmountable about their brand of intelligence," he declared. "You have to stand in their presence, as Harry and I did, to get the full impression of them.

"Did you ever seriously consider a horse?" he asked irrelevantly. But Ray had visited few zoos. "Well, a horse is vastly superior to a human in many ways. It is larger, stronger, fleet of foot, and a natural vegetarian. Yet it cannot be made to see our viewpoint without the use of force."

Johnnie briefly sketched the use of "harness" in ancient times. "The horse needed to be shown that we were superior—and nothing but force would suffice. The same is true of the Martians. Vastly superior to us though they are in many ways, our development is, on the whole, the better. Yet they could not be made to see this unless we dominated them."

"And so long as they have the M-rays there's small likelihood of that," I commented. "Apparently they lack a sense of justice. I could see that they were wholly without humor; how could they be just? Of course there must be some slight trace of righteousness in their makeup—the rebellions prove that; but clearly the quality is deliberately stifled in each new-born ruler."

Johnnie added that there was still another obstacle which he could not describe; he had gotten a feeling of extreme loathing which was utterly inexplicable.

After supper we hurried to the observatory and kept constant watch on our heavenly neighbors. Mars seemed to have lagged behind his position of the night before, but his apparent size was greater. Jupiter's edge was already over the horizon.

Ray focused an instrument on this edge and adjusted the clockwork to keep step with our motion. Thus the scope constantly pointed in our general direction of travel. We referred to it from time to time during our inspection of Mars; and about ten o'clock Ray stepped back from its eyepiece with a startled exclamation:

"Did either of you move this scope?" she demanded. When we pleaded not guilty, she pointed out that it no longer centered on the planet's edge but was decidedly displaced upward and to the left.

Johnnie glanced at once to the north. Creeping up toward the Great Dipper, Saturn's flaming mass was just beginning to show. His huge body would soon cover the pole star.

"There's the reason for the change in the scope," Johnnie said. "We are being led astray by that upstart of a baby sun!"

"Do you mean to say that Saturn has turned us aside that much?" demanded Ray sharply.

"That's just the beginning. We are going to wabble a good deal more than that before our journey is over." Johnnie was unconcerned—outwardly; but I fancied that he was bluffing to some extent.

Saturn's size appeared to grow rapidly as he drifted in from the northeast. We could detect Jupiter's shifted position with the naked eye, and it was now plain that Callisto would pass ahead of us. At this hour Mars was nearly in the position of the noonday sun. Perhaps I had best remind you again that he was at the earth's "right" in the race toward Jupiter.

A little later: "Saturn is certainly much larger than before," declared Ray, and I caught a trace of that peculiar matronly

tremor. I hurried to comment: "It's impossible for him to influence us greatly. We are going too fast—and not near enough to him."

"Fact is," Johnnie backed me up, "we really need his little pull to carry us safely around back of Callisto."

He went on to comment upon the absolute silence of the whole affair, saying that it impressed him strangely. He did not say that it was making him nervous. "It didn't seem odd for the Cone to be noiseless; but for this immense globe to rush through space without sound is—it's appalling."

We said but little after that until past midnight. Once I broke the silence when Saturn was at his nearest. Ray was very nervous and making no effort to conceal the fact. I said: "We were always in more danger of colliding with the old moon than we are now in from Saturn. Speed is what does it."

But the great star was a nerve-racking spectacle. He was a yellowish likeness of the moon about three days after the explosion began, with the added terror of constantly increasing size. We could make out the leaping flames, which at this distance only seemed to crawl. Of the former satellites and the wonderful rings not a trace remained. There was nothing but this awful—I almost said roaring—burst of fire. Queer that we could see so plainly and yet hear nothing!

"The Martians evidently plan to cross ahead of Callisto," I remarked later. I noticed how the words startled Johnnie, and was alert for fresh indications. "They are far enough to our right to do so, I mean."

Johnnie replied with a visible effort: "That is the way their orbit appears on the chart. They have the same chance we have."

Ray noted the change in his confidence at once. His face showed that he was under a very genuine strain. It struck me that he might be considering some new invention, and I carelessly asked him what his next production would be.

"Nothing at all definite in mind," he answered, surprised. "I've thought of nothing but this little jaunt for three years." Instantly he lapsed into watchfulness.

CHAPTER XX.

RAY SINGS.

ABOUT three o'clock the first of the four eclipsed satellites came into sight. The announcement was to the effect that we should pass over Ganymede; his orbit is nearly in the plane of the planet's equator, while we were steering for the northern temperate zone. I asked Johnnie about this.

"There is a double reason," he explained. "We are going into the higher latitude for the benefit of the milder climate; also, because the earth's speed, due to the braking effect of Saturn and these satellites, will become reduced to such a point that we must strike Jupiter where his air is moving less swiftly than near his equator."

"I see," mused Ray. "If the earth did not finish her journey in a part of the atmosphere where its speed was about the same we should suffer from friction. Of course the air moves as fast as Jupiter himself, and at the poles is motionless, but on the equator flying extremely fast."

Johnnie added that there was a further advantage in passing over instead of among the moons. "Watch how Ganymede pulls us down."

By this time Callisto was near the position which Mars had occupied earlier in the evening, and the red planet was on its way to the northwestern horizon. Johnnie's eyes were on it constantly.

As for Ganymede, shortly it dropped below the horizon and out of our direct sight. We got into communication with African observatories, and with the phone saw the curiously-marked satellite draw steadily nearer and nearer, yet always drifting farther south. The effect was very disconcerting to be looking up at the thing and yet to feel that we were passing over it. Of course we have the habit of assuming that north is up.

"We are much nearer to this moon than we have ever before, with the excep-

tion of the planetoid, approached any heavenly body. The distance is much less than that to the old moon; and were it not that our paths are at right angles we might easily form a new couplet from mutual attraction.

"As it is," concluded the announcer, "Ganymede is pulling us enough out of our otherwise straight path to bring us uncomfortably near the next satellite."

It was only shortly after that when we again looked "around the earth" and saw Europa, the middle moon, rapidly climbing the southern horizon. I admit that these directions are a bit puzzling, especially when my narrative skips from one side of the globe to the other in this fashion; but you need only remember that the earth was threading its way through a veritable labyrinth of moons. It was never done before; it would never be done again.

The instant I caught sight of Europa my heart gave an uncontrollable leap of fright. It was terribly near! Its surface was partly in shadow, so that it resembled the old moon in its first quarter; but there was no denying its steady motion toward us.

"Johnnie—that looks dangerous!" Ray's voice shook, although she made a violent effort to appear calm. "Are you sure that we shall pass all right?"

He hesitated for a moment, his eyes fixed on Mars, before answering. "Oh, yes; perfectly sure."

And the look that Ray gave me supported my own fears. What if Johnnie and his astronomer friends had all been wrong? What if those elaborate calculations had been based on some ancient but false premise? If so, did Johnnie now realize that the great adventure was doomed to end in tragedy—and was he deliberately concealing his fears to allay our own?

He quietly broke into my thoughts with: "I'm not worrying about the earth, Bob."

I was startled. His tone was so like of old I was taken completely off my guard. Involuntarily I cast about in my mind for an object for legitimate worry. I stepped abstractedly to the mirror and glanced at Europa. What I saw made my heart stand still in its work.

The moon was almost in my face. I gave an exclamation of dismay, noting at the same instant that Europa had scarcely moved at all westward. The earth was being drawn toward it; we and all its people were in genuine peril.

"My God, Johnnie!" I exclaimed, whirling from the mirror. "You have been playing with us! The whole thing has gone wrong!"

"Bob! Johnnie!" stammered Ray. Her face had gone deathly white, and she clung to the scope for support.

Johnnie faltered for an instant, then dashed to the mirror. Instantly he turned and thundered at us. "Be quiet!" I was stumblingly trying to comfort the girl. "Bob!—I didn't think you were such a fool! Why, if there was any real danger, I'd have Ray a million miles away in a Cone, by this time!"

The girl rallied suddenly. "And do you suppose for one second that I'd use the Cone?" She eyed him angrily; then as suddenly she softened. She had thought of something. "If you have enough faith, Johnnie, not to keep a Cone for your own use, I'll stand by your game to the finish."

It was my turn to feel ashamed. I had overlooked this very obvious proof of his sincerity; I was on the point of apologizing when our photophone connection was changed to a station in the Kongo region.

"Wild excitement among the native population," announced the operator. "We will give you a view of the largest mob." In a moment we were looking into a seething, roaring crowd of blacks in a large open space on some river bank. Lighted only by the reflection from the terror moon, the people impressed us horribly with their weird cries and gesticulations. The negroes had clearly gone out of their senses; thousands of supposedly civilized people, temporarily mastered by fear.

It occured to me that this sort of thing might be going on everywhere. Not necessarily in mobs, but in each citizen's soul. Had it not been for Johnnie's courage, I would have been terrorized myself. At that moment the music began.

I watched the photophone in astonishment. Some one was singing in a clear, ringing soprano; some one who as yet had

kept out of focus. The opening notes were in Latin, sharp and staccato like the call of a clarion. It was an order to clear the throne room; the emperor was coming. And then Ray stepped into sight.

I had not missed her. The chairman had given the old right to the system. On went the song, pausing before it took up a much different strain. Somebody was telling the emperor that an heir to the throne was being born. It was a sympathetic narrator; she sang of the patience of mothers—a low, even key. Then she began a lullaby.

We—mothers' arms. It was deliciously warm and comfortable there; the lights were dim and there was a gentle murmuring undercurrent of friendly voices in the next room. Imperceptibly it all died away, with a sigh at the—asleep.

Suddenly the music burst forth hilariously. We were children now, scampering madly to and fro on a lawn. There were pet animals cavorting with us. I was having a great time! In a moment matters had become serious. I was very thoughtful. There were things more important than play; we must equip ourselves for the world. And then we were out for ourselves, striving for place and honor with the rest of humanity. The strains became energetic, challenging, combatative. They rose to stridence; I must do my best! There was no denying that clanging note of strife.

And now the singer exulted. We had succeeded. We could boast in security. The refrain became a lilting melody, full of laughing sidelights. Life was truly joyous; we had done so very well! The notes swelled with the fulness of a satisfied heart.

Then came the crash. The music stopped with a discordant blare. Something had gone wrong. The singer sobbed as she told the emperor, brokenly, fearfully. It was an accident. We had been hurt; people were hovering over us, murmuring soothing words and bathing our foreheads. Then the hesitating, doubtful notes became stronger; in a moment they were assured, and then confident, and then triumphant. It would be all right; the emperor need not be alarmed. On went the melody; there was a tear of joy behind every note. And now others joined in, to prove the singer right; figures appeared by her side, and the solo became harmony. I recognized some of Ray's pupils. We were going to keep together, unafraid and comradely. The notes were positive and sweet; they rose and fell evenly and with stately tread. And marching confidently on, they swept out of our hearing, unconquerable and irresistible, as the singers stepped out of focus.

It was a miracle of faith. The world gave a sigh of the most intense relief; and then, from the photophone, came the good, old cheering which always greeted Ray when she used to sing the Marseillaise. Mad people could not cheer like that. She had restored their reason.

After a while the girl returned. We could not speak for emotion, but she was alert. "Is civilization only skin deep?" she asked thoughtfully. Then she turned to me, puzzled. "A fine lesson for us all. You nearly stampeded me, Bob. What started you off, anyway?"

I decided at once to force Johnnie to explain. If not Europa, what then was bothering him? I turned to find him at the scope, which was now pointed toward the northwest and bearing on Mars.

Never again do I want to see such a look on a man's face. Johnnie had been shaken to his very soul by what he had seen. I took his place, and stared at the red planet for a full minute before I understood.

"Bob; what do you see?" Ray was at my elbow, anxious and peremptory. I let her look, and gazed at Johnnie with a great weight at my heart.

"Well?" she was looking at us in perplexity. And so I told her.

"Ray, Mars has been drawn completely off his course. He has begun to circle around Saturn."

Still she did not understand. Johnnie broke in hastily, as though to get it over with. "Mars is flying in a spiral!"

"Merciful heavens!" burst from Ray. Then we stood in awe-struck silence for a while, each busy with his own thoughts. It was beyond my imagination. That inconceivably immense cloud of fire! Getting closer and closer—the stilt-men—but we had escaped.

I resolutely turned to inspect Europa and was relieved to note that it had drawn away considerably. Johnnie had been right. The earth's velocity, augmented by the pull from the next planet, had taken her out of Europa's influence. We were now approaching Io, heading so as to cross over its north pole, just as in the case of Europa.

"Do we pass very near this one?" I queried Johnnie. He was standing entranced at the scope and did not hear me. I repeated in a louder tone.

Then he began to speak, in a sorrowful monotone, mechanically, as though he felt he must say it. "Come here, Bob; you too, Ray. We must watch this thing through to the end. No; there is no real danger from Io, although we must go exceedingly close.

"Now look at Mars, Ray." He spoke in a low tone, entirely devoid of feeling. "He is only about half a million miles from Saturn and gliding rapidly nearer. Is he too near the horizon now? I'll connect you to the Philippines observatory."

On he went, in the same sing-song fashion, his face like the face of a bereaved mother. In a moment we could view the planet more directly. We could actually see the change of motion, so rapidly did Mars succumb.

Ray was sobbing, partly in sympathy and partly in excitement. We watched entranced, not noticing the lapse of time. Dawn had passed. It was broad daylight, and still we stood at the mirror.

And Johnnie rambled on. "I'll tell you how it happened by and by. Just look at that planet. It took millions of years for life to reach the stage we found there. In an hour it will be burned to a crisp."

After a while Ray made him stop. "Johnnie! You're getting on my nerves. What makes you talk that way? It's a dreadful thing, but it can't be helped."

To my vast astonishment the inventor suddenly dropped into a chair and burst into a fit of sobbing. His shoulders heaved convulsively, his whole body shaking with the terrible crying that only a man experiences. Ray eyed him in wonder, her face filled with ready sympathy.

I turned hastily to the mirror. Mars was quite near his awful goal; and looking intently at his disk, I saw a brilliant spark of light in the center. As I watched, it grew and spread until it became a triangular patch of scintillating radiance, a pinkish flare against the somber background.

I called the others to inspect it. Johnnie had regained his composure. Hardly had they taken their places at the mirror when the tragedy came, swift and sudden, silent and dreadful as the hand of death.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CATASTROPHE.

I SAW Mars swing around Saturn until he approached the far side of the flaming sun. There he seemed to pause as though to gather strength for another circle; but the irresistible force of the gigantic star reached out. In an incredibly short time the red disk with its curious pinkish flare dropped down and back, down and back, until first one of Saturn's flames, then another, intercepted him. Then the planet disappeared into the great fiery mass; a stream of flame appeared at the spot where the entrance occurred, and we knew that in time a great volcanic eruption would mark the funeral pyre of Mars.

When it was all over, we sat down and gathered our faculties as best we could. We had witnessed the world's greatest tragedy; yet, I am bound to say that my first definite thought was of breakfast. We ate a few bites in silence.

Suddenly Johnnie jumped to his feet and began pacing the room. "I can't stand it any longer," he blurted. "I must tell you what really happened. You have got to know.

"You remember that, a week before we steered the planetoid past the earth, the astronomers finally agreed that Mars's 'plume' was a deliberate effort to intercept Jupiter?"

Johnnie paused and passed his handkerchief over his forehead with a shaking hand. He was laboring under a terrific strain. I racked my brain for a cause of such distress.

He fell to pacing again. "When we calculated the earth's path in leaving her old orbit to share Jupiter's, we took into consideration the influences of every planet and satellite which could affect us. As soon as we were sure of Mars' purpose, we allowed for him also; and figured out just where to steer the star so as to counteract what disturbance he might make.

"But here's the point. We knew what Mars had done; they didn't know what we were going to do. When they discharged their rocket of M-rays, they had calculated only for what was known to them."

Johnnie raised his voice impatiently, breathlessly. "Don't you see? We could allow for Mars, but they couldn't allow for the earth."

He dropped into his chair again, but rose in a moment, more agitated than ever. "What happened is this: the Martians figured on slipping in ahead of Saturn the same as we did; but we, being bigger and faster and a little ahead in the matter of time, got by in safety. But you must remember that, if Saturn deflected us, so did we deflect Saturn. Gravitation is mutual; don't forget that." His voice trailed off impotently.

"And so," I finished for him; "Mars came nearer to Saturn than they thought. And we have seen. God, what an awful end!" I paused, and then added, "Well, Johnnie, it's all over now. Don't let it bother you."

"Not bother me!" he fairly shouted, leaping to his feet. "Why—"

At this instant the mirror flashed with an announcement from the chairman. He had taken the center of focus, and spoke with a beaming face that filled my heart with relief and gladness.

"Congratulations, everybody," he said, quietly but with ill-concealed satisfaction. "We are past every obstacle, and from now on all is clear sailing. There remains only Fidus, the tiny innermost satellite, and we are traveling so as to surely slip in between him and Jupiter.

"Briefly, I must remind you that we are bound for the eastern edge of the big world. We are not aimed directly at his face, of course; the purpose of the calculations was to bring the earth well within the limits of the Jovian atmosphere, yet far enough from his surface that his gravitation could not overcome our centrifugal force.

"There will be nothing startling about our arrival. Life will go on here just as before, except that we shall experience frequent eclipses whenever we pass through Jupiter's shadow. In time our air will mingle with the new, but for years it will be hard to detect any difference."

The chairman mentioned the ease with which our airplanes could make the trip between the two surfaces, and cautioned everybody to go slowly and bear in mind the need for care. "I know you are all anxious to visit the big planet; but don't forget to take your bearings with great care when you reach the 'neutral zone.' I mean, the point where the two gravitations balance. There is the only danger."

He spoke regretfully of the great disaster which had overtaken Mars; and called attention to the fact that the peculiar triangular flame still remained in the spot where Mars had last been seen. It was very odd.

"I want to keep you another minute, long enough to mention the man whose extraordinary ingenuity and heroic explorations have made this wonderful thing possible. I congratulate the race of man on having produced Johnnie Babcock!" And as the chairman stepped out of focus, he switched the connections so that we heard the applause.

And such an ovation! The world never heard its like before. The composite reflection which smiled and shouted at Johnnie expressed all that is glad and hopeful and buoyant in the human race. I would have been forgiven had I felt envious; but I could not help joining in the chorus.

In a moment the young fellow, flushing to his ears and considerably rattled, stepped into focus and looked shyly at the mirror. Quickly the applause died down, and meanwhile he regained his poise. "I'll tell you how much I appreciate this," he stated in a dry, hard voice, "shortly after twenty-two o'clock. We aren't there yet."

I stared at him in astonishment as he stepped toward Ray and me. What had

made him throw such a damper on their spirits? Ray caught him by the shoulder and shook him as though he were a disobedient child.

"Johnnie, there's something all wrong, somewhere. Tell us quickly what it is. You sha'n't move another step until you do."

He hesitated, and I put in with "You were on the point of telling, when the chairman began speaking. I had said, not to let Mars' fate bother you—I think."

"But it does bother me," he said mournfully. "You may have forgotten why we three are here together, Bob, but I haven't —Ray is going to select one of us for her life partner."

Now, I had made up my mind what to say; for none but a fool would have placed my small efforts alongside Johnnie's amazing record. I cleared my throat. "Johnnie, I'm out of the race. You've beaten me and I admit it. You don't want me, do you, Ray?"

She did not hesitate now, but looked me sympathetically in the eye. "Johnnie's the bigger man, Bob. I love him—I always have. If it's any consolation to you to know that you are far and away the finest character I ever—"

She was interrupted by a groan from Johnnie. "Dear girl, don't say any more —not until you've heard it all." The boy was trembling in agony; his face was streaked with perspiration.

"Listen." He clutched the chair spasmodically. "These Martians — we knew their plans and allowed for them. We are safe, and they are dead! My God!"—his voice vibrated wildly—"this is the terrible thing! I—I knew they'd have to be sacrificed! I knew—from the beginning!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE END?

JOHNNIE slid to the floor, writhing in the torture of his soul. Ray stared at him in growing horror. Her eyes were distended with dread; her lips curved in repugnance. She said nothing; but the despair and fear in the stare she gave her lover, can be compared only to a rabbit's horror of a rattlesnake.

I could scarcely believe what I had heard. "Great heavens, man, have you hoodwinked yourself into assuming the blame for this? Why didn't you tell somebody, long ago?"

He got to his feet and walked shakily about the room, twisting his hands together as though in pain and not even raising his eyes from the floor, much less to look at Ray. She had found relief in tears, moaning a little under her sobs.

"These astronomers are an unimaginative lot," muttered the inventor. "None of them figured on what would happen to the globes we passed, after we had gotten by. They all stopped short at that point. But I went a step further and saw that Mars must fall into Saturn.

"My first idea was to confide in the public; but I remembered that the women's votes were largely against the enterprise from the outset. I felt sure that, if they knew, they would vote against moving the earth.

"Don't you see?" His eyes were fixed on Ray, beseechingly. "In all probability a planetoid would never pass us again. And meanwhile, what would become of the earth? Don't you realize that a few generations would witness the breaking down of our civilization? We would either have to put away the old people, or prevent births. That wouldn't be life: that would be bare existence.

"Ray!" he begged, then turned to me. "I was afraid I couldn't make her understand. But there was nothing else to be done. It was now or never. It was a fearfully ticklish job to maneuver our orbit, anyhow. We had to steer that star with the utmost delicacy to give the earth precisely the correct send-off."

Ray stopped him. She spoke in a low, reproachful voice, full of regret and sorrow, far more terrible than an outright denunciation. "Was our civilization so much more precious than theirs? You allowed them to be sacrificed for our convenience!"

"Don't!" he pleaded piteously. He began pacing again in desperation. "You

will never appreciate how hopeless they were! If you could only have faced them as I did — terrible people! Don't pity those workers too much—they were not like humans—if they had gotten the upper hand, they'd have been as cruel as the rulers."

"I understand, Johnnie, if Ray doesn't. It isn't as though we sacrificed part of our own race."

But Ray was crying again. She could not comprehend. There is a peculiar faculty in the male make-up which enables us to detach ourselves at will from a problem and consider it impersonally. Few women have the gift. To the feminine mind, every question is personal.

I hope you'll not misunderstand my own attitude in this unfortunate situation. I am not an unselfish paragon, thinking only of others and their happiness. I wanted to see Ray and Johnnie reconciled because I was fully convinced that he was the better man. Of course, at the bottom of it all I wanted her to be happy; if I had thought for one instant that she could ever care as much for me as she did for Johnnie, I dare say I'd have done nothing to patch things up.

I regret to say that my efforts were totally without effect. Ray retired to her room, mourning the breaking of her ideal, quite unable to see her lover's case in its broader light. Johnnie went out for a dismal stroll on the snow, and I was left alone in the observatory.

For want of anything else to do, I called Paris and watched Fidus approaching in the southeast; we were aimed to pass between him and Jupiter. As for the giant himself, he filled half the heavens.

After a while I thought of what Johnnie had said about looking further ahead than the astronomers; and took a sight at the spot in the heavens where Mars disappeared into Saturn. I was amazed to see the triangular pinkish flare immensely larger, so large as to rival Saturn himself.

"We are analyzing it now," said the astronomer to whom I appealed. "Just a moment." I waited, and shortly he came running to his mirror in great excitement.

"It's the M-Rays!" he shouted violently. "Those damned devils fired at us! The thing is coming straight for the earth!"

I ran from the mirror and found Ray and Johnnie. By this time the astronomers were making the formal announcement that the red planet had loosed a final attempt at revenge. They stated that the rays were traveling at such a rate as to insure their reaching the earth.

"As to what effect they may have, we can only guess. It is reasonable to suppose that they are capable of overheating our atmosphere. We can do nothing whatever but wait. The impact will occur about twenty-one o'clock, C. T."

We three had gone through too much recently to be upset by this news, yet we forced ourselves to keep awake until the end. It gave Ray plenty of time to think of her problem in a new light.

The flare increased steadily in size, without in the slightest degree reducing its brilliance. In a short time it rivaled Jupiter in conspicuousness. The world awaited its arrival in feverish anxiety.

It was five minutes of the hour when Johnnie, who was at the mirror, gave a great shout of relief. "Wait!" he cried. "There's a pleasant surprise in store for us." He made us wait a couple of minutes before he let us look into the phone.

What I saw was a fitting climax to all that had gone before. Gliding in between the M-Rays and the earth was Fidus, the tiny satellite which we had all but ignored. Such was the timing of the event, that the little moon struck the rays squarely at the exact moment they reached his orbit. Instantly he burst into flames. There was no slow rise of vapor; it happened so rapidly, because the distance was so short, that the little round orb almost instantaneously changed into a seething, boiling ball of rose-colored fire.

"By Jove, we've escaped!" I exclaimed, my voice hollow with awe. It seemed—the Almighty.

But Johnnie was watching closely. "Fidus has absorbed almost all the rays," he announced suddenly; then glanced up sharply. "There's a tiny tip of the triangle left, which the disk did not cover. And it's coming right along!"

There was little time to wait. By some queer chance the rays were pointed toward our own quarter of the globe; we could see that the tip was due to strike somewhere to our west. It was traveling at a terrific rate, and struck in a few seconds.

Looking out over the Yosemite we saw the beam fall on the western horizon. There was no sound, at first, but instantly a dense cloud of vapor arose. "It struck water," commented Johnnie. After a minute the report came from Lick Observatory that the rays had stopped in the Pacific, a few miles from the coast.

There was another short pause, and then came the storm. I never want to experience such another. I have passed through some extremely violent hurricanes in the East Indies, but none quite as bad as this. It was the intense heat of the rays; they turned a part of the sea into a veritable caldron, and upset the careful balance of pressures.

Considerable damage was done in our immediate neighborhood, to say nothing of an immense amount of destruction along the coast. Ray's house escaped, however, except for having all her windows smashed. Within half an hour the commotion died down.

We had remained in the observatory because of its substantial construction. I made the first remark.

"I said they would be hounds, and so they were. Martians!—dogs! Dogs in a manger. If that whole discharge had struck us, this wind would have blown fast enough to have taken all the air off the earth. We would be suffocated. I'm glad they're gone!"

Johnnie said nothing. He was busy adjusting the mirror, which had been blown over. I glanced at Ray and was startled to see in her face the exact reflection of my own anger and relief. She took a step or two toward Johnnie.

"Mister inventor," she said tremulously. Her eyes were very big and moist and piteous; but she forced her mouth to twitch at the corners. "I guess you knew more about them than I did—I'll be good now." And she put on the air of a child who has asked for candy and doesn't know whether it will be forthcoming. Only—had it been me, now, I wouldn't have kept her waiting.

Abruptly Johnnie turned around. His face was suffused with a broad grin, and his voice was boyishly frank again. "If I am approached in the proper manner, I think I can be induced to kiss you!"

But it was he who did the approaching. I turned away in time to avoid seeing what happened, but I heard the sound. And now I was at a loss to know how to conceal my own feelings. They should not know how my heart ached. The phone came to my rescue. It was the chairman.

"The trouble in the Pacific is little more than local," he stated. "Fidus is reduced to flames. The earth is absolutely safe, and just entering the upper atmosphere of Jupiter according to program!"

He was answered by a mighty cheer, the pent-up feelings of billions of relieved and triumphant humans going into the sound. For several minutes the rejoicing continued, then it broke and a word began to make itself heard. In a moment it predominated. "Johnnie!" they were shouting. It became unanimous. "Johnnie! *Johnnie!*"

He tore himself from Ray and stepped into focus. He began with some trivial joke about the satellite which had become all "light"; I couldn't make it out in the confusion. But he went on to thank them for their confidence in the scientists whom he represented. He named some of them individually, and disclaimed any personal credit for the enterprise whatever.

"The idea was an inspiration, and inspirations come from a superhuman source." He hesitated diffidently, and added in a lower tone: "If you feel like praying, now is a fine time to thank God."

He stood for a while with bent head, and the intense silence which followed was the most impressive thing about the whole affair. By and by—"Don't be too hasty about driving to the surface. Remember how slowly and carefully we had to proceed with the Cone."

He irreverently gave way to a tremendous yawn. Instantly an answering gasp came from the rest of the world; and then we all laughed. Can you imagine that hilarity? Johnnie started to leave the

booth, saying: "I guess we need sleep more than anything else right now"; but Ray stepped up beside him.

Her face was scarlet, but her chin was resolute. "If any of you girls have designs upon this boy, you'll have to take him from me by main force." Her eyes sparkled mischievously. "He's my choice and I'm his."

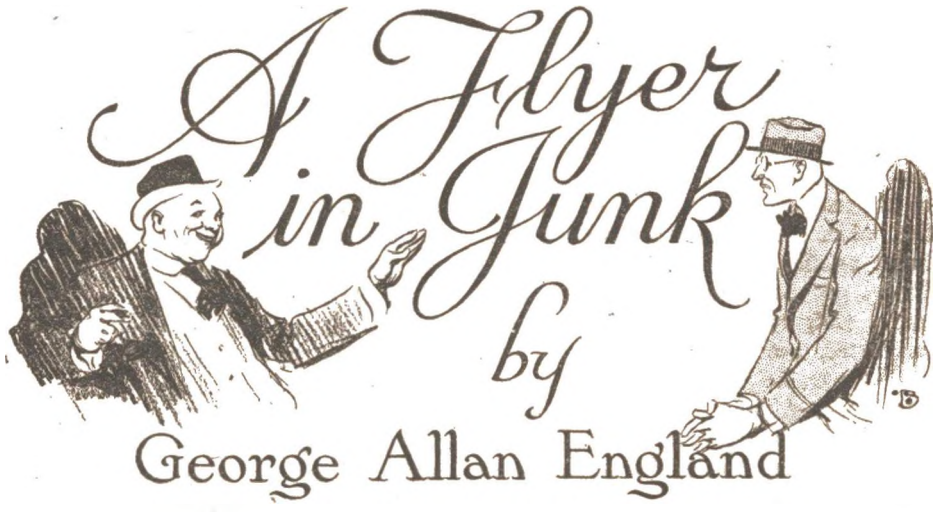
There was no mistaking the vociferous response that came from the phone. The world knew Ray and thought it well.

But the chairman saw a chance to badger the inventor. He interrupted in a tone of mock bluster. "You started out to find a place for us to overflow upon. What are you going to do with us when we finally outgrow Jupiter, hey?"

Johnnie desperately stifled a yawn, and assumed an air of indifference. "Here's your solar system," and he waved a hand grandiloquently. "And there's the stars. Every one of 'em means more planets. You've got the Cones, haven't you? Well —help yourselves!"

He yawned until I feared for the worst. Then he smiled apologetically: "Good night!"

(The end.)



THE stout, expansive man with the pompadour lighted still another cigar, leaned back against the leather cushion of the Pullman smiling.

"As a deal, it was some deal, believe *me!*" he remarked, contemplating the serious-looking man with the horn spectacles, who sat opposite. "It ain't every day o' the week you can pull off a stunt like that, an' get away with it!"

"You say the guy that fell for it, and that you wished the old boat off onto, claimed to be wise to cars?" asked the young fellow in the striped suit, inhaling a lungful of Egyptian smoke.

"An' then some!" chuckled the stout man. "He wasn't after it, for himself. No, he was buyin' for another guy—man by the name of Robinson, from Boston. The way he put it to me, this Robinson didn't claim to be no Solomon in the buzz-buggy-business. Didn't trust his own judgment in buyin' no second-hand wagon, an' so got him to O.K. the machine. That's what makes me laugh, even now, when I think of it!"

The stout man cacchinated, and blew smoke. He of the horn spectacles fixed an interested gaze upon him.

"'I know 'em from tires to top,' says this duck, when he comes to give Liz the once-over. Liz was her name. Just Liz. 'What I say to Robinson, goes. I have *cart blonk*,' says he. Well, when I got through with him, it wasn't *cart blonk* he had, but cart junk. Say! They don't slip

anything much over on Jimmy Dill—that's me!"

"Was she really on the fritz?" asked the young fellow, while the serious-looking man lent an interested ear.

"Fritz? You said somethin'! Fritziest ever! She was an old *Buck* model seventeen, to begin with, crop of 1912. Seven-pass., rebuilt to runabout shape. Sixth-hand when I got her from a guy that had gave her up in despair. I paid him a hundred an' give him five three-dollar meal-tickets in my café. I run the Alarm Café in Revere, see? Battleship gray, she was. Sixty H. P., with cylinders as big as pails, an' took a pail o' gas, too, every time she coughed."

"Some baby, eh?" inquired the young man, with approbation.

"Oh, boy! Two men to crank her—one to throw her an' the other to hold his hand over the intake—an' throwin' her was a Sandow job, or a Gotch, at that. You had to pump up the gas by hand, every few miles, when the pump was workin', which it most usually wasn't, an' then you'd stall till you got her patched. An' no emergency. Only a foot-brake; an' one time she busted her universal on me downgrade in a traffic-jam. An' maybe I didn't sweat blood, skiddin' her through—but she coasted right to a garage an' stopped outside, an' all they had to do was come out an' haul her in!"

"So you sold her, did you?" interrogated the horn spectacles. "Unloaded her on some sucker?"

"*Did* I? But wait till I tell you some more about her. She had her faults, even when I got her, a-plenty. But travel? Say! I never *did* dare open her up, full. When she really got goin'—an' sometimes she could be started in less 'n fifteen minutes—why, there wasn't no such things as hills to her. She went wild, simply wild over hills. An' on the level stretches she dusted 'em all. Just a gray streak. Zowie! Never needed no horn, nor nothin'. Make a noise like a pewmatic riveter on a jag. Hear her two mile off. *Some* boat!"

Jimmy Dill puffed smoke-arrows, heavily, and nodded strong confirmation. The serious-looking man's interest seemed growing ever greater. Dill continued with enthusiasm:

"Liz was good, 'spite of all her kick-ups, till last spring. Then she slumped sudden, though she still kept flyin'. She was a flyer, even if she begun to show signs of bein' junk. Tires begun to go bad, with a slow leak in one that we couldn't fix, noway—all wearin' down, an' no more o' them bolted-on kind to be had. One lug of her cylinder-casin' cracked off, too. That was bad. Supposin' another went, while she was doin' sixty, an' the engine dropped out? Flowers for yours truly.

"Magneto went on the blink, too, an' cylinders wore crooked, so oil worked up, an' she'd only run a few miles hittin' on four. Then she begin coughin' till you'd clean the plugs again. Who the devil can clean plugs every five miles? Her feed got leakin', too, so you couldn't pump her up without lamin' yourself. An' her gear-shift busted, some way or 'nother, so for a while she'd only run on low—I once brought her home, sixteen mile, on low—an' then all of a sudden she'd only run on high. After a lot o' tinkerin', we got her to run on low an' high, but no second. An' boy! The times I used to have, tryin' to coax her from low to high!

"I begun to think I'd have to scrap her. But it was only after her radiator blew out, while I was to Ellengone out in the country, an' I had to plug it with chewin' gum, an' then she took to back-firin', an' I had to be towed in by a fliv, on the end of thirty foot o' barb-wire that we cut off'n a farmer's fence, that I phoned Levitsky.

"Levitsky, the junkman, come an' said fifty beans on the hoof, as she stood. I was strong for the fifty, but Bill Hemingway, friend o' mine—he's in the garridge business, Bill is—says I can maybe do better. So I canned Levitsky an' put an ad in the paper, no price set. An' severial guys come an' give her the o. o., an' then blow. Till at last this here wise duck, sent by this here Robinson, arrives.

II.

"I HAS Liz already runnin' an' I'm loaded for bear, when he shows up, 'cause

he's already phoned me he's comin', an' I'm not takin' no chances on not bein' able to start her. It's kind of noisy, down by the Alarm Café, with lots of electrics and et cet, so Liz don't sound so awful conspicuous. She's all washed an' polished, anyhow, an' that's half a sale. The wise duck gives her the up-an'-down, an' then he says, says he:

" ' Demonstrate her, will you?'

" ' Demonstrate is my middle name,' says I. ' All goods strickly as represented, or no sale. I wouldn't take a dollar of any man's money on no false misrepresentations,' I says. ' Money back if not sound an' kind. Get right in, mister, an' we'll hop to it!'

" So the wise guy gets in, an' I prepares to make Liz do or die, or perish in the attempt.

" I has her all loaded for bear, o' course, like I said before. Got enough gas pumped inta the tank on the dash to last her five mile, an' the plugs all clean, an' tires all pumped hard—I'm prayin' harder than the tires is, they won't blow—an' I got a new set o' batt'ries in, an' got her wired so that when I let on to throw her onta the mag., she'll still be on bats. The mag.'s out o' commission, total.

" An' I has her on the stiff down-grade front o' the café, so she'll slip from low inta high, without makin' no kick-up. So that's all right. So he's gets in, the wise duck does, an' away we blows.

" Half-way down the grade, I shift her an' get away with it, O. K. The noisy street camouflages the kick-up in the engine so it ain't very raw. I pushes her out onta the boulevard, an' lets her out, an' boy! Does she hike? Some! The wise duck has to take his dicer off an' hold it in his lap, to keep it, an' the way we passes everythin' is a wonder.

" So far, it's pie with ice-cream on top, but my heart's in my mouth about the big hill. Everybody always has to go into second, on that doggone hill, you see, an' Liz ain't got no second. I try to turn off toward the beach road, but the wise duck says ' No, let's try her out on the hill,' so that's all off. So I decides I'll try to rush the hill, an' trust to prayer an' luck, when flap-flap-flap somethin' begins goin', on her right hind leg.

" ' What's that?' asks the w. d., anxious.

" ' Oh, nothin',' says I, easy-like. ' She's maybe picked up a piece o' hoop, or a lath, or somethin'.'

" ' Better stop an' have a look, hadn't you?'

" I'm sweatin' blood. If I stop, I can't never make that hill, an' if I don't, Lord knows what'll bust. I takes chances—there ain't nothin' else to do—an' charges the hill. Man! How noble old Liz answers me! Up an' over she goes, full lung-power, an' straightens out on the level again. Whew! But there's more sweat on my manly brow than what the thermometer could account for!"

" You had a hard time disposing of your bunch of fossilized pigiron, on a guarantee to return the money if not as represented, didn't you?" inquired the gentleman with the horn glasses, a bit cynically. " Your narrative interests me, decidedly. What happened next?"

" Next? Oh, after we're over the top, I stops Liz on a good startin' grade, jumps out, an' finds one tire's gettin' ready to lay down on the job an' die. There's a long strip o' rubber, loose, that's been whackin' against the mud-guard. I yanks it off, drops it in the road an' climbs back, smilin', though my heart's half-dead, 'cause that there tire's liable to blow worse 'n a whale, any old time, an' I got no spare.

" ' Well, what was it?' asks the w. d.

" Oh, nothin'—piece of a barrel-hoop,' says I.

" ' Puncture?'

" ' Naw! These here tires is puncture-proof, anyhow,' I says, an' away we slides, again. But all the time I'm watchin' the speedometer careful an' anxious, 'cause if my five miles o' gas runs out, I'm done. So, pretty soon, I rounds back towards town, again. An' now Liz begins to skip. Three's all she'll hit on.

" ' Hello,' says the w. d. ' What now?'

" ' Nothin' at all,' I assures him, smilin' confidential. ' Dirty plug. *That* don't signify. Ain't been cleaned in six months. She's some little bearcat to travel, ain't she?'

"The duck allows she is, an' so there's no more said. I'm prayin' hard we'll reach the café without no traffic hold-up. If I ever have to go inta low, I'm done. Once she's on low, on level ground, you couldn't get her inta high with dynamite. But Liz's luck holds. Nothin' jams us. An' so, pretty soon, there we are again, back front o' the café, with her nose down-hill. I makes a snappy stop with the foot-brake an' crams her wheel against the curb, to hold her from runnin' away.

"'Why don't you put on your emergency?' asks the duck.

"I only scorns him.

"Emergency, nothin'!' says I. 'No such animal, on *this* boat. She's a racin' car, stripped light. I thought you said you was hep to cars, tires to top!'

"That settles the duck. He climbs out, puts on his hat, shoves his mitts down in his pockets, an' looks wise.

"'Well, mister,' says I, 'can she travel, or can't she?'

"'She sure can, but—'

"'Is she some classy boat, or ain't she? What?'

"'Classy is right,' he answers, while Bill Hemingway, who's been layin' in the offin', so to speak, lays off from layin' in the offin' an' lays alongside. Bill assumes a flankin' position, to reinforce me. 'She's classy, speedy an' all that,' the duck says, 'but—well—'

"'No well to it!' I interrupts, lookin' at my watch as if I had a dozen dates. 'You gotta talk turkey to me, right off the bat. I got six offers, already. There's only one one boat like this here, in the world,' says I, which is strictly true, 'an' it's the lucky man that gets her,' which is what I call a flight of imagination. 'She's liable to be gone in an hour. What's your best offer?'

"'Hundred an' fifty,' says the w. d.

"My mouth's just openin' to yell: 'Gimme it!,' when Bill, he horns in with:

"'Nothin' doin'!' His tone's indignant. 'I guess not! Nix on the one-fifty. Say, I wouldn't let my own brother have it for no such slaughter price!'

"'What's your lowest?' asks the w. d., anxious.

"I'm just goin' to bust inta tears an' fall on my knees, implorin' Bill to keep out an' not grab me from drawin' down three times what Liz is worth even for junk, but he elbows me out. The duck squints at Liz, an' then says, says he:

"'I'm not buyin' for myself, you understand, but for a friend o' mine, name o' Robinson. What's your very lowest?'

"'Name a figure yourself,' says Bill, cool as one o' my frozen puddin's. 'You know the car. You've had a full demonstration, an' she's all as represented. She's just as you see her, an' no comeback if purchased. Ever see a boat any classier?'

"'Oh, she's good, all right.'

"'As an expert, now I ask you, is she the goods or ain't she?'

"'She can travel, I admit. She's certainly there!'

"'Name a figure!'

"'One sixty-five, an' that's the last cent I'll go!'

"'Mister, you've bought a car!' says Bill, holdin' out his hand. 'Congratulations!'

"Somethin' kind of seems to rise up an' cloud my sight, like I was faintin'. When I comes to, gets my eyes open again an' catches my breath—when I comes up for air, you might say—the duck is diggin' up eight new twenties an' a V. I'm still gaspin', like, but Bill shoves me into the camouflage, or the background, or somethin', while the duck climbs inta Liz.

"'Good luck,' says Bill, wavin' his hand, as Liz slides away down hill. 'Here's hopin' Robinson will find her sound an' kind, an' be as glad to get her as we're glad to do him a favor an' let him have her. I congratulate you on havin' bought the only car in the world like her—the only original Liz. Good luck an' goodby!'

"Away the duck goes, down the hill an' round the corner, with Liz still hittin' on three an' the slow leak bringin' one front tire nearly flat, an' now an' then back-firin' like a Krupp. An' that's the last I ever see or either the Duck or Liz. I never sees Robinson, nor hear of him, neither. He's a game spoht an' a good loser, I'll say that for him. Ain't he? What?"

The young man in the striped suit nodded, grinning. The man with the horn

glasses looked very thoughtful, very grave. A little silence fell in the smoking-compartment, while from the engine sounded a long whistle, announcing an approaching stop.

"Great stuff!" suddenly exclaimed the young man, with enthusiasm, as he slapped his knee. "That's the best put-over I ever heard, in the boat line!" He turned to the man in the horn glasses. "Well, what d'you think of it? You don't seem to fall for it very strong, do you?"

"No, I don't," answered the man in the horn spectacles. "As a matter of fact, I'm Robinson!"

III.

THE man with the pompadour stared vacantly. His jaw dropped.

"Good *night!*" he ejaculated. "*You?*"

"I have that honor, sir."

"Go on! You ain't the guy that the wise duck bought Liz for?"

The gentleman with the horn glasses drew out his card-case, looked it through, chose a card and presented it.

"At your service," he answered.

He of the pompadour read:

WILLIAM F. ROBINSON
Attorney-at-Law
27 Pearl St., Boston

For a moment, the blankest silence fell that had ever permeated that smoking-compartment. Then Pompadour gulped, wiping his brow with a tremulous hand:

"Good night! I—I sure spilled the beans that time!"

"The beans, sir, are certainly spilled," answered Horn Glasses. "The entire pot-ful. And that is not all. Now that I know the complete inside story of the infamous fraud perpetrated on me, the same constituting a clear case of obtaining money under false pretenses, I call on you to make complete restitution, or suffer the consequences!" His eyes were severe, through the big glasses. Impressively he tapped the leather-covered arm of the divan. "The car is worthless, absolutely and entirely worthless. Junk, indeed, and nothing else. I was obliged to sell her for such. I received but forty-five dollars for her. Your story, sir, has been heard by witness. Do you wish to settle with me privately, or would you rather have me take the matter into court?"

"I—I guess I'd rather settle, but—"

"Very well, sir. The sum of one hundred and twenty dollars will liquidate your indebtedness."

"But I—I ain't got that much on me!"

"How much have you, sir?"

"Ninety-two, sixty!"

"Very well. I will be reasonable. I will accept ninety dollars in complete settlement of all claims. Otherwise—well, matters must take their course."

Jimmy Dill passed a hand up over his pompadour, then, resigning himself to the inevitable, pulled out his bill-fold and paid up. Horn Spectacles very gravely pocketed the money. Then, as the brakes began to grit, he reached for his suit-case, stood up and putting on his hat left the car.

Dill, in a collapse against the cushions, feebly shook his head.

"Can you beat it?" he whispered huskily. "Good night! *Can—you—beat—it?*"

IV.

As the train pulled out of the little way-station, Horn Spectacles stood gazing after it, with a smile.

"Not too bad, for a casual bit of business," said he contemplatively. "Ninety beans don't grow on every bush, but a little 'bush' seems to have produced ninety. Some cinch, eh?

"Good idea to carry a full assortment of cards, comprising all the more common names. A man in my line of high-grade confidence specialties never knows when one or the other will come in handy. Now, for instance, if I hadn't just happened to have a card with the name 'Robinson' on it, this flier in junk couldn't have been pulled across, and I'd have been out ninety.

"I wonder who Robinson really was, though, and what happened to Liz?

"I wonder!"

The Moving Finger

by Natalie Sumner Lincoln

Author of "The Nameless Man," "I Spy," "The Trevor Case," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

MANY persons were linked closely with the strange and startling death of Bruce Brainard, well-known mining engineer, and guest of Mrs. Porter in "Dewdrop Inn," her Virginian home.

There were Vera Deane, night nurse for Craig Porter, Mrs. Porter's son and a helpless paralytic as a result of an aviation accident in France; Dr. Noyes, of the British army, who was gradually bringing a cure about in Craig; Dr. Beverly Thorne, almost hereditary enemy of the Porters, though he lived next door; Mrs. Christine Hall, the day nurse; Millicent Porter, Craig's sister, who was reported to be engaged to the dead man; Hugh Wyndham, her cousin and nominal head of the house; Mrs. Porter herself; Dorothy Deane, Vera's sister and a society editor in Washington—the list was a long one. All the servants came under suspicion, from Murray, the footman, down to Selby, the butler.

For Bruce Brainard, who had been sent to bed the night before by Dr. Noyes following a slight attack of vertigo, was found there in the morning by Vera Deane with his throat slit almost from ear to ear, and a razor lying by his hand on the blood-stained bed.

When Coroner Black arrived, following Dr. Thorne, who came also in his official capacity of justice of the peace, it was soon established that Brainard had not killed himself. For he was a normally right-handed man, and the gash in his throat extended from under his right ear toward the left. Also, he had been suffering from a tumor of the brain.

But the ownership of the razor could not be established. It was not a common one at all, but evidently one of a set, for its handle was marked "Monday," while the morning of the finding of his body was Tuesday.

The strange part of it was, however, that Dr. Noyes, whom Murray had seen the night before stropping a razor in his room, was missing. Mrs. Porter explained to the coroner that the doctor was expecting hourly a summons back to his work, and that in all probability he had been called during the night.

Meanwhile Dorothy Deane, society editor, was struggling bravely against the after effects of a heavy night in the nation's capital. She saw the head-lines in the papers, and was thunderstruck. And then Seaton, a reporter, supplemented the meager first reports.

Murdered! Dorothy stared at him aghast. Bruce Brainard murdered—and under the same roof with her sister, Vera—and Hugh Wyndham! Something snapped inside her brain—

"Hully gee! Help, boys!" roared Seaton, bending over her. "She's fainted!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE WALL BETWEEN.

VERA DEANE scanned the handsomely appointed dinner-table and its vacant places with mixed feelings, and Murray, hovering solicitously behind her chair, answered her unspoken thought.

"Mrs. Porter and Miss Millicent are taking dinner in their boudoir," he explained. "Selby is serving them, and Mrs. Porter gave most particular orders that you should have a good dinner, Miss Deane."

"I don't believe I can eat," protested Vera, declining bread and butter. "I have no appetite to-night."

"Just try this soup, miss," coaxed Mur-

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for March 2.

ray. " It's one of cook's specialties. And you know, miss," added Murray artfully, setting the plate with its smoking contents before her, " what with one thing and another, they've given you no rest to-day, and Dr. Noyes always said humans must eat to keep their machinery going."

" Quite true," smiled Vera. Murray was a favorite of hers, and his extreme loquaciousness often amused her. The footman was too well trained to overstep the gulf lying between their positions; he had been told off to wait upon the nurses and assist them in their care of Craig Porter on the latter's arrival from France, and, having a natural aptitude for caring for the sick, they found him extremely useful.

Vera had not been slow in discovering Murray's one hobby, a hobby which, seven years before, had almost cost him his place, Mrs. Porter not having taken kindly to his lugubrious countenance and depressed manner when waiting upon the table. She expressed her feelings to his former employer, a friend of long standing, who responded impressively: " My dear, Murray's an excellent servant, with one little weakness—his health. The more certain he is that he suffers from a mortal disease, the more enjoyment he gets out of life. Just ask him now and then, ' Murray, how are you feeling?' and he will be your slave."

Mrs. Porter had promptly followed the advice, and whenever she found the footman looking preternaturally solemn had cheered him immensely by inquiring for his health.

Both Nurse Hall and Vera Deane had quickly discovered his hobby, and the younger nurse had advanced in his esteem by listening patiently to descriptions of every new symptom his fancy conjured up. The fact that he failed lamentably in the proper use of medical and anatomical terms never disturbed him—his last confidence to Dr. Noyes having been that he was suffering from inflammation of the semicolon.

Vera found Murray's opinion of the excellence of the soup justified, and ate the remainder of the dinner with more zest than she had imagined possible an hour before. The relief of being alone was an additional fillip to her jaded nerves.

Upon being excused from the inquest that afternoon she had gone at once to the branch telephone in Mrs. Porter's boudoir, only to find that the instrument had been disconnected and that she could not communicate with her sister, Dorothy. She had then returned to Craig Porter's bedroom, and in trying to satisfy Mrs. Hall's insatiable curiosity as to what had transpired at the inquest, she had had no time to herself before dinner was announced.

" No coffee to-night, Murray," she said, pushing back her chair. " I am going upstairs to Mr. Porter, so that Mrs. Hall can have her dinner immediately."

" Mrs. Hall had tea earlier in the afternoon," was Murray's unexpected response. " She told me that Mrs. Porter had given her permission to spend the night in Washington."

" Oh!" Vera's expression was blank. " Is Mrs. Porter sending her into town?"

" No, miss; Mr. Hugh took the car just after the inquest adjourned and hasn't returned yet. I hear tell "—Murray paused, dessert dish in hand—" that Mrs. Hall arranged with one of the 'tecs to have a taxi sent out from the city for her." And without more ado he disappeared into the pantry.

Vera was a trifle out of breath when she entered Craig Porter's bedroom. Mrs. Hall, chart in hand, was standing by the mahogany desk, and her face cleared at sight of Vera.

" Why didn't you let me know you wished to go off duty a little earlier?" asked Vera reproachfully. " I would have hurried back—"

" Because I knew it would rest you to have your dinner in peace and quiet. I have arranged Mr. Porter for the night and given him his nourishment. All you have to do is to follow the doctor's directions; they are pinned to the chart."

" Of course I will follow the doctor's orders," responded Vera, much offended by her companion's manner as well as her words, " I will obey instructions as I have done heretofore."

Mrs. Hall looked at her oddly, a look which Vera missed as she crossed the room to arrange the window-blinds.

" Are you nervous about staying up alone next to that?" asked Mrs. Hall, and a turn of her head indicated the room occupied by Bruce Brainard the night before.

" Not in the least," answered Vera; she was having some difficulty in closing the heavy outside blinds and her voice was somewhat muffled. She jerked her head inside the room again and closed the window. " There is a motor-car coming up the drive—it looks like a taxi."

" It's probably for me." And Mrs. Hall disappeared into the dressing-room which connected Craig Porter's bedroom and the room which she and Vera shared.

Left to herself Vera went thoughtfully over to the desk. She was still writing when Mrs. Hall reappeared, bag in hand.

" Will you please mail this letter for me in the city?" asked Vera. " I won't be a moment finishing it."

" You'll find blotting-paper in the lower desk-drawer," announced Mrs. Hall, stoping to button her heavy coat up about her throat. " It wastes time blowing on the ink." Vera reddened. " If it is only a note to your sister, why not give me a verbal message?"

Vera's color deepened. " I prefer to write," she answered stiffly.

" As you wish; I only made the suggestion to save time," and Mrs. Hall glanced significantly at the clock.

Vera's hot temper got the upper hand. " On second thought, I'll not detain you longer," she said, and her long, slender fingers made mince-meat of the letter she had been writing. With a mumbled " good night," Mrs. Hall left the room, and, turning, Vera stared contemplatively at the door.

What had come over her companion? It was not like Mrs. Hall to be so cantankerous.

Vera spent the next hour in performing her accustomed duties, and when she finally took her seat near the shaded night light she was conscious of utter weariness, a weariness more akin to mental exhaustion than she had known in many months. The day's horrors were telling upon her, and her mental state was reacting upon her physical strength.

A footstep outside the partly open hall door caused her to hasten across the room as Murray appeared, tray in hand.

" Cook sent some broth to-night as well as the sandwiches," he said, lowering his voice as he tiptoed into the room and placed the tray on a side table. " She thought you would like to have something hot in the early morning, and I put the broth in the thermos bottle."

" That was very kind and thoughtful of you both," exclaimed Vera gratefully. " Please thank cook for me."

" Yes, miss." Murray tiptoed over to the bed and looked at Craig Porter, who lay with his eyes closed, his face matching the sheets in whiteness. The almost imperceptible rise and fall of his chest was the only indication that life still lingered in the paralyzed body. Shaking his head, Murray retreated to the hall door.

" I'm thinking the young master's health will have a setback, now Dr. Noyes has gone," he said sorrowfully. " And he was improving so finely."

" We are keeping up the same treatment," replied Vera. " Good night, Murray, and thank you."

Pausing only long enough to see if her patient required attention, Vera returned to her chair, and in its comfortable, upholstered depths her tired muscles relaxed, and she half lay, half sat at ease and surveyed her surroundings. The room and its furnishings were well worth a second look, but an attraction which Vera was powerless to conquer drew her eyes to the transom in the wall separating the room she sat in and the one which had harbored the grim tragedy of the night before.

In her excited state of mind she half expected to see the same faint light appear through the transom which had shone there twenty-odd hours before, but the darkness in the next room was unrelieved. However, even the patch of darkness gave full play to her morbid fancies, and with a shudder she turned her head away—to find Mrs. Porter standing by her side.

Too startled to move she gazed in amazement at her employer.

" I slipped in through your bedroom so as not to disturb Craig," explained Mrs.

Porter in a subdued tone. "The other door lets in so much light from the hall when opened. I have something to say to you—"

"Yes, Mrs. Porter." Vera was on her feet. "Will you sit here, or shall we—"

"Is Craig asleep?"

Vera moved over to the bed and bent over her patient, then returned.

"Yes, he is still slumbering," she announced.

"Then I will sit here." Mrs. Porter pulled forward a companion chair to the one Vera had vacated. "If we speak low our voices cannot disturb Craig in this large room. How is he to-night?"

Vera hesitated, and Mrs. Porter, her eyes sharpened by love, saw it even in the dim night light, and one hand went to her heart.

"I really think Mr. Porter is the same," answered Vera hastily. "I see—no change."

A heavy sigh broke from Mrs. Porter. "Why couldn't Alan Noyes have stayed?" she moaned. "Why such mad haste? I would have paid him any price—done anything, in and out of reason, to insure my boy having his skilled medical attendance. And now—"

Never before had Vera seen Mrs. Porter's composure shaken, and as she looked at her grief-stricken face a compassion and understanding of the woman she had deemed all-worldly moved her. Impulsively she extended her hands in ready sympathy, and Mrs. Porter clasped them eagerly.

"Don't borrow trouble, dear Mrs. Porter," she entreated. "Dr. Washburn stands very high in the profession—"

"But he can't come." Mrs. Porter dashed tears from her eyes. "He has just sent word that he is ill with pleurisy, and recommends that I send for Dr. Beverly Thorne."

"What?" Vera studied her intently. "Will you follow Dr. Washburn's advice?"

"And send for Beverly Thorne?" with bitter emphasis. "I wouldn't have that man attend a sick cat! Oh, why didn't I close this house and go back to the city?"

Vera was discreetly silent. Mrs. Porter had carried her point of wintering in the country against the, at first, outspoken indignation of Millicent and the veiled opposition of Hugh Wyndham; but that was hardly the moment to remind Mrs. Porter that by having her own way she had herself to thank for their isolated position.

Mrs. Porter continued her remarks, heedless of Vera's silence. "And poor Millicent is cut off from young companionship just at the moment when she needs her friends. By the way"—bending eagerly forward—"can't your sister come and stay with Millicent?"

"Dorothy—stay here?" Vera half rose, her eyes dilating.

"Why not?" demanded Mrs. Porter. "The two girls were chums at boarding-school, even if they haven't seen much of each other for several years, and I imagine you know Hugh's opinion of Dorothy—"

Vera nodded dumbly.

"I've always been very fond of Dorothy, and I can't understand, Vera, why you permitted her to go into newspaper work," in reproachful accents.

"Dorothy is old enough now to judge for herself," said Vera wearily. "She selected newspaper work for various reasons, and I must say," with quick pride, "Dorothy has done well in that profession."

"I know she has, and I admire her for it." Mrs. Porter spoke warmly, and Vera colored with pleasure. "Do put your clever wits to work, Vera, and arrange it so that Dorothy can get leave from her office and spend a week here at the least. Her cheerful society will do Millicent good.

"I wish, my dear, that I could see more of you," and Mrs. Porter impulsively kissed her. "But you sleep all day and work all night, and I sleep all night."

She rose abruptly. "I must go back to Millicent; the child is grieving her heart out." She made a hesitating step toward the door leading into Vera's bedroom. "Did you mention in your testimony at the inquest this afternoon that you saw Millicent down in the library when you went to telephone to the coroner?"

"No." Vera caught the look of relief which lighted Mrs. Porter's eyes for a brief instant, then the older woman continued on her way to the door, but stopped again on its threshold.

" Do you know what became of the key to the next room after they removed Mr. Brainard's body to the morgue in Alexandria?" she asked.

" No, I was asleep at that hour." Vera came nearer. " Is the bedroom locked?"

" Yes. I suppose the police—" Mrs. Porter's voice trailed off, then she added, " Good-night," and was gone.

Vera went thoughtfully over to the bedside, and seeing that Craig Porter still slept, she moved over to the desk and, picking up a pad and pencil, tried to reduce her ideas to writing. The words repeated to her by Mrs. Hall, who had been told the jury's verdict by the coroner, recurred to her:

> We find that Bruce Brainard came to his death while spending the night at the residence of Mrs. Lawrence Porter, between the hours of one and five in the morning of January 8, from the severing of the carotid artery in his throat, and from the nature of the wound and other evidence produced here, we find that he was foully murdered by a party or parties unknown.

" By a party *unknown*," Vera murmured, dashing her pencil through the words she had scrawled on her pad. " But how long will the 'party' remain 'unknown'—Merciful God! If there was only some one I could turn to!" and she wrung her hands as she gazed despairingly at the desk calendar.

A low tap at the hall door aroused her, and hastening across the room, she looked into the hall. Murray was standing by the door.

" Your sister is out on the portico, miss," he announced in a low voice.

" Dorothy—here—at this hour?" Vera looked at the footman in amazement.

" It isn't so very late, miss, not yet eleven," explained Murray. " I asked Miss Dorothy in, but she said she didn't wish to disturb any one; only wanted a word with you."

Vera viewed the footman in silence, then came to a sudden decision. " Very well, I will go down-stairs. You remain with Mr. Porter, Murray, until I return."

" Yes, miss." And Murray, waiting respectfully for her to step into the hall, entered the bedroom and closed the door.

On reaching the front hall Vera paused long enough to slip on Millicent Porter's sport coat which was hanging from the hat stand, and, putting up the latch, she walked out on the portico, and stopped abruptly on finding herself alone. A low hail from a taxi standing a slight distance down the driveway caused her to look in that direction, and she saw Dorothy's face at its window. A second more and she stood by the taxi door, held invitingly open by Dorothy.

" Are you mad, Dorothy?" she demanded, keeping her voice lowered in spite of her anger. " To come out here at this hour of the night!"

" It's perfectly all right," retorted Dorothy. " William, our old coachman, brought me out in his taxi," pointing to a man in chauffeur's livery who stood some little distance away. " Did you think I could stay away, Vera, when I heard—"

" What have you heard?" The question shot from Vera.

" That you found Bruce with his throat cut—" Dorothy drew in her breath sharply. " I never dreamed he would kill himself—"

" The coroner's jury called it murder," said Vera dully.

" Whom do they suspect?" gasped Dorothy.

" I imagine Dr. Noyes."

" Dr. Noyes!" in profound astonishment. " Why?"

" Chiefly because of his sudden departure without bidding any one good-by."

" But—but—the motive? Heavens! Did *he* know Bruce?" And Vera leaned forward from the taxi, so that the moonlight fell full on her face.

" He met him last night," with dry emphasis, and Dorothy moved restlessly. " Listen, Dorothy, I can stay but a moment longer. If you should be questioned, remember that at the inquest I did not mention that I had ever seen Bruce Brainard before last night, and that I have not confided to any one in the Porter house that I ever heard of him before."

" But—but—Hugh knows."

" Hugh Wyndham!" Vera clutched the door of the car for support. " Did you tell him to-night?"

" No, I haven't seen him for over a week.

I—" But Vera did not give her time to finish her sentence.

"Dorothy, were you so foolish—my God! You didn't mention *names* to Hugh?"

Her sister nodded dumbly.

From one of the leafless trees far down the lawn an owl hooted derisively as a light footstep crunched the gravel just behind Vera, and she swung quickly about. The front door of the house was wide open and a stream of light illuminated the portico.

Millicent Porter, approaching nearer, recognized Vera and her sister, and darted to the side of the car with a glad cry of welcome.

"Dorothy, you've come!" she exclaimed, seizing her hands. "I told Hugh not to return without you."

Dorothy glanced in speechless surprise from Vera to Millicent, then back, almost pleadingly, to her sister. Vera's face was set and stern.

"Yes, Millicent," she said quietly. "Dorothy has come to spend the ni—" she stumbled in her speech—"several days," she amended.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THORNEDALE LODGE.

A ROW of beautiful trees ran the length of Thornedale Lodge, facing the entrance on the south. They had been planted generations before, and, no allowance made for their increase in height and circumference, towering above the old house, they were landmarks for miles around. Their branches touched the galleries and windows, and in summer their foliage shut out much light and sunshine, but Beverly Thorne scoffed at the idea of dampness and refused to cut down the trees, as his father had refused before him.

The stars in their constellations were not more fixed than the customs which had obtained in the old Virginia home.

Beverly Thorne crossed the lawn and entered his house, and an anxious-faced negro butler, grown gray in service, came forward to meet him.

"Yo' breakfas' am served, sah," he announced, and his soft, drawling voice contained a note of reproach. "I done looked ober de whole house fo' yo', an' de things am gettin' cold."

"Sorry, Cato." Thorne preceded the old servant into the dining-room, but instead of approaching the table he stopped before a window overlooking the sloping ground and a distant view of the Porter homestead, Dewdrop Inn.

"See that man, Cato, loitering near the lodge-gate?" he asked, and Cato peered over his shoulder. "Send Julius to him. Wait," as Cato moved away. "Tell Julius to say that Dr. Thorne presents his compliments and asks Detective Mitchell to come here and have a cup of coffee with him."

"Yessir." And Cato went to execute the errand, while Thorne waited until he saw the small negro boy who assisted Cato in tending the grounds cross the back lawn, then turned away from the window.

Walking over to the table, he picked up a folded newspaper by his plate and used it as a shield as he drew a photograph from his inside coat-pocket. The picture was irregular in shape and small in size, and had evidently been cut from a group photograph, for the two figures on either side of Vera Deane had been partly decapitated by scissors.

Vera and her companions were in their nurses' costume and carried diplomas. It was an excellent likeness of Vera, her pose was natural and her fresh young beauty and fearless eyes claimed the attention of the most casual. Thorne knew every light and shade in the photograph.

"To think she threw away her happiness, her career, for—" he muttered, and his hand clenched in impotent wrath. Then, becoming aware of the negro butler's return, he replaced the photograph in his pocket, and soon became absorbed in the newspaper.

Cato, considerably annoyed by the prospect of further delay in serving breakfast, arranged another place at the table with more alacrity than his rheumatic joints usually permitted. He had no more than finished when Detective Mitchell appeared at the side door, ushered in by the grinning

boy. Throwing down his paper, Thorne greeted the detective heartily.

"Very good of you to share my breakfast," he said, pouring out a steaming cup of coffee as Mitchell took possession of the chair pulled out for him by Cato.

"You are the good Samaritan, doctor," declared Mitchell, rubbing his chilled hands. "The Porter place gets the full force of the wind; you are more sheltered here," glancing out of the diamond-paned windows, and then back again at his host and the cosy dining-room with its blazing logs in the large stone fireplace at the farther end.

The somewhat shabby old furniture, the wide sideboard on which stood quaint glass candelabra and heavy cut-glass decanters and dishes of generous proportions of former decades, a table in the window littered with magazines and books, and near at hand a mahogany stand equipped with a smoking-outfit, all seemed to blend with the low, time-stained oak beams and wainscoted walls. No curtains hung in the windows, and the winter sunshine streamed in, betraying here and there in cracks and crannies small accumulations of dust which Cato's old eyes had passed unseeing.

Thorne observed which way his guest's attention was straying and smiled, well pleased; he was proud of the historic old house. "This is one of the pleasantest rooms," he said, pushing the toast-rack near the detective. "Try some toast; it's hot."

"Thanks." Mitchell enjoyed his breakfast for a few minutes in silence. "Is this house older than the Porter mansion?"

"Same age; in fact, my great-great-grandfather built them both," answered Thorne. "But this was only a hunting-lodge, while the Porter homestead was a mansion-house, and is pure Georgian in architecture."

"It's the best-looking house in this country," affirmed Mitchell enthusiastically. "Pity to have a gruesome crime committed inside its old walls."

"You are sure it was a crime?" asked Thorne, stirring his coffee and then sipping it gingerly. "A murder?"

Mitchell stared at him in surprise. "Of course I'm sure that it was murder. Didn't the medical evidence prove that the wound could not have been self-inflicted?"

"The deputy coroner gave that as his belief, with one reservation — the wound could have been self-inflicted if Bruce Brainard was left-handed."

"Which he wasn't," declared Mitchell positively. "I have questioned all who knew Brainard, and they swear he was right-handed. So there you are, doctor, with a case of proven murder."

Thorne laid down a fresh piece of toast untasted on his plate. "I take exception to Deputy Coroner McPherson's theory that the wound from its appearance could not have been self-inflicted," he announced slowly. "Any surgeon will tell you that it is next to impossible to tell with any degree of accuracy at exactly which point the razor first entered the flesh. Brainard might have gashed himself by holding the razor in his right hand with the full intention of committing suicide, and opened the carotid artery. In that way he could have inflicted just such a wound as killed him."

Mitchell moved impatiently. "Why didn't you mention that at the inquest?"

"Because I was not called as a witness."

The detective ruminated silently for some moments, casting frequent glances at his host.

"Well, perhaps an expert can tear the medical evidence to pieces at the trial, but there's one point you overlooked, doctor," he argued. "Every one admits, including Mrs. Porter, that Brainard had not expected to spend the night at that house, and he had not come prepared with pajamas; only had the clothes on his back, a dress suit. Mr. Wyndham admitted in the presence of the coroner yesterday that Mr. Brainard did not see his overcoat after he was taken ill, and Murray, the footman, states that it hung in the coat-closet until I took it down to examine it. No trace of a razor was found in either his overcoat-pockets or those of his dress suit."

Mitchell paused and added impressively:

"I'll stake my reputation that Brainard had no razor when he was put to bed; therefore he could not have committed suicide. He was murdered by some one inside the house."

"No one in the Porter household admits having seen that razor before," was Thorne's only comment.

"Sure, they ain't going to give each other away."

Thorne straightened up and looked at the detective. "Do you mean to imply a conspiracy?"

"No, not a conspiracy to *kill* Brainard," Mitchell hastened to explain. "Only an endeavor on the part of Mrs. Porter and her daughter Millicent to shield the guilty man."

Thorne reached over and rang the small silver bell, then replaced it on the table. "More coffee, Cato," he directed, and turned again to Mitchell as the servant disappeared with the pot. "And which is the guilty man?"

"Frankly, I'm not quite sure," admitted Mitchell, grinning. "But as there are only two men in the house, not counting the butler, footman, chauffeur, and two gardeners, I hardly anticipate difficulty in narrowing the hunt down to one."

"And the two men are—"

"Dr. Alan Noyes and Hugh Wyndham."

Thorne opened his cigar-case and offered it to Mitchell, then helped himself, and placed a box of matches on an ash-tray conveniently before his guest.

"Dr. Alan Noyes and Hugh Wyndham," he repeated thoughtfully. "Mitchell, you have overlooked a member of the family in your list."

"You mean—" The detective looked puzzled.

"Craig Porter."

Mitchell laughed outright. "Have you seen him?"

"No."

"Why, doctor, he's paralyzed, can't move hand or foot." Mitchell puffed contentedly at his cigar. "I was in his bedroom yesterday afternoon and got a good look at him while I was chatting with Mrs. Hall, the other nurse. I don't think Porter will live very long, poor devil," he added. "Fine-looking chap; must have been some athlete, from all accounts."

"Yes," agreed Thorne, moving his plate aside to make room for the fresh pot of coffee which Cato brought in at that moment. "Let me give you a hot cup, Mitchell; there, that's better. What were you going to ask me?" observing that his companion hesitated.

"Can you give me any pointers about this Dr. Alan Noyes and Hugh Wyndham?" asked Mitchell. "They are your next-door neighbors, so to speak."

"And I never crossed their threshold until yesterday," responded Thorne dryly. "A family feud of long standing, Mitchell, and if I were the devil with horns, Mrs. Porter couldn't regard me with more horror." A boyish smile touched his stern lips and his gray eyes twinkled.

Mitchell glanced at him speculatively. There was little of the student in Thorne's appearance; his bronzed cheeks and throat spoke of out-of-doors, and his well-cut riding-clothes showed his tall, wiry figure to advantage. The faint crow's feet under his eyes and the slight graying of his black hair at the temples gave an impression of a not too easy path in life, and Mitchell decided in his own mind that his host was between thirty-six and thirty-eight years of age.

"While I never talked to Mrs. Porter until yesterday, Mitchell," continued Thorne, laying down the stub of his cigar, "I've had a slight acquaintance with Wyndham, and one not calculated to make me popular with him."

"How's that, doctor?"

"Oh, in my capacity of justice of the peace I've had to fine him for speeding," responded Thorne. "I believe Noyes was with him on one of these occasions, but he stayed out in the motor-car."

"I wonder whose motor Noyes used to leave the Porters early yesterday morning," mused Mitchell. "Pshaw! there's little use in speculating along that line. We've proved his alibi was true."

"Indeed? You mean—"

"That a cipher cablegram was telephoned out to him from New York yesterday morning between one and two, and if Mrs. Porter's testimony is to be relied on—and I see no reason to doubt it now—Noyes must have made straight for New York and is aboard the S. S. St. Louis, of the

American Line. She sailed for Liverpool, and I've wirelessed out, but haven't received an answer from the ship."

"So that clears Noyes," commented Thorne.

"Yes, I suppose it does," but Mitchell's tone was doubtful. "It doesn't explain Miss Millicent Porter's curious behavior at the inquest. Judging by her manner and her testimony, she *believes* Noyes guilty."

"Miss Porter was in a very hysterical state, hardly accountable for her actions." Thorne paused and examined the nicotin-stained fingers with interest. "Have you unearthed any evidence against Hugh Wyndham?"

"Well"—Mitchell hesitated, and shot a sidelong glance at his host—"nothing tangible against him—but if we eliminate Noyes it's got to be Wyndham."

Before answering, Thorne refilled his coffee-cup. "Wyndham—or an outsider," he said.

"Not a chance of the latter." Mitchell spoke with absolute confidence. "I've examined every lock and bolt on the doors and windows; not one is broken or out of order, and both the butler and footman declare all windows and doors were locked on the ground floor yesterday morning as usual. Take it from me, doctor, no one broke into that house to murder Brainard. No one except the dinner guests and Mrs. Porter's household knew Brainard was spending the night there.

"I tell you," emphasizing his words by striking the table with his clenched fist, "it was an inside job."

"It would seem so," acknowledged Thorne, who had listened closely to Mitchell's statement. "Were you at the Porters' last night, Mitchell?"

"No, I had to go in to Washington, but I left Pope there, and I returned early this morning and sent Pope in to Alexandria to get some breakfast and bring me my share. He's never appeared." Mitchell smiled ruefully. "But for you, doctor, I'd have fared badly. I greatly appreciate your hot breakfast," he added, as he rose somewhat awkwardly and pushed back his chair.

Thorne was slower in rising from the table than his guest.

"Make this house your headquarters, Mitchell, while investigating Brainard's murder," he suggested hospitably. "The nearest road-house is five miles away. Should you require a meal—a telephone—a quiet moment—come here."

The detective looked gratified. "Mighty thoughtful of you, sir," he said. "And I accept. The Porter house is out of the beaten track, and frankly—"

He paused as they reached the large hall which did duty also as a living-room; at least such was the impression gained by Mitchell as he glanced inquiringly around, for the negro boy had taken him into the dining-room through a short passage leading from a side door, and he had not seen the front of the house before.

The staircase in the hall was partly concealed by the stone fireplace and huge chimney about which it was built; deep window seats, comfortable lounging-chairs, a few tables, tiger skins, and other fur rugs added to the hall's homelike, comfortable appearance, while guns, moose and deer heads and other hunting trophies hung on the walls.

Suddenly Mitchell became conscious of his prolonged silence and that Thorne was waiting courteously for him to continue his remark.

"Frankly," he commenced again, "I think the mystery will be solved and the murderer apprehended within forty-eight hours. And in that case, doctor, I'll not trespass long on your hospitality."

"Come over, whenever you care to," exclaimed Thorne. "I'll tell Cato to make you comfortable if I am not here."

"Thanks." Mitchell turned up the collar of his overcoat as Thorne opened the front door, and stood hesitating on the threshold. "Say, doctor," he suddenly burst out, "you were the first outside the Porter family to see Brainard yesterday morning—what struck you most forcibly about the affair?"

Thorne considered the question. "The composure of Nurse Deane," he said finally. "The young woman who *said* she was the first to discover the crime."

Mitchell stared at him open-mouthed. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"It is an unheard of thing for a first-class trained nurse to sleep at her post." Thorne spoke slowly, carefully. "And the transom between the two bedrooms was open."

"But it is over Craig Porter's bed," objected Mitchell. "And Nurse Deane couldn't have looked through the transom without climbing up on his bed."

"I grant you she could not have looked through the transom," answered Thorne. "But she could *hear*. The slightest sound becomes 'noise' at dead of night."

Mitchell's eyes grew bigger and bigger. "Then you think—"

"That Nurse Deane both heard the murder committed and investigated it long before she went to summon Hugh Wyndham—and in that interval she had time to recover partially from shock and exert her self-control which, for a girl of her years, appears little short of marvelous."

There was a brief silence which Mitchell broke.

"You've given me a new view-point," he said. "So you think Nurse Deane is an accessory after the fact?"

"Possibly—through sympathy."

Mitchell whistled. "Not to say affection, eh, doctor?"

But Thorne was looking through the open door and failed to catch Mitchell's suggestive wink. Mitchell moved briskly across the paved walk which led from the front door to the box-hedged garden in front of the house. "I'll let you know what the third degree brings forth, doctor," he called over his shoulder and hurried up the walk.

CHAPTER VIII.

MANY INVENTIONS.

DOROTHY DEANE laid aside the muffler she had been pretending to knit and stared intently at Millicent, who lay stretched out on the lounge in Mrs. Porter's pretty boudoir. Millicent was certainly asleep at last, but Dorothy waited several more minutes before rising cautiously and stretching her stiff muscles. It seemed hours since she had breakfasted.

Taking care not to awaken the sleeper, Dorothy left the room and, after debating her future actions, she finally went in search of Murray. She found the footman polishing the silver service in the pantry.

"Miss Millicent wishes to know, Murray, if Mr. Wyndham has returned," she said, letting the swing door close behind her.

"No, Miss Dorothy, not yet." Murray dropped his chamois and straightened to an upright position, and a sudden sharp crick in his back resulting caused an involuntary groan to burst from him. Dorothy looked at him sympathetically.

"Why not use some liniment?" she asked.

Murray shook his head and eyed her dismally. "I'll just have to endure it, miss—if it isn't rheumatism it's something else."

"Try a liver pill," suggested Dorothy. She was aware of Murray's peculiarities, and, if discussing medicine and illness would put him in a good humor, she was willing to go any lengths; Murray alone could supply her with certain information.

Her suggestion, however, was unfortunate. Murray favored her with a withering glance.

"It's not my liver that gives me an ache in every bone, it's grip," he announced. "I'm wishing I had one of them ante-bellum cartridges."

"Had what?" Dorothy looked at him in honest amazement.

"Ante-bellum cartridges," he repeated. "The same as Dr. Noyes gave you, Miss Dorothy, when you came down with cold and fever in Christmas week."

"Oh!" Dorothy's piquant face dimpled into a smile, hastily suppressed; discretion prevailed in spite of her love of fun. It was wiser not to tell Murray that he should have said "antifebrin capsules"; she was there to wheedle, not to instruct. "Oh, Murray, I do hope you haven't grip—it's so contagious."

"Yes, miss." But Murray did not look downcast at the idea. "We'd be a whole hospital then, a regular hospital." His face lengthened. "But we've no doctor in the house, now Dr. Noyes has gone."

"Oh, well, there's one in the neighbor-

hood; in fact, just across the fields—Dr. Thorne."

Murray shook his head dubiously. "I'm thinking I wouldn't like him," he said thoughtfully. "They say he's overhasty at cutting people up."

Dorothy laughed, then became serious. "I believe he has made a specialty of surgery." She turned as if to go. "By the way, Murray, did Mr. Wyndham mention when he would be back?"

"No, miss, he didn't." Murray, turning about to replace a dish on the shelf, smiled discreetly. "I'm thinking, miss, that Mr. Hugh intended to tell Mrs. Porter when he would be back when that 'tec, Mr. Mitchell, stepped out of the door I was holding open for Mrs. Porter, and Mr. Hugh called to her to expect him when she saw him, and the car started off with a rush. He was here this morning."

"Who—Mr. Hugh?" Dorothy turned like a flash.

"No, no, miss, the 'tec, Mitchell. I hear tell as how he's the man in charge here; tall, light-haired, looks as if he didn't belong anywhere, 'cause he's so busy concealing he's looking everywhere."

"I know the man you mean." Dorothy laid her hand on the swing door. "Miss Millicent and I watched him pacing up and down the carriage drive before breakfast, and saw him go toward Dr. Thorne's house. Has he been here since? Oh!" She stepped back, startled, as a face appeared at the pantry window, and a second later a finger tapped gently on the pane.

"Speaking of the devil"—muttered Murray, walking past Dorothy and throwing open the window. "What do you want to scare the lady for?" he demanded wrathfully.

"I beg your pardon." Mitchell lifted his hat and regarded Dorothy solemnly. "I was under the impression she had seen me standing here a moment ago. Please tell Nurse Deane, Murray, that I wish to see her."

Dorothy, who had drawn back until she stood partly hidden by the wall of the pantry from Mitchell's penetrating gaze, grew paler as she heard the detective's request, and the quick droop of her eyelids hid a look of sudden terror. Before the footman could reply she stepped forward to the window.

"My sister is off duty this morning," she said. "She is still asleep in her bedroom. Can I take your message to her?"

Mitchell considered rapidly before replying. "May I have a few words with you?"

"Surely. Will you not come into the house? It is rather chilly standing by an open window."

"Walk around to the front door, sir, and I'll show you into the drawing-room," directed Murray, removing his apron and closing the window. "Mrs. Porter is in the library," he added, and hastened to open the swing door.

With a word of thanks Dorothy walked slowly through the dining-room and down the hall, permitting the footman to reach the front door and usher Detective Mitchell into the drawing-room before she entered.

She bowed courteously to Mitchell and signed to him to take a chair near the sofa on which she deposited herself with careful regard to having her back turned to the windows and the detective facing the light. She waited for him to open the conversation.

"You came here last night, Miss Deane." It seemed more a simple statement of fact than a question, and Dorothy treated it as such and made no reply. Mitchell moved his chair nearer the sofa before asking, "Did I understand you to say that your sister was resting this morning—or ill?"

Dorothy started. Ill? Why should the detective imagine Vera was ill?

"She is resting," she responded. "Your ignorance of nurses' hours of duty proves a clean bill of health, Mr. Mitchell. Night nurses must sleep in the daytime, especially when the day nurse is late in reporting for duty."

"But Mrs. Hall has been back for some time," persisted Mitchell. "And it is now nearly one o'clock. Are you quite sure that your sister is still asleep? I am under the impression that I saw her in the upper hall talking to Miss Porter fifteen minutes ago."

Dorothy considered the detective in si-

lence. What had aroused his sudden interest in Vera?

"If you will give me your message," she said, "I will go up-stairs and see if my sister is awake."

"Thank you," replied Mitchell. "But I must see your sister—"

"When?"

"Now."

Hearing a step behind him, Mitchell spun around as Murray stopped by the back of his chair.

"Mrs. Porter desires you to step into the library, sir," he announced. "You also, Miss Dorothy," and, wondering why her presence was required, Dorothy followed the detective into the library.

A disorderly pile of newspapers lay on the center table in front of Mrs. Porter, whose air of displeasure and heightened color Dorothy rightly attributed to the display type which heralded the news accounts of the mysterious death of Bruce Brainard.

"Upon my word," Mrs. Porter's gold lorgnette performed an incessant tattoo on the table. "The unbridled license of the press of to-day! And your paper, Dorothy, is most sensational," addressing her directly. "How could you permit it?"

"But, dear Mrs. Porter, I'm only society editor—I have no authority except over my particular section of the paper," protested Dorothy. "I am deeply sorry if—if the article offends you."

"It not only offends—it's offensive!" fumed Mrs. Porter. "I spoke hastily, Dorothy; I admit you are in no way to blame, but I'll place the matter in my lawyer's hands, and the owners of the paper shall smart for hinting that we are a band of murderers."

"Surely it does not go as far as that?" ejaculated Mitchell.

"It implies it." Mrs. Porter favored him with an angry look. "I see the article gives you, Mr. Mitchell, as authority for the statement that Dr. Noyes is being sought by the police. How dare you insinuate that he may be guilty? I gave his reason for his abrupt departure at the inquest; the jurors did not hold him in any way responsible for the crime or bring a verdict against him."

"You must not believe everything you read in the newspapers," remarked Mitchell, meeting her irate glare with unruffled good nature. "My precise statement to the newspaperman implied nothing against Dr. Noyes. The reporters simply picked him as the first possible 'suspect.'"

"Kindly disabuse their minds of any such idea. Dr. Noyes, besides his professional ability, is a man of high character and proven courage. He would not stoop to murder," declared Mrs. Porter hotly. "Besides, there is no possible motive for his killing Bruce Brainard—they never even met before Monday night."

Mitchell remained discreetly silent, and, after watching him in growing resentment, Mrs. Porter announced vehemently:

"Mr. Brainard committed suicide. In ascribing his death to murder, the police err."

"What leads you to believe he committed suicide?" demanded Mitchell.

"His morbid tendencies, his—" She stopped abruptly. "He must have been suffering from mental aberration."

"All suicides are temporarily insane," agreed Mitchell. "Otherwise they would not kill themselves; but, Mrs. Porter, in Brainard's case the medical evidence went to prove that the wound in his throat could not have been self-inflicted."

"Fiddle-de-dee! I don't place any reliance on that deputy coroner's testimony." Mrs. Porter indulged in a most undignified sniff. "Was Dr. Beverly Thorne present at the autopsy?"

"No." Mitchell moved nearer the center table. Mrs. Porter's altered manner at the mention of Beverly Thorne's name had not escaped the detective's attention. Apparently Mrs. Porter was far from loving her neighbor as herself. The family feud, whatever it was about originally, would not be permitted to die out in her day and generation.

Mitchell dropped his voice to a confidential pitch. "Come, Mrs. Porter, if you will tell me what you have in mind—"

Mrs. Porter's frigid smile stopped him.

"I can hardly do that and remain impersonal—and polite," she remarked, and Dorothy, watching them both, smothered a keen desire to laugh. "It is my unalterable

opinion that Bruce Brainard, in a fit of temporary insanity, killed himself," added Mrs. Porter.

"Ah, indeed! And where did he procure the razor?"

"That is for you to find out." Mrs. Porter rose. "Do that and you will—"

"Identify the murderer," substituted Mitchell with a provoking smile. In the heat of argument she might let slip whatever she hoped to conceal.

"No, prove my theory correct," Mrs. Porter retorted, rising and walking toward the door. She desired the interview closed. "Have you the key to Mr. Brainard's bedroom?"

"Yes, Mrs. Porter."

"Then kindly return it to me." And she extended her hand. "The room must be cleaned and put in order."

"Not yet," retorted Mitchell. "It was to prevent anything being touched in the room that I locked the door. After the mystery is solved, Mrs. Porter, I shall be most happy to return the key."

Mrs. Porter elevated her eyebrows as she looked at Dorothy and murmured in an audible aside, "Clothed in a little brief authority"; then, addressing Mitchell, who was following them to the door, "Mr. Mitchell, in the absence of my nephew, Mr. Wyndham, I must remind you that I cannot permit you or your assistants to intrude upon the privacy of my family."

"Except in the line of duty, madam." Mitchell's tone matched hers. "This case must be thoroughly investigated, no matter who is involved. Miss Deane, kindly inform your sister that I must see her at the earliest possible moment."

"She will see you when she is disengaged, and not before," retorted Mrs. Porter, wrath getting the better of her judgment, and laying an imperious hand on Dorothy's arm she conducted her from the room.

Mitchell turned back and paced up and down the library for over five minutes, then paused in front of the telephone-stand. "So the old lady is hostile," he muttered, turning the leaves of the telephone directory. "And Pope isn't back yet—" He ran his finger down the list of names and at last found the one he sought. Hitching the telephone nearer he repeated a number into the mouth-piece, and a second later was talking with Beverly Thorne.

"What, doctor, you don't wish to come here again!" ejaculated the detective, as Thorne refused his first request. "Now, don't let that fool feud interfere with your helping me, doctor. I assure you you can be of the greatest assistance, and as justice of the peace I think there is no other course open to you. Yes, I want you right away —you'll come? I sha'n't forget it, doctor. I'll meet you at the door." And with a satisfied smile the detective hung up the receiver and went in search of Murray.

Mitchell, twenty minutes later, stood twirling his thumbs in the front hall; his growing impatience was finally rewarded by the ringing of the front bell, and before the butler could get down the hall he had opened the door and was welcoming Thorne.

"We'll go up-stairs, doctor," said Mitchell, after Thorne had surrendered his hat and overcoat to Selby, and stood waiting the detective's pleasure. "Selby, ask Miss Vera Deane to join us at once—"

"I am here," cut in a voice from the stair landing, and Vera stepped into view. Her eyes traveled past the detective and rested on Beverly Thorne with an intentness which held his own gaze. Totally oblivious of Mitchell and the butler they continued to stare at each other.

Suddenly the carmine crept up Vera's white cheeks, and she turned to Mitchell, almost with an air of relief. "What is it you wish?"

"A few minutes' chat with you," answered the detective, mounting the stairs. "Suppose we go into Mr. Brainard's bedroom. Will you lead the way?" waiting courteously on the landing. But there was an appreciable pause before Vera complied with his request, and it was a silent procession of three which the butler saw disappear up-stairs.

Mitchell was the first to speak as they gathered about the bedroom door. "Nice dainty little watch-charm to carry about with me," he said, holding up a massive brass key which measured at least six inches in length, with a ward in proportion. "Did you lock Mr. Brainard's door, Miss Deane,

on Monday night when you returned to your other patient?"

"No, I left the door unlocked, but closed." Vera spoke with an effort. "As you see, Mr. Mitchell, the old lock turns with difficulty, and I feared the noise it makes"—a protesting squeak from the interior of the lock as Mitchell turned the key illustrated her meaning—"would disturb Mr. Brainard."

"It needs oiling, that's a fact." Mitchell flung open the unlocked door. "Come right in," he said, and stalked ahead of them.

Vera paused on the threshold and half turned as if to go back, but Thorne's figure blocked the doorway. Slowly, with marked reluctance, she advanced into the bedroom, and at a sign from Mitchell, who was watching her every movement, Thorne closed the door, his expression inscrutable.

"Look about, Miss Deane," directed Mitchell, sitting down and drawing out his note-book. "I want you to study each article in the room and tell us if it is just where it stood at the time you discovered Brainard had been murdered. Sit down, if you wish," indicating a chair near him.

"Thanks, I prefer to stand." Vera eyed the two men, then did as she was bidden, but as she looked about the bedroom she was considering the motive underlying the detective's request.

What did he hope to learn from her? How dared he make her a stalking horse, and in the presence of Beverly Thorne? The thought bred hot resentment, but the red blood flaming her cheeks receded as quickly as it had come at sight of a figure stretched out in the bed under the blood-stained sheets and blankets. A slight scream escaped her and she recoiled.

"It is only a dummy," explained Mitchell hastily, laying a soothing hand on her arm. She shrank from his touch.

"I realize it now," said Vera, moistening her dry lips with the tip of her tongue. "I had not expected to find it there."

"Do you see any changes in the room, Miss Deane?" asked Mitchell, as she lapsed into silence.

Vera, who had been gazing at the figure in the bed as if hypnotized, turned mechanically about and inspected the bedroom. The window curtains had been drawn back and the shades raised, and the room was flooded with light. Catching a glimpse of herself in the huge antique mirror above the mantelpiece as she turned her back to the bed, Vera was startled to see how white and drawn her reflection appeared in its clear depths, and surreptitiously rubbed her cheeks to restore their color.

"I see nothing changed on the mantel," she said and the sound of her calm voice reassured her; she had not lost her grip, no matter what the mirror told her. "But"—she wrinkled her brow in thought as her eyes fell on a chair on which were flung a suit of clothes and some underclothing—"Mr. Brainard's dress suit was laid neatly on the sofa over there, and his underclothes there also."

"Did you place them there?" asked Mitchell, jotting down her remarks.

"No, they were there when I came into the bedroom Monday night."

"Did they appear mussed or rumpled the next morning, Miss Deane, as if Brainard had risen in the night and searched the pockets?" inquired Thorne, breaking his long silence. He had followed the detective's questions and Vera's replies with the closest attention, while his eyes never left her. It seemed almost as if he could not look elsewhere, and but for Vera's absorption she could not have failed to note his intent regard.

Vera hesitated before answering his question. "I think the clothes had not been touched," she said. "My impression is that they lay exactly where Mr. Brainard placed them before retiring."

"Do you think Mr. Brainard, a sick man, placed the clothes on the sofa, and not Wyndham or Noyes?"

"You must get that information from either of those men," replied Vera wearily. "I was not present when Mr. Brainard was put to bed."

"But you can inform us, Miss Deane, if Dr. Noyes ordered an opiate administered to Brainard," broke in Mitchell, and Thorne looked sharply at him. What was he driving at?

"No, Dr. Noyes did not order an opi-

ate." Vera moved restlessly. "I gave Mr. Brainard a dose of aromatic spirits of ammonia as directed, and that was all."

Mitchell rose and stepped into the center of the bedroom and pointed to the transom. It was an oblong opening in the thick wall, forming the top, apparently, of what had formerly been a door jamb; the communicating doorway, judging from appearances, having been bricked up years before.

The glass partition of the transom, secured at the bottom to the woodwork by hinges, hung down into the bedroom occupied by Craig Porter from chains fastened to the upper woodwork of the transom and was barely visible from where Vera and Thorne stood in Brainard's bedroom. The glass partition, when closed, was held in place by a catch lock at the top.

"Look at that, Miss Deane," exclaimed Mitchell harshly. "The transom is almost entirely open. Do you still maintain that you heard no sound during the night in this bedroom?"

"I heard no sound which indicated murder was being committed in this room," Vera protested vehemently. "I tell you I heard nothing," observing Mitchell's air of skepticism. "To prove to you that all sound does not carry into the next bedroom, one of you go in there, and I will steal from the hall into this room and over to the bed, and the one who remains can tell what takes place in this room."

"A good idea." Mitchell walked briskly toward the door. "You watch, doctor," and he stood aside for Vera to step past him into the hall, then followed her outside and closed the door securely behind him.

Barely waiting for their departure, Thorne moved over to the chair on which lay Brainard's clothes, and hurriedly searched the few pockets of the dress suit, only to find them empty. Evidently the police had taken charge of whatever had been in them.

He was just turning away when the door opened without a sound and Vera, her white linen skirt slightly drawn up, slipped into the room and with stealthy tread crept toward the bed.

Thorne watched her, fascinated by her unconscious grace and her air of grim determination. He instinctively realized that the test she had suggested was repugnant to her high-strung, sensitive nature, and only his strong will conquered his intense desire to end the scene. As close as he was to her he heard no sound; but for the evidence of his eyes he could have sworn that he was alone in the room. He saw her turn to approach the head of the bed, falter, and draw back, and was by her side instantly. She looked at him half dazed, and but for his steadying hand would have measured her length on the ground. He read the agony in her eyes and responded to the unconscious appeal.

"Come back, Mitchell," he called, and while he pitched his voice as low as possible its carrying qualities reached the detective in Craig Porter's bedroom, and he hurried into the next room in time to see Thorne offer Vera his silver flask.

"No, I don't need it," she insisted, pushing his hand away. "It was but a momentary weakness. I have had very little sleep for the past forty-eight hours, and am unstrung. If you have no further questions to ask me, Mr. Mitchell, I will return to my room."

Before replying Mitchell looked at Thorne. "Did she do as she said she would?" he asked. "I heard nothing in the next room until you called me."

"Yes. Frankly, had I not seen Miss Deane open the door and enter this room I would have thought myself alone," responded Thorne.

"The carpet is thick." Mitchell leaned down and passed his hand over it. "It would deaden any sound of footsteps. You are sure that you heard no talking in here Monday night, Miss Deane?"

"I have already said that I did not," retorted Vera, and she made no attempt to keep the bitterness she was feeling out of her voice. "It seems very hard to convince you, Mr. Mitchell, that I am not a liar."

Thorne, who had been staring at the bedtable, looked up quickly.

"Did you see a razor lying on this table when you arranged the night light for Brainard, Miss Deane?" he asked.

"No." Vera sighed; would they never

cease questioning her? "That brass bell, the glass night light, empty medicine glass, and water carafe were the only articles on the table."

Mitchell went over to the foot of the bed. "Just whereabouts on the bed did you see the razor yesterday morning?" he asked.

Vera, who stood with her back almost touching the bed, turned reluctantly around. It was a high four-post bedstead and required a short flight of steps to mount into it, but some vandal had shortened the four beautifully carved posts to half their height and the canopy had also been removed.

The figure lay huddled face down, for which Vera was deeply grateful. Even in its dark hair she visualized the tortured features of Bruce Brainard, and she turned with a shudder to point to a spot on the bed just below the sleeve of the pajamas which clothed the figure.

"The razor lay there," she announced positively.

"Thanks." Mitchell closed and pocketed his note-book. "Now, one more question, Miss Deane, and then we will let you off. "At what time yesterday morning did you go to summon Dr. Noyes?"

"To be exact, at twenty minutes of six."

"And what hour was it when you first discovered the murder?"

Vera stared at him dazedly, then her trembling hand clutched the bedclothes for support, but as her fingers closed over the sleeve of the pajamas they encountered bone and muscle. With senses reeling she half collapsed in Thorne's arms as the figure rolled over and disclosed Murray's agitated countenance.

"H-he m-made m-me do it, miss," the footman stuttered, pointing an accusing finger at Mitchell. "Said he wanted to play a trick on Dr. Thorne; but if I'd dreamed he wanted to scare you, miss, I'd never have agreed, never! And I've been lying here in agony, miss, afraid to speak because I might scare you to death, and hoping you'd leave the room without knowing about me. If Mrs. Porter ever hears!" Murray gazed despairingly at them. "She wouldn't have minded me making a fool of Dr. Thorne. Oh, Miss Deane, don't look at me like that!" and his voice shook with feeling.

"It's all right," gasped Vera, standing shakily erect; Murray's jumbled explanation had given her time to recover her poise. She turned to Detective Mitchell, her eyes blazing with indignation. "The farce is ended, sir, and my answer to your last question is the same—I found Mr. Brainard lying here with his throat cut at twenty minutes of six. Good afternoon."

And she left the three men contemplating each other.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE ATTIC.

THE high wind sweeping around the Porter mansion in ever increasing volume found an echo under the eaves, and the attic in consequence resounded with dismal noises. Much of the space under the sloping roof had been given up to the storage of trunks and old furniture, but on the side facing the Potomac River wooden partitions divided that part of the attic into rooms for servants.

The south wall of the attic was lined with pine book-shelves which ran up to the wooden rafters. There old Judge Erastus Porter had stored his extensive law library, and there his great-niece, little Millicent Porter, had made her playhouse when she visited him.

The nook used in childhood had retained its affection in Millicent's maturer years, and, the trunks forming an effectual barricade, she had converted it into a cozy-corner, placed pretty curtains in the dormer window, a rug on the bare boards, wheeled an easy-chair, a highboy, and a flat-top desk into their respective places, and, last but not least, a large barrel stood near at hand filled with out-of-print books and a paper edition of Scott's novels.

Mrs. Porter on her first tour of inspection of the attic had remonstrated against the barrel, stating that it spoiled the really handsome pieces of furniture which Millicent had converted to her own use, but her daughter insisted that the barrel added a touch of picturesqueness, and that

she still enjoyed munching an apple and reading "Ivanhoe," a statement that drew the strictured comment from Mrs. Porter that Millicent had inherited all her father's peculiarities; after which she was left in peace and possession.

Bundled up in a sweater, Millicent sat cross-legged before a small brass-bound, hair-covered trunk, another companion of her childhood, for she had first learned to print by copying the initials of her great-great-grandfather outlined in brass tacks on the trunk lid. The trunk still held a number of childish treasures, as well as cotillion favors, invitations, photographs, and a bundle of manuscripts.

But contrary to custom, Millicent made no attempt to look at the neatly typewritten sheets; instead she sat contemplating the open trunk, her head cocked on one side as if listening.

Finally convinced that all she heard was the moaning of the wind under the eaves, she lifted out the tray, and, pushing aside some silks and laces, removed the false bottom of the trunk and took from it a ledger. Propping the book against the side of the trunk she turned its pages until she came to an entry which made her pause:

Dined with Mrs. Seymour. Bruce Brainard took me out to dinner. He was very agreeable.

And apparently from the frequency with which his name appeared in her "memory book," Bruce Brainard continued to be "agreeable." Millicent turned page after page, and for the first time read between the lines of her stylish penmanship what her mother, with the far-sighted eyes of experience, had interpreted plainly.

Flattered by the attentions of a polished man of the world, years older than herself, Millicent had mistaken admiration for interest and liking for love. Brainard's courtship of the débutante had been ardent, and what she termed an engagement and her mother "an understanding" had followed. Brainard had pleaded for an early wedding, but business had called him away to Brazil, and on Millicent's advice, who knew her mother's whims and fancies, he had postponed asking Mrs. Porter's consent to their engagement until his return.

Millicent read on and on in her ledger; accounts of parties gave place to comments about her brother, Craig, then he absorbed the entire space allotted to each day, and the progress of his trip home was duly recorded, and the items:

October 5.—Thank God, Craig is home again, but, oh, what a wreck! It's agony to see him lying in bed unable to move hand or foot, unable to speak, unable to recognize us. But he's *home*, not lying in an unknown grave somewhere in Europe. I've just met Dr. Alan Noyes, who accompanied Craig to this country, and to whose skill Craig owes his slender hold on life. The doctor is painfully shy.

October 7.—Saw more of Dr. Noyes to-day; he improves on acquaintance. Mother says he is not shy, only reticent.

Millicent did not linger over the next few entries, but paused and scanned the words:

October 15.—Vera Deane has replaced the night nurse for Craig. She reminds me so of Dorothy, yet they are not a bit alike. Persuaded Dr. Noyes to talk about his experiences in the field hospitals abroad. Must write Bruce to-night without fail.

Millicent skipped several pages, then came the entry:

December 15.—I had no idea Alan Noyes had such a temper; we quarreled most awfully. He announced his creed is never to forget a friend and never to forgive an enemy. Well, I can be stubborn, too.

Millicent sighed drearily and jumped to the date:

December 24.—Alan Noyes has been exceptionally nice to-day. Our quarrel has blown over. I wish I had told him about Bruce when we first met.

A tear rolled down Millicent's white cheek and splashed upon the paper, then suddenly she bowed her head and gave way to the grief consuming her. The minutes lengthened, and at last she sat up and dried her eyes. The outburst had brought physical relief, for during the past twenty-four hours she had fought off every inclination to allow her feelings sway, had suppressed all sign of emotion, and had refused to discuss Bruce Brainard's mysterious death, even with her mother.

Mrs. Porter had hoped that Millicent's unnatural calm would give way when un-

burdening herself to her old chum, Dorothy Deane, and she had made opportunities to leave the girls together. But she was not aware that Dorothy had shown an equal desire to avoid the topic of the tragedy, and Millicent found to her secret relief that she was not urged to confidences which she might later bitterly regret.

But that afternoon she had felt the need of being by herself, and had fled upstairs, hoping her mother would not think of looking for her in the attic.

Millicent pulled a chair close to her side and was on the point of rising from her cramped position before the trunk when she heard some one coming up the uncarpeted stairs. She slammed the ledger shut and thrust it among the silks and laces in the trunk, and, pulling out a vanity box, commenced powdering her nose and removing all traces of recent tears.

"Who's there?" she called as heavy steps approached.

"Me, Miss Millicent."

"Oh, Murray!" Her tone spoke her relief. "Have you brought the coffee and sandwiches I told Selby to order for me?"

"Yes, miss." And the footman emerged from behind the highboy which, with a Japanese screen, partly blocked the view of the cozy corner from the rest of the attic.

"Just put the tray on my desk," directed Millicent. "Has mother gone out?"

"Yes, miss; she took Miss Dorothy in to Washington." Murray moved several of the desk ornaments to make room for the tray. "These ladies called just now, Miss Millicent, but I said you were out." And he handed her a number of visiting-cards.

She barely glanced at the names before tossing the cards aside. "I am thankful you did, Murray; make my excuses to callers for the next week. I can see no one."

"Very good, miss." But Murray lingered, a troubled look in his eyes. "The 'tec, Mitchell, left word that he'd be back this evening, miss, and that he's got to see you."

"Oh, he has?" Millicent's eyes sparkled with anger. "Inform Mr. Mitchell that I decline to see him."

"Yes, miss," and Murray smiled broadly. "Shall I throw him out, miss?"

"Heavens, no!" exclaimed Millicent. "You might get in serious trouble with the law. He has, I suppose," bitterly, "the right to hang about the scene of a crime—detectives are sanctioned human vultures."

"He is, miss; a regular troublesome, meddlesome busybody, getting innocent people into trouble," responded Murray feelingly. "He thinks he's so bright with his ideas—I'll idea him." And the footman, forgetting his customary respectful attitude in his indignation, doubled up his fists suggestively. "How is Miss Deane feeling, miss?"

"Who, Miss Vera? She is at last getting some rest; be sure, Murray, and tell mother and Miss Dorothy not to disturb her when they return."

"Certainly, miss." The footman turned to leave. "Anything else I can get you, miss?"

"Not a thing, thank you! Any telegrams or telephones?"

"No telegrams, miss; but the telephone is going every instant, 'most all of them are reporters."

"Don't give out any information, Murray," she cautioned.

"Certainly not, miss." And he hurried away.

Millicent waited until she heard the door at the foot of the attic stairs close, then bent over the trunk and again took out the ledger and carefully tore out a handful of pages. Before replacing the ledger in its hiding-place she felt about under the false bottom until convinced that the article she sought was still there, after which she put back the ledger and the false bottom, rearranged the silks and laces, put in the tray, and locked the trunk.

"If you are not going to drink your coffee, I will," announced a voice to her left, and a man stepped out from behind the Japanese screen. A low cry escaped Millicent, and her hands closed spasmodically over the pages torn from her ledger.

"Hugh!" she gasped "Where—where have you been?"

"In town." Wyndham stopped by the tray and, picking up the plate of sandwiches, handed it to Millicent. She shook her head.

"No?" he queried; "then I'll eat your share." He poured out a cup of coffee and drank it clear, almost at a gulp. "That's delicious," he declared. "I had no idea I was so cold and hungry. Can't I help you get up?"

But Millicent declined his proffered assistance, and rose somewhat clumsily, both hands engaged in pressing the torn sheets into the smallest possible compass.

"Where have you been, Hugh?" she asked again.

"Sitting on a trunk behind that screen waiting for Murray to go down-stairs," he responded, refilling his cup.

"Then you came up to the attic just after he did?"

"In his wake, so to speak." He shot a questioning look at her. "Every one appears to be out this afternoon."

"Yes." Millicent carefully turned her back to the dormer window and sat down on the arm of her easy-chair. "You haven't answered my question, Hugh—where have you been ever since the inquest?"

"At the club." Wyndham helped himself to another sandwich. "Awfully sorry I couldn't get in touch with Dorothy Deane and deliver your message. I was sorry to disappoint you."

"But I wasn't disappointed. She received the message in time and came last night."

Wyndham seemed to have some difficulty swallowing his coffee.

"Is she still here?" he inquired as soon as he could speak.

"Yes. Mother insisted that she could run her social column from here as well as from her boarding-house. Most of the social news is gathered over the telephone," explained Millicent vaguely. "And mother promised to motor in to the office every afternoon and bring her out again in the evening."

Wyndham set his coffee-cup back on its saucer with small regard for its perishable qualities.

"I might have known that she would come," he said, half to himself; then louder: "Intimate friends don't have to be told when they are needed."

"Dorothy has so much tact—"

"Discussing me?" And Dorothy Deane appeared at Wyndham's elbow. There was a distinct pause as she recognized Millicent's companion, and her cheeks, rosy from her long motor ride in the wind, paled. "Oh," she ejaculated, with an attempt at lightness which deceived but one of her hearers, "the wanderer has returned!"

"Yes—returned to you," was Wyndham's quiet rejoinder, and his eyes never left her. "It was very careless of you, Dorothy, not to leave word at the office that you were coming out here last night."

"If I had mentioned it the managing editor would have insisted that I cover"—she stopped and colored painfully—"new developments for the paper."

Wyndham transferred his attention to his cousin. "New developments," he repeated. "Have there been any since I left last night?"

His question did not receive an immediate reply, for Millicent had not paid strict attention to their conversation, being absorbed in secreting the sheets torn from her diary inside her gown.

"Nothing new," she responded dully. "The detectives are still looking for clues, and under that pretense poking their noses into every one's concerns."

"Let them. Who cares?" But Wyndham did not look so care-free as his words implied. "Brainard's death is a seven days' wonder in Washington, Millicent; so be prepared for all sorts of sensational stories. Our friends will talk themselves to a standstill after a time."

"I suppose sensational stories are to be expected," admitted Millicent, and she moved restlessly away from her chair. "But what are Bruce's friends doing?"

Wyndham looked at her quickly. "I don't understand you—"

"I mean what steps are Bruce's friends taking to trace the—the murderer?"

Wyndham took a newspaper from his pocket and unfolded it.

"Brainard's brother has offered a reward of five thousand dollars for the arrest of the criminal," he stated, pointing to an article in the paper.

Dorothy broke the silence with an im-

patient stamp of her foot. "The fool!" she exclaimed. "He'd better have waited until it's proven beyond doubt that it was a murder and not a suicide."

The newspaper crinkled in Millicent's hand as she took it, and Wyndham, his eyes roving about the cozy corner, stated quietly:

"The police have found that Brainard never shaved himself, but went every morning to a barber shop just below his apartment-house. Apparently he never owned a razor, and the police seem to think that evidence precludes all possibility of suicide."

"I don't see why," protested Millicent, looking up from the paper. "If Bruce contemplated suicide he could have purchased a razor."

"True, but investigation proves that he did not buy a razor at any of the dealers handling them in Washington, or at a pawnshop. I must admit the police have been very thorough in their search," acknowledged Wyndham. "It's all in the evening papers." He stopped for a moment, then added steadily: "I think, no matter how terrible we find the idea, that we must accept the theory that Brainard was murdered!"

Millicent caught her breath. "I don't agree with you," she retorted obstinately. "Are we meekly to consider ourselves murderers just because Bruce never, apparently, owned a razor?"

"You are right," declared Dorothy, but her manner, to Wyndham's watchful eyes, indicated that she was clutching at a straw rather than announcing her convictions. "Some friend might have loaned him a razor— Heavens! what's that?"

A loud hail sounded up the staircase. "Millicent! Millicent!" and they recognized Mrs. Porter's angry accents. "Why in the world are you staying in that cold attic? Come down at once."

"Yes, mother." Millicent started for the staircase, casting an appealing look at Dorothy as she passed her, and in mute response the latter turned to follow, but at the top of the stairs Wyndham laid a detaining hand on her shoulder.

"Wait," he entreated, and as he met her wistful, frightened glance he repressed with difficulty the emotion that threatened to master him. "Dorothy, never forget I have your interests at heart to the exclusion of all else."

"Hush!" She raised a trembling hand to his lips, and, seizing it, he pressed it against his cheeks.

"Dear, how cold you are!" he murmured fondly, caressing her hand.

"Hush!" she reiterated. "Hugh, you must not—this is not the time—"

"It is. You cannot have forgotten—"

"Forgotten?" Dorothy started as if stung. "Would to Heaven I could!"

"Then you understand?" She looked at him dumbly. "You are sure you understand?"

Through a mist of tears Dorothy studied him, and as she met his imploring gaze a wave of tenderness sent her other hand to meet his eager clasp; then horror of herself, of her thoughts, checked her wild longing to throw herself into his arms, and she drew back.

"It is because I understand," she said, steadying her voice with an effort, "that I shall never cease to reproach myself—"

"Stop!" Wyndham held up an imperative hand. "You must not reproach yourself. Bruce Brainard deserved what he got. I tell you he did—" noting her expression. "It was justifiable homicide!"

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.

Fate

by William Slavens McNutt

AT the southern end of Dixon's entrance, the northerly of the only three sounds in the whole nine hundred miles of the great inside passage to Alaska, only ninety miles south of Ketchikan, the first Alaskan port of call for the steamers plying between Seattle and Skagway, is situated the newest town of the Canadian northwest.

In 1908 the western shore of Kaien Island was an almost impenetrable jungle of cedar, hemlock, and spruce. It was impossible to see fifty feet through it at any point. Giant windfalls and tangled underbrush were everywhere.

A mile inland there is a mountain about twenty-five hundred feet high and running the entire length of the island.

From the base of this mountain to the shore was a chaos of small hills and valleys, hummocks and gulches; as rough a spot as one could imagine.

The surrounding country is bleak, desolate, grand and dramatic, depressing and inspiring by turns.

In the spring of 1908 a small party of men landed on this shore with a surveyor's outfit, built their camp, took a big chew of tobacco apiece and a long breath, and went at the forest with crosscut, ax, and peavy.

Behind them lay one of the four finest harbors in the world, almost completely land-locked, and one that could be entered at any stage of the tide, minus a pilot, by the biggest ships that sail the Pacific without fear of rocks or shoals.

The jungle that lay in front of them had been decided on as a town site for the terminal of a great transcontinental railroad that was to tap a new and almost wholly unexplored country, northern British Columbia.

This little party was composed of surveyors and axmen sent to lay out and clear the town site.

Lots were to be sold at auction by the railroad company a short time later in Vancouver.

These men came in large and small batches, bit into the primeval forest and—"after them the deluge!"

They came from all the four corners of the world!

I have met men who came direct from Buenos Aires, from Hong-Kong, from Yokohama, from India, New Zealand, Switzerland, and Russia! Every State in the Union and every province in Canada was well represented: hoboes and adventurers from all the world!

Middle-aged mechanics, professional men, and small merchants, ground into mediocrity and routine by the complexity of life in the old centers of civilization, came with their families, seeking opportunity and an "even break" in the birth of the new, squatted in a tent, log hut, or rough board shack, grabbed an ax or a shovel, and went to work to hew out a liv-

ing with their hands until their chance should come.

The railroad started building from this end eastward to meet the west-bound construction, and that gave work to hundreds.

The lots were auctioned off. Buildings seemed to spring from the ground overnight. Fortunes were made in a week in real-estate deals; and to-day, where that first party of surveyors and wood-choppers landed on the shore of Kaien Island, stands the town of Prince Rupert.

Here came the gamblers from Alaska and all the Western States, the last of the old guard left over from the days of the buffalo, the Indian wars, and the first gold rushes to Alaska; old government scouts and Indian fighters, heroes in their day, now mere parasites, driven from one outpost of civilization to the other as town after town closed its doors to them, their day of usefulness past, pitiful, and some of them really defiant outcasts from the country whose development their youthful heroism and daring were partly responsible for.

All of which leads up to the point of my story, a remark made by one of these old-timers, " You can't cold-deck Fate."

I was sitting in a gambling room (Pardon me! My mistake! A cigar-store, I should have said) with three old-timers. All had served as scouts in the Indian wars under Miles, Custer, and Crook. All had run gambling-houses in Alaska and the Yukon country in the height of the great gold rush. All had been successful smugglers. Not one was a drunkard. Each had handled fortunes, and all were practically broke!

They were speaking of the different cities in the West that they had lived in in the early days, and the chances they had had to make fortunes by investing in land.

" Why," said Dick Hesler, " I remember when I could have bought land in Omaha—that is, what's Omaha now—for—oh, hell! I don't know! For nothing, pretty near! Maybe ten dollars or fifteen dollars an acre! An' I had all kinds o' money in them days, too!

" I'd made a big chunk o' money just before I hits Omaha this time I'm speakin' of. I meets a couple o' gees that's been minin' somewheres out in California, on their way East they was. They lived back there somewheres around Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia—some o' them places; I don't remember just where.

" Anyway, they had about thirty thousand between 'em, an' I got 'em in a stud game an' grabbed 'em for the whole bunch of spondulicks.

" Sent 'em back to California clean as a hound's tooth! Wasn't a dirty dollar mark left on either one of 'em.

" It's right after this that I makes Omaha, this time I'm speakin' of, an' I got all this on me, see?

" Well, I meets an old fella there, friend o' mine he was, an' he wises me up that this Omaha thing's goin' to be a big camp, an' tips me off to stick a piece o' the bankroll into some land there, see?

" Nothin' doin'! Why, I laughed at him. Couldn't see it for a minute. No! I was too busy makin' money to do anything like that!

" Why, if I'd 'a' done what he wanted me to, I c'd 'a' been worth two million today, dead easy!

" Oh, well, that's the luck o' the game, that's all!"

" No-o-o-o," drawled old Charlie Nelson, the proprietor of the gamb—cigar-store! " 'Tain't the luck o' the game, Dick; it's this Fate thing!

" Now most folks think that we ain't got nothin' to do with this Fate stuff, but mostly that ain't so.

" There was you an' me back in the early days. We was both good skookum young fellers, an', too, we was some smarter than the average. I know we was, 'cause we was dealin' from the bottom in them days in games where to get caught meant gettin' a hole in your face that nature never meant you should have; an' we ain't neither of us got only what we was born with, so—

" Well, we was fightin' Injuns an' huntin' buffalo an' scoutin' for the gover'ment, an' one thing an' another, an' we says to ourselves, ' Well, what do we want to be?'

" Well, we wanted to be gamblers an' rounders; leastwise *I* did; an' I reckon you was the same, or you wouldn't 'a' been one.

" That's what we wanted to be worse 'n anything else, an' we studied hard for it, settin' round camp an' in back rooms for hours, rifflin' the cards an' figurin' percentage an' so on.

" 'Cause you know, kid "—turning to me —" it takes an awful lot o' work to be a good poker player! Why, if I'd put in as much time studyin' law-books or to be a doctor or somethin' like that as I have studyin' poker, why—

" Well, anyhow, that's what we wanted to be, an' old Fate she says, ' All right! You've picked your ticket an' that's your number.' An' so we was gamblers.

" After a while, when we got some older an' knocked around some more, we begin to see that we ain't so all-fired wise as we thought we was! We seen that some o' these suckers that couldn't rig up a couple o' bettin' hands if you left 'em alone with the deck for an hour an' then come back an' shut your eyes while they dealt 'em, but worked for their money like damn fools, an' maybe had a wife an' kid to take care of— we seen that they had the edge on us in the long run, after all, an' so we says, ' To hell with this stuff! We'll just cash in this game an' sit in somethin' new!'

" An' right there's where old Fate grabs us!

" She says, ' Nothin' doin'! You picked your own game,' she says; ' you anted your life to sit in. Your ante's in the pot, an' you got to stay for a show-down '; an' that's the answer!

" We wanted to be gamblers, an' we got to be; but we can't never be nothin' else, nor make no kind o' money at nothin' else!

" Why, we're doin' the same thing right here in this town we've done all over the West! Lettin' chances to make good, clean money slip through our fingers, an' watchin' fellers 't we call suckers gettin' rich while we sit round an' wait for the police to chase us out o' town!

" I heard a preacher readin' out o' the Bible once somethin' about—' If a feller makes a livin' stickin' people up with a sword, he's sure to die on account o' some guy gettin' him with a sword, too.' O' course, he didn't mean only swords, that's just his way o' puttin' it.

" Same way if you make your livin' gamblin', you'll get put on the bum an' lose your main chance on account o' your gamblin'. An' you can't get away from it no ways.

" We start out aimin' to make our livin' easy, an' kind o' slide through life without doin' overmuch work or marryin' any to speak of, an' we wind up by gettin' drawed out, an' in the one big pot that always comes up some time in the game, whether it's a good woman or a big chunk o' real money, or whatever it is, that we'd give anything we got or ever did have to win out!

" That's Fate! An' the slickest-fingered rounder that ever turned a card can't cold-deck Fate!

" Reminds me of old Bill Ditson. You recollect Bill, Dick? Him an' me was at Fort Assiniboine together, kind o' partners we was for a while.

" Well, sir, this Bill was about the toughest party I ever did see. Great big, bull-necked, red-headed feller, an' strong. Regular moose he was; an' as game as he was skookum, too. Good gunman, an' likewise an A1 rough-an'-tumble fighter, which same is a mighty seldom combination.

" Well, sir, if ever they was a man that you'd say didn't have a weakness nor a soft spot in him nowheres, it was this same Bill Ditson.

" He didn't give a whoop one way or another for man, God, devil, *nor* woman! Stood on his own two feet complete, an' never had any o' what you'd call ' friends.' Didn't want 'em, an' plenty capable he was to get on without 'em.

" Nobody but Bill Ditson amounted to anything with him, an' lucky! He done a little bit o' everything; good gamblin' man he was, an' then he done quite a bit o' horse-stealin', cattle rustlin', tradin', bootleggin', an' so on, an' cleaned up at everything he went at.

" Just to show you what kind of a nut this Bill person was in them days: when we was in the scout service together, him an' me gets sent out one time to bring in three young fellers, brothers they was, that's

wanted for bootleggin' whiskey to the Indians.

"It wasn't no great shakes of a job, 'cause none of 'em was what you'd call bad at all.

"'Most everybody that could get the hooch was bootleggin' in them days, only these boys just happened to get it put on 'em somehow.

"We hears that they got a buffalo-camp about forty miles south o' the post, so out we goes after 'em, an' sights their campfire along about dark.

"There wasn't no moon, an' it was cloudy an' comin' on to rain; so with them sittin' round in plain sight in the firelight, all we had to do was walk right up in the dark till we got in talkin' distance, an' throw down on 'em.

"We got off our horses, an' I says to Bill: 'Now, when we get up clost enough, I'll call to 'em, an' then when we've got 'em lined up proper, I'll hike up an' get their guns while you stay back an' keep 'em covered.' An' he said, 'All right.' So we sneaked up sort o' easylike till we're about fifty yards from 'em, an' I'm just gettin' ready to sing out 'Hands up!'

"Well, sir, I remember it just as well as if it happened last night. One of the boys was sittin' on a little box close up to the fire facin' our way, an' the other two was squattin' on blankets with their backs to us.

"As I said, I'm just ready to call out, an' the feller that's facin' us, he's laughin' 'bout somethin', an' he's just lifted his right hand to slap his knee, same as a feller will when he's tickled, when all of a sudden—*spow!* Old Bill's 40-90 spangs out right 'longside my ear.

"The feller that's laughin', he gives a little jump an' shakes his head quick, like a feller will if you hold his nose while he's sleepin', an' then he opens his eyes an' looks at the fire awful puzzled-like, an' that one hand still in the air, like he was goin' to slap his knee.

"'Hands up, you two!' Bill hollers. 'I give you a sample o' the medicine you'll get if yuh don't behave.'

"Well, sir, I couldn't say a word for a minutes. The coyotes had been howlin' around, an' they was a little crick off to the right, an' some frogs was croakin' down there, an' then came that shot, an' everything stopped. It was so still all of a sudden it fair stunned a man.

"'Well,' says Bill, 'that's one less to guard goin' into camp.'

"'Why, my God, Bill!' I says. 'What did you go to do that for?'

"He don't answer none then. Just walks on up to the camp an' me after him, so allfired surprised I couldn't think what to do.

"He touches the feller he'd shot with his foot an' grins.

"'Good shootin',' he says, an' looks up at me.

"He must o' seen in my face what I was likely to think about it, soon's ever I got so's I could think, an' he ups an' covers me.

"'What's the matter with you?' he says. 'White-livered, are you, that you turn sick over a little killin'? He wasn't nothin' to you. He's dead now, an' he ain't nothin' to the gover'ment; so what are you gettin' wild-eyed about?

"'I'm sick o' this country, anyhow,' he says. 'I'm goin' to the coast. You can do what you like with these friends o' yourn, an' you can tell 'em what you damned please when you get back to the post. All you got to do right now is stand there by the fire till you can't hear the sound of my horse no more.'

"He looks off into the dark, keepin' me covered, an' that's the last o' him in that country. I give the boy a buryin' an' let his two pals go. I didn't have the stomach for takin' 'em back to the post after what Bill had done. I stalls around for several days, an' then goes back to the post an' reports that the boys made a runnin' fight an' a getaway out of it, an' also that I lose Bill in the ruction an' can't pick him up again.

"Well, come along ninety-four, me an' another feller had us a sloop, an' we was smugglin' whisky down around Puget Sound when the game got pretty stiff account the United States hired men gettin' a pretty good case on us, an' needin' nothin' but just our presence in court to get a conviction. So we took a run up inside to southwestern Alaska to git rid of some of our hooch at

high price in some o' the new camps there. We made a few sales to some Siwash an' a small camp or two, an' was runnin' in along just above where Ketchikan is now, when we meet up with some prospectors in a sailin'-boat, an' they tell us wild tales of a fine prosperous camp on the Stickeen.

"We found they was one man has the camp tied up. Owns the saloon an' store an' whoever buys buys from him. I look this bird up to unload some whisky on him, an' when I find him I find Big Bill Ditson.

"It was him an' yet it wasn't. He was the same man, an' yet he was altogether different. He looked kind o' like a distant relative of himself. I couldn't make out for a time whether he looked better or worse to me. All I knew was that he looked all different.

"He was tickled to see me. Seemed to have forgot how we parted. He showed me his store an' his saloon, an' then took me up to his home an' told me the big news.

"It seems, accordin' to him, that he's the father of the most wonderful girl ever born o' human parents. Bill, he'd took up with a Siwash woman, an' this girl had come along an' hit Bill where he lived. She was the reason why he looked so different to me. At last he'd found somethin' that he really loved, and he was just as soft as he had been hard.

"That girl an' her welfare was the one big pot in Bill's game. The big one, I'm tellin' ye, always comes up. An' he was playin' to the roof on it.

"His woman had died when the kid was six years old, an' he'd sent her to some folks o' his back in Boston to be brought up an' sent to school, havin' her come out to Seattle for a couple o' weeks every year, when he'd go below an' visit with her.

"An' he was crazy about that girl. Talked me deaf, dumb, an' blind tellin' me what a wonder she was, an' how she didn't scarcely show none o' her Indian blood in her looks, an' all that stuff.

"I couldn't sell him no whisky, 'cause he was just goin' out o' business.

"He says to me, he says: 'You know, Charlie, lots o' them tory people back east that Jessie' (that's his girl) 'has got to be friends with, they look down on a man that keeps a saloon, ye know, an' I'm scared some of 'em might get wind of it some way an' make her feel shame, ye see? So,' he says, 'I'm goin' to quit the whole of it, an' go into fur-buyin' altogether.'

"After that I used to hear about him now an' then buyin' furs all over Alaska, an' makin' a pile o' money, but I never happened to run acrost him.

"I went into the Yukon an' up to Dawson in ninety-eight, along of the big gold-rush, an' the fall of ninety-nine I'm dealin' black-jack in the Arctic dance-hall there.

"The last trip in before the river closes, in comes the College Kid (we called him that 'cause he was an educated kind of a feller, an' they do say he come of a fine family back east somewheres; anyway, he used to go back every year or so), an' he had a whale of a fine-lookin' dame with him. Oh, she was a dandy-lookin' girl. Had a good voice, too, an' the kid he gets her a job singin' in the Arctic where I'm workin'.

"She was kind o' shy an' scared-like the first few days. You could easy see she wasn't used to that kind o' thing; but, oh my! didn't she ketch on quick! An' inside o' three weeks she was makin' more money on percentage than any other woman in Dawson.

"Ye see, the girls in them halls would do their turn on the stage, an' then come down on the floor an' mingle with the crowd an' work through the boxes, an' any time anybody bought a drink for 'em, why they get twenty per cent on it, an' with wine at forty dollars a bottle, why—

"Well, sir, she got to be the best money-getter on percentage of any woman in Dawson. Bold as brass she was, an' just about as hard.

"About two months after she an' the kid hits camp, old Bill Ditson he mushes in over the ice with the dogs, calculatin' to camp around Dawson for the winter, maybe pickin' up a claim, an' if he didn't make out that way, why he'd take out some furs, anyway.

"Him an' me was sittin' in the Arctic the first night he got in, talkin' an' drinkin' an' watchin' the different girls do their turns before I went on shift, an' finally this new

girl I'm speakin' of she comes on for her stunt.

" Bill he gave one look at her, an' I never see a man git so white in my life.

" He set for half a minute with his eyes pretty nigh starin' out of his head an' his mouth workin', an' all of a sudden he gives a regular scream an' jumps up.

" ' Jessie!' he yells. ' My God! Jessie!' an' starts fightin' his way toward the stage, yellin' an' screamin' like a crazy man.

" The girl she stops singin' an' looks out in the crowd when he begin to yell that way, an' watches him for a minute tryin' to get through to the stage, an' then she gives a kind o' little shrug to her shoulders an' walks off.

" Some of us got hold o' Bill an' took him out to the office, screamin' an' fightin' all the time, an' then pretty soon he quit his fightin' an' begun to blubber like a kid that somebody's took a toy away from.

" ' That's my little girl,' he says, cryin' all the time. ' You got my little girl, damn you! You give me back my girl, I tell you!'

" Well, I squared it up with the manager, an' we frisked him for his gun, an' then took him around back, still cryin', an' up to the girl's dressin'-room.

" She was settin' in there, cool as a cucumber, leanin' back in her chair smokin' a cigarette, an' she looks up when we come in an' says, just as calm as anything, ' Hello, dad!'

" The old man, he goes down on his knees an' grabs her an' hugs her an' kisses her, blubberin' away all the whole time, an' she just sets there kind o' resigned-lookin', an' lets him fuss over her for a while, an' then she sort o' pushes him away an' begins fixin' her hair where he'd mussed it up.

" ' Well,' she says, ' you made a nice scene out there, didn't you? What's the matter with you, anyhow?'

" ' Oh, my little baby,' he says, still cryin' an' beatin' his hands on his chest; ' how'd you ever come up here?' he says. ' You don't know what you're doin', my baby girl. They're foolin' you somehow, Jessie! They're foolin' you!'

" ' No,' she says, ' they ain't foolin' me, an' neither are you! I'm the daughter of an old squaw man an' a tin-horn gambler! An' for that combination I'm doin' pretty well, thank you.'

" The old man he's bent over, groanin an' beatin' his head on the floor at her feet, an' she looks down at him an' kind o' sneers, an' touches the top o' his head with her foot.

" She looked, right that minute, as much like old Bill in his young days as a pretty woman can look like a man; an' she has everything in her face that I'm tellin' you old Bill had lost that time I meets him on the Stickeen. An', sir, it comes over me in a flash—that time back there on the prairie, an' old Bill turnin' that poor boy over with his foot. That boy that wasn't nothin' to him!

" Well, sir, it made me feel like— Oh, well—

" Anyway, she says to him: ' Oh, come on dad; be a sport. Brace up.' An' when he kep' on groanin' an' blubberin', she turns to the manager an' says:

" ' Say, take this sniveling old fool out of here an' keep him out.'

" An', sir, he never said another word. Just followed out o' there meek as a lamb, an' went off to his hotel, still sobbin', just a twisted-up wreck that any ten-year-old kid could spit on!

" It was awful pitiful; but somehow, every time I started to feel sorry for him, I'd see him turnin' that boy over with his foot, an' all the sympathy I had went out to that girl that was the daughter of an old squaw man an' a tin-horn gambler.

" Bill went outside next day. He didn't even have nerve left to shoot up the College Kid.

" I see him a couple o' years ago bummin' drinks from the old-timers around the bars in Vancouver. Dead now, I reckon!

" No, sir. As I said before, you can't cold-deck Fate! An' likewise you couldn't get a bunch of live ones into this joint to play poker if you gave away a horse an' buggy to the winner of every jack-pot! So if you dead-heads think maybe you could find some other place in town to set down— I'm goin' to lock-up an' get some beauty sleep."

"Who Am I?"

by Max Brand

Author of "Fate's Honeymoon," "The Adopted Son," "The Sole Survivor," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ARRIVING at her father's funeral in New York, which she had been forbidden to attend, pretty Ruth Burns, who had lived all her life in fashionable schools, found herself plunged into a life among gamblers and crooks. Never having seen her father, and having been informed that he was a recluse, what was her surprise when John Collins, her father's attorney, informed her that her parent had been the owner and active manager of a gambling-house. Collins also told her that her father, Henry Burns, had owed him thirty thousand dollars, and as proof opened all the gambler's papers for inspection, except one.

Ruth then determined to operate her father's business until the debt was repaid, and that night she visited the gambling-house with Collins. There she met the beautiful Victoria Danforth, "puller-in" for the house, and Jimmy Weaver, college man, ex-safe breaker, dreamer, and card "scientist."

During the evening Collins left for a business trip, and Ruth stayed on in Weaver's care. Knowing that there was some mystery about her birth, she gained Weaver's consent to open Collins's safe and read the paper concealed there. While Jimmy was investigating the safe's combination, who arrived but Victoria Danforth. In her anxiety to conceal Weaver's work, Ruth allowed Victoria to believe she had come there at Collins's request. Victoria laughed, handed Ruth her personal key, and left. What Jimmy found in the paper in the mean time he would not say.

The following morning Henry Cochrane, an old lover of Ruth, called upon her. Divining that she was in difficulties, he made her promise if she had not won her fight in two weeks that she would either come to his home upon the Hudson or send for him. She promised, and shortly afterward began her education in gambling under the direction of Jimmy Weaver.

Nearly a week later Weaver pronounced her an expert, as indeed she was. She seemed to have inherited "card sense." That night she played her first game with Billy Voltz, a Wall Street man, known as a plunger. Hour after hour the stakes went back and forth across the table. Then, as the bets grew larger, luck seemed to be with Ruth. Pot after pot she drew in until Voltz, stopping to count his check-stubs, discovered he had lost six thousand dollars.

Voltz dropped his check-book and stared at her.

"Done for!" he muttered. "Done for!"

CHAPTER XI.

TO THE VICTOR.

VOLTZ dropped his check-book and stared at her.

"Done for!" he muttered. "Yes, done for!"

He had grown white about the lips.

He reminded her of a dog wincing when the cat turns. It was not as if the loss of his money overwhelmed him; but it startled and angered him.

"Six thousand," he said grimly, "and all because the luck has turned away from me."

She listened to him eagerly. The figures he mentioned loomed vaguely before her mind, hardly to be grasped in the moment. The amount she owed Collins on her father's debt was thirty thousand dollars, but this fact had left her memory for the moment. She felt merely the ecstacy of the power with which she had whipped this man to the confession of defeat. The gambling instinct was like wine in her blood.

She piled the checks and the chips on the table.

"One more hand without a draw for the whole six thousand," she said.

He looked up at her stupidly underneath

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for February 23.

his frown, like a pugilist who keeps up his guard by instinct only after he has felt a stunning blow.

"I've nothing—here—to put against it," he said.

"You have your check," she answered.

"Yes."

"A check for six thousand against this pile."

"All for nothing," he said, and wrote in the check-book.

She pushed the pile of paper to the center of the table and he moved forward the check he had just written. The cards fell. Voltz packed his cards together and shuffled them, then peeked at them one by one in the gambler's fashion; but Ruth swept up her cards in one careless gesture. She held two tens and two deuces. Voltz sat back in his chair frowning, and with the palm of one hand pressed down against the table.

"Show!" said he.

He turned up two aces, and when Ruth laid down the cards he sat looking at them without comprehension for a moment. He sprang out of the chair and shook his fist in her face.

"A crooked game," he cried hoarsely. "It's been crooked from the first. That damned Danforth woman set me on a ringer! By God, I'll have the law on this place, but I'll have my money first!"

He swept the checks from the table toward him. Ruth rose and stood watching him with a singular lack of emotion. She merely kept saying to herself: "Like a woman! Like a woman! I could never lose my heart like this!" He had wadded the checks into his pocket, still glaring at her and accusing her of being a sharper, when Weaver stepped to his side.

"Put back the stakes, Billy," said he. "I saw the game."

Voltz turned with his hand clenched as if to strike, but when he saw Jimmy's face his expression softened to one of complaint.

"It isn't right, Jimmy," he said, "the Danforth woman sent me after this girl, who calls herself Burns, and said she was a straight sort. I tell you, she's a crook with the cards."

"Don't talk to me," said Jimmy scornfully, "I saw you crimping the deck all through the game. Put back the stakes, I say."

Voltz kept a fearful eye on him as if hypnotized; the hand carrying the checks moved slowly out to the table and dropped the papers.

"Have a drink," said Weaver. "You look sick. Then get out. You can't work that sort of a game here twice, Voltz."

The latter turned in a dazed manner and walked unevenly toward the door. His head sank low between his shoulders. Before he reached the door he stopped and put his hand gently to his forehead like a man feeling for the welt of a blow which had dazed him. At the same time Collins and Victoria approached Ruth's table.

"Twelve thousand dollars!" said Ruth to Jimmy Weaver. "Think of that!"

It seemed to her that he winced as Voltz had winced when she exposed the two pair of the last hand. Certainly he went pale.

"A few more nights will clear you," he said huskily; "a few more will put you out of debt!"

"What's that?" asked Collins.

"She plucked Voltz twelve thousand," said Weaver.

Collins swore softly and stared at her with large eyes.

"I'll give you a check to-morrow for part of the amount due you," said Ruth to him, "and in a few days I hope I will be through with the whole business."

"Just say that again, deary," murmured Victoria.

"I say I will be through with it," said Ruth, "and yet—"

"You can't go," declared Weaver. "The thing is in your blood now. There's no use in your trying to shake it off. It's the lure of chance, Ruth."

Collins swayed his eyes from one to another of the group and then his face lightened.

"If you're going to leave to-morrow," he said, "we turn to-night over to the big farewell. We're going out to my place, all four of us, and celebrate one of the biggest killings that was ever pulled in Burns's place!"

"I can't go," said Ruth, somewhat unevenly. "I must go back home."

"Home is all New York for you now," said Weaver. "It doesn't matter about the particular address."

"Of course you'll go," said Victoria. "If you are going to leave to-morrow I want to talk with you to-night. Come on, folks, everybody has left."

Ruth looked about the room. Save for their group, it was quite deserted; the chairs pushed back from the tables, and from the ash-trays the thin wraiths of smoke still wound up toward the ceiling from unconsumed cigarettes. She whirled back and faced her companions.

"Let us go," she said quickly. "Let us go somewhere so that I can get this out of my head!"

They went out to Eighty-Fifth Street, Collins's up-town house, for he explained to Ruth on the way that he used the down-town apartment more as an office than as a place in which to live.

The suite of rooms into which they were taken was on the third floor, three beautifully appointed rooms through which Ruth walked up and down for a time to clear her head of the excitement. She had rarely seen such tastefully arranged furniture, and though she had been in richer homes, she had never known an impression of greater dignity.

On the whole, the rooms were dark-floored, and light walled; great mirrors framed in dull gold taking the reflection from the floor almost up to the ceiling. The heavy rug of the first room was a royal blue, and upon it stood an Italian table of shimmering old walnut, beautiful in grain and finish.

The central room of the three had no windows, but it was lighted up by a rug in dark rose and dull gold. It was apparently used as a dining-room. A ponderous buffet stood against one wall, a Chippendale table in the center of the room, and upon the rug and over the table and buffet, the light of a log fire fled and flickered.

The third room completed the vista with a variation. It was done more brightly than the other two, with rose-colored curtains draping the three windows which filled the arching end of the room, and a Chinese rug on the floor. The lines of the stone fireplace in this room swept up in a beautiful curve, continuing the stone-work to the ceiling.

But what pleased Ruth more than all else in the rooms was the unique use of color. In front of the partitions which partially shut off each room from the others, great vases of flowers were placed, repeating one note of color. Looking down from the front room the color of the flowers in the vases was red, flags and tall roses.

Looking from the rear room the color was pure white, startling in its effectiveness. But so cunningly were the various colors combined that each room was complete and distinct in itself, though each blended in the open vista of the whole.

The dining-room began to change swiftly. Servants appeared, moving swiftly and softly here and there. Shimmering glass appeared on the buffet. Flowers poured forth on the table or stood in slender-necked vases, as graceful as young saplings whose foliage has scarcely begun. A bright chandelier sparkled suddenly with light and sent a keen reflection into the long mirrors. A little wine-wagon, whose tank was brimming with ice, was pushed into the room.

"Beautiful!" said Ruth, smiling with delight, for the loveliness of the scene had driven all other things from her mind. "I have never seen a finer interior, Mr. Collins!"

He leaned closer to her chair, his red-stained eyes shining steadily at her, and taking advantage of a burst of Victoria's laughter, he said softly:

"I'm mighty glad you like it, Ruth. There's no reason why you shouldn't see a good deal of it, eh?"

She made no effort to draw her eyes away from his gaze. His voice, his manner, the fleshy color of his face fascinated her with a peculiar sense of the physical. She listened not so much with her ears as with her eyes — her sense of touch — her taste. The sound of a happy boy crunching apples had always fascinated her. The sound of Collins's voice held her with a similar interest.

"I am glad there is no particular rea-

son," she said. "I shall hope to see more of the rooms!"

"Good!" said Collins, sitting up a little more erectly in his chair. "Then there's to be no more talk of giving up your new life, eh? No more of these sudden abandonments?"

"I made up my mind about that, I think," she answered, "when Jimmy Weaver spoke to me. The thing has gotten into my blood in very truth. It is my power over Chance, and the power of Chance over men."

"Right," grinned Collins. "The gambling chance is the king of us all—and you are the queen, my dear!"

A bell sounded as softly as the chime of an old clock. Collins rose and led the way to the dining-table. Behind each chair stood a negro servant in livery. A butler hovered in the background, silently and skilfully directing his subordinates. To Ruth's left sat Weaver, to her right was Collins, and opposite was Victoria Danforth.

"This reminds me," said Weaver, "of a soubrette and two dark, desperate villains entirely surrounding the ingénue in the second act."

"Ingénue?" queried Victoria with raised eyebrows.

"Don't be catty, Vic," said Weaver coldly. "Keep your claws tucked away inside the velvet. We haven't forgotten the old religion, Vic, we're simply admiring the new."

"Jimmy Weaver," said Victoria, turning in her chair, "why can't you be out and out? I never know whether you're smiling with me or at me. You criticise with a compliment and compliment with a criticism. Have a heart, Jimmy."

"Not a hope of that," commented Collins. "Some one took out Weaver's heart and substituted perpetual ice. As far as the emotions are concerned, Jimmy, you're the best little imitation of the arctic zone I've ever seen."

He took up a bottle of wine and felt the neck and the bottom of the bottle carefully.

"Confound it," he said. "I've never found a servant who could get it through his head that wine shouldn't be as cold as beer."

He held it a moment toward the fire, turning it slowly between his fingers. Then a negro uncorked and poured it into the four glasses.

"Bottled sunshine," said Weaver dreamily, raising his glass until the sparkle from the chandelier shone through the liquor. "Somewhere two score years ago in France the grapes grew that made this wine—some southern slope where the sun comes all day and the wind blows at night."

"Cut out the dreams, Jimmy," said Victoria. "Let's have a toast to the new luminary."

"A toast to the queen," cried Collins, banging his hand noisily on the table.

Weaver sat back in his chair a moment, then rose.

"To the queen," he said slowly, and then nodded to Victoria in acknowledgment of her suggestion. "She rises like the sun in the east. She reigns for a day. In the morning we did not know her. In the noon she is the ruler of the kingdom of chance. She has all that her heart desires, for she is hated by women and loved by men. In the night—well, instead of the night, let's drink a long health to bring the sun up again!"

They rose and drank, laughing.

"You shouldn't call me the sun, Jimmy," smiled Ruth. "Just a small mirror. You taught me everything, you know. So here's to you, Jimmy Weaver."

She drank. The servant filled the glasses hastily, but Ruth was still brooding on the oily warmth of the rich wine.

"Twelve thousand on the first night!" Collins was saying. "Let's see. Twelve thousand a night for a hundred nights makes one million; three months a millionaire. You can't beat that, eh, Ruth?"

The flattery was sweet to her in spite of herself. These men and this woman had baffled a thousand visitors in the palace of chance; but now they bowed to her—on her first night. She tilted her head a little like a young colt who tries its speed for the first time across the pasture and stops at the bars looking enviously at the wider fields beyond. Her eyes, bright with plea-

sure, roamed about the room and stopped at a great vase of dull blue on a massive pedestal. Great flags swept nobly up from the mouth like bits of frozen flame.

"What a beauty!" she cried. "What a perfect beauty of a vase!"

"That?" asked Collins; "it is yours, my dear. I'll send it to-morrow! I drink to your eyes, Ruth!"

"And I to yours!" said she, and raised her glass.

"The wine," Weaver interrupted in his cool voice, "is liquid sunshine, as I said before, but it's a good deal stronger than sunshine, Miss Burns!"

The "Miss Burns" shocked her into a closer attention of those about her. It seemed as if a purple mist were brushed suddenly from before her eyes. She was conscious first of Victoria's narrowed eyes searching her face. Then she was aware that Weaver and Collins were staring hard at one another. Collins was quite purple, and his lips formed several words one after another, but no sound issued. Weaver was paler than ever, but his eyes burned with cold anger. Collins lapsed back in his chair with a laugh.

"You're right," said he to Weaver. "The wine is pretty strong. I guess you had better not drink that glass, Ruth."

She saw him again clearly. For the last half hour he had been merely the owner of this beautiful home. The flush of her good fortune had spread a veil over his repulsive features; the warmth of the wine transformed him into a jovial companion. Now she pushed back her chair hastily and rose.

"I must go at once," she said. "You will forgive me for leaving so abruptly, Mr. Collins?"

Across the table she saw Victoria's mocking smile.

"Certainly," said Collins, glaring at Weaver. "I'll take you home myself. My machine is at the door."

"No," she answered, too steadily for a second offer. "I had rather go alone."

"And break up the party?" complained Collins.

"To the queen all things are queenly," said Weaver, tilting back in his chair; "to the victor belongs the spoils!"

Collins broke in with sudden vehemence. "I *shall* take you," he cried.

CHAPTER XII.

VICTORIA TAKES BACK HER KEY.

THEN he crossed to Ruth and led her down-stairs to the automobile. He paused with her at the foot of the steps.

"Of course," said Ruth in a small voice.

"And of course, also," he added impatiently, "you understand that I simply forgot you weren't used to—er—wine?"

"Yes," she assented, "I suppose so."

"You must be sure," he urged, leaning closer to her so that his breath came against her face.

She made a step back with a vague feeling of fear.

"I am sure," she said, almost as if she were repeating a lesson.

"Good night—dear!" he whispered at the door of the automobile, and then closing the door she heard him give the driver the address of her hotel. He stood on the pavement watching the machine drive away.

Ruth edged into a corner of the car. It seemed to her that the figure of Collins had gotten into the car with her and sat braced upon his cane, swaying a little with the lurching of the heavy machine. She shrugged her shoulders and forced herself to sit more erect. To-morrow she could send him a check!

She was too tired to think clearly that night. The whole evening passed into a blur in her mind; and when she awoke the next morning, it was to hear the telephone jangling urgently. Victoria Danforth answered her at the other end of the wire.

"I've just awakened," said Victoria, "and I've been reading my paper. I suppose you've seen the news?"

"News?" asked Ruth.

"That means you haven't," said Victoria; "but I'll let you read it for yourself. Get a *Times* and look on the second page. You'll be interested."

"I will," yawned Ruth.

"And then come to see me right away."

"I'm hardly awake," said Ruth stiffly.

Victoria laughed.

"The news will waken you, all right," she said, "and I think you'll want to talk it over with some one."

"I'm afraid I shall be busy," answered Ruth.

There was a little silence.

"It is very important," said Victoria in a changed voice. "I really must see you, and I think you will find it worth your while."

"Can't you give me an idea about what it is over the telephone?" asked Ruth.

"First of all," answered Victoria, "it's about that key!"

Ruth gripped the receiver hard.

"Very well," she said, "I shall come at once."

"Don't wait for breakfast," added Victoria, "I will have something brought up to my rooms. Good-by!"

Her receiver jangled, and Ruth turned away to dress, wide awake by this time. She hurried through her bath and dressed in haste. On her way out she bought a *Times* at the hotel desk.

In the taxicab she glanced over the second page hastily, but saw nothing, and then the third and fourth, thinking that Victoria might have made some mistake. She came back to the second page, and now she found in one corner of the page a rather small article under the heading: "Broker Attempts Suicide."

Late last night William Voltz, a well-known broker, of 30 Broad Street, shot himself twice in the head, but did not succeed in inflicting a mortal wound. The sound of the shots was heard by his landlady, Mrs. Henry Wiseman, from whom he rented his rooms in a west-side apartment.

She rushed to his room and, finding the door unlocked, entered, and discovered Voltz lying in a heap on the floor beside his bed. Her cries of terror raised the other occupants of the house. Patrolman Michael O'Connor was summoned to the scene and sent for an ambulance, which removed the injured man to the Polyclinic Hospital.

An examination revealed two wounds, one a slight scalp wound and the other a dangerous wound in the skull. This was evidently the result of the first shot. It missed the brain by a fraction of an inch. The wounds were dressed and the opinion given that Voltz would probably recover from his self-inflicted injuries.

It is not definitely known what caused Voltz to make the attempt on his life. Recent reverses in the stock-market are held to account for it. A fellow broker who had followed Voltz's operations declared that his fortune of approximately one hundred and fifty thousand dollars has shrunk almost to nothing, and that his total assets are probably not more than a few hundred dollars. He attributed Voltz's act to despondency.

The paper dropped rustling from Ruth's hand and she leaned back with her eyes closed. She had been figuring the twelve thousand dollars backward and forward since the night before, but now it was not the idea of losing that money which shocked her. It was the thought that when she played with Voltz the night before a third influence had set at the table unseen —death! At the turning of the cards which had meant success to her, the fleshless face had grinned and stretched forth a bony hand for another victim.

When the taxi halted at Victoria's address on West Fifty-Seventh Street, Ruth paid the driver gloomily and turned toward the house. At the same moment two big plasterers strode whistling past. Their caps were white with splotchy mortar, and their hands and bare forearms were powdered, but they stepped along without a care. Ruth could not help stopping to watch them swing out of sight around the next corner. Then she went up to Victoria's room.

The housemaid admitted her dubiously, saying that Miss Danforth was probably not yet ready to receive callers. From this Ruth judged that Victoria was not yet out of bed, and her prediction proved correct. A sleepy voice answered her knock faintly and called her in.

She opened the door into a living-room and followed the invitation of Victoria passed on to the bedroom beyond. Here she found Victoria lying propped among a mass of pillows, a smoking-stand by the bed, papers littered here and there, and blue-white drifts of cigarette smoke through the air.

"Fine to have you here," said Victoria cordially, heaving herself up in bed and extending her hand which the latter took somewhat gingerly. "Shall I have breakfast sent up?"

"Thank you," said Ruth. "I think I hardly care for any food now."

"You have read the paper?"

"Yes."

"Rotten luck," murmured Victoria. "Worst in the world. Think of the rotter gambling away twelve thousand dollars when he didn't have twelve hundred in the world! They ought to jail him for life!"

"It is done now," said Ruth dully. "I suppose there are other people who will—gamble."

She had to pause before she could utter the last word.

"And here," she continued, "is the key. I assure you I never wanted to keep it, but—"

"Not a word about it," said Victoria, taking the key from Ruth's hand and tossing it onto a table. "You had me blindfolded that night. I don't know what you pulled off in Collins's apartment. I'll never ask, and no one in the world will ever learn from me that you were there."

Ruth nodded her thanks dumbly. She had expected a sharp hostility from this woman, but all she could read in the somewhat tired eyes was sympathy and friendship.

"Now you take it straight from me," went on Victoria, sitting up cross-legged in bed and supporting her chin on the palm of one hand. "I was all ready to knife you at the first chance after you passed me up with the icy mitt, but you took my breath when I saw you in Collins's place. I begin to see through it now. I don't know just why you were there, but I know it wasn't for the reason I supposed. Yet I know when I'm beaten. You beat me that night and I hand it to you, kid, for getting by with a big deal. I was a bit suspicious when you refused the cigarette, but you carried it off like Maude Adams. And then the song at the piano—"

She stopped and put a hand on Ruth's arm, where she sat on the edge of the bed.

"Say, Ruthie, *was* there some one in old Collins's office that night? No, I haven't a right to ask you that, and I take it back. What I would like to know is: how did you get Weaver interested?"

"Interested?" queried Ruth.

"Hanging on by his teeth," said Victoria more emphatically. "Blushing and smiling like a two-year-old when you come around. Well, I don't suppose you know the formula for it, but you certainly have hooked him hard. Last night I thought Jimmy was going to shoot Collins—and Collins thought so too."

"I am sure," began Ruth with dignity.

"Now none of that duchess stuff," smiled Victoria. "You aren't in Germany now. Listen why I asked you to come here. It wasn't to talk about the money you've lost, but to tell you to beat it quick; get away from New York, and get away far—and don't leave any tips about where you're going."

Ruth stared at her in amazement.

"It is quite impossible," she said coldly. "I have no idea why you are advising me, but I cannot leave New York. There is a debt which must be paid. That is all I can say."

Victoria laughed unmusically.

"A debt to old skin-flint Collins," she scoffed. "I think I heard something about that. Your father's debt at that! But I say you'll never pay that debt while you're in a gambling-house. It can't be done, and I'll tell you why—Collins himself will see that you never *can* pay the debt!"

"I don't understand."

"Of course you don't, infant, but didn't you see Collins's face when you said that you'd won twelve thousand dollars last night? I tell you, when he heard you say that he thought he'd lost you forever. It made him sick all over. Can't you see that's he's on your trail like a bloodhound after a deer? He goes slow, but he goes sure and far, and he'll catch you in the end."

Ruth made a gesture of angry scorn.

"I'll kill him first—or myself, Victoria," she answered.

Victoria shook her head.

"Listen to me, honey," she said in a softer voice. "You haven't a chance against him; but he isn't the only one. If it were just Collins I'd say, perhaps, take a chance—a long chance, to be sure. But Collins isn't the only one. There's Jimmy Weaver! Ah, you change color now! I

tell you Weaver is harder to shake off than a thousand Collinses. I think he has never been really interested in anything—not even himself—before he ran into you. But now he's more than interested. Take it from me, honey, Jimmy is out for blood; though right now I guess he doesn't know it himself. But he'll know before long. Collins might take you by force. Weaver would take you by skill, and neither of them has any more conscience than a Junker in the front rank."

"My father's debt," whispered Ruth, staring desperately into a corner. "Why *won't* they leave me alone?"

"Ask the devil," said Victoria curtly; "but don't stop to ask him now. Get out of New York. Look what's ahead of you here! A life in a gambling-house, the loss of respectability, the loss of friends whom you care to call friends—the loss finally of your own better self. I tell you, *I know*. If you want to pay off your father's debt, go marry one of your own kind, Ruthie—and save your soul. I guess it's worth saving."

The smell of the cigarette smoke was pungent and sickening in Ruth's nostrils. The thought of Henry Cochrane was like a breath of pure air to her. She rose quickly.

"That's right," said Victoria. "Good-by, my dear. Here I've gone and talked myself tired again. Make a clean getaway, kid. Whatever happens, you've given us all a thrill, but when you beat it, *don't leave any clues behind.*"

CHAPTER XIII.

"SHE WHO FIGHTS AND RUNS AWAY—"

RUTH sat crouched forward, her chin in her hand and the fingers playing nervously about her mouth.

"He might have died," she said in a whispering voice.

"Who?" asked Victoria, sitting up in bed.

"And then his blood—on my hands!" breathed Ruth.

She held the slender white hands far away from her as if she were hunting for a perceptible red stain.

"Voltz," Ruth said, in response to Victoria's question, "if the two bullets had gone true to the mark he would have died. Victoria, I feel as if I had played with life and death when I laid wagers on those cards."

She caught a deep breath as if she were choking for air and dropped her head against Victoria's breast, sobbing and trying to speak, but inarticulate with grief and horror.

"Hush up, honey," murmured Victoria, patting Ruth's head with her hand while her eyes still stared blankly at the opposite wall. "Hush up. He *didn't* die. That's all you have to remember."

Ruth reached up a blind hand and it circled the neck of Victoria.

"I don't understand," she sobbed; "I don't understand. If I stay here I stay here in crime. If I run away from it all I am dishonored by that act. Victoria, I must tell everything to some one. Will you listen to my story?"

She raised tear-glittering eyes to Victoria. The older girl clutched her to her breast with a spasmodic movement and then pushed her away.

"Tell it all to me, kid?" she asked almost roughly, and then broke into a shrill and shaken laughter.

"Not a hope, deary," she said, the quiver of her voice contrasting with the roughness of her words; "not a hope of me listening. I know too much about you already. Don't go babbling out all you know to me, because—because I'm one of them, Ruthie. I'd like to help you, honey, God knows I would; but the trouble is, a woman like me *can't* help one of your sort. Do you understand that? No, you don't, or you wouldn't be here, but it's the God's honest truth, Ruthie. Take my advice, kid, and beat it while the way's half clear."

Ruth raised her head. Her eyes cleared as she stared into the face of Victoria.

"Victoria," she cried impulsively, "if I go you must go with me. We'll leave all this. We'll go among other kinds of people!"

A fire flared in Victoria's eyes.

"Me go, too?" she repeated in a half-whisper as if she had seen a ghost.

Ruth shook her by the shoulder.

"Yes, yes," she urged, "of course you must. You know what this life leads to, Victoria. You *must* come with me, please —dear!"

The little word brought a tide of color to Victoria's face and a mist in her eyes.

"I might," she began, speaking rapidly to convince herself. "Where'd we go, Ruthie?"

"To my friends," said Ruth. "I have hundreds of them. Fine people, Victoria. I could give you a dozen homes until I make one for myself."

Victoria sprang from the bed and swept a dressing-gown about her shoulders.

"I will," she cried, "and leave them all, the dogs, the rotters! And leave them all to snap in the air! I will!"

Her face changed subtly and then went gray. Ruth turned and saw that Victoria was fronting a mirror. She sat down suddenly in a chair and covered her face with her hands.

"No hope, kid," said the dull voice. "I'm done for. Look at that face. A fox could disguise his nose better than I could disguise that color—or the eyes."

"Victoria dear," murmured Ruth, kneeling by the chair, "you mustn't say that. You're beautiful, really beautiful."

"And I used to think I could get away with it," went on Victoria in the same voice, "but every day writes a little more hell into your face here. Ruth, what would your friends think if *you* came back to them with eyes and mouth and color like—like this?"

She rose and stood before Ruth with her arms outstretched. In spite of herself Ruth paled and trembled. Victoria laughed, a sound half snarling and half broken.

"Get out!" she said roughly. "I hate you and all your kind with all my soul—your smooth cheeks, your clear eyes, the curve of your smile—get out—I—hate—it —all!"

She caught Ruth by the shoulder and forced her toward the door, opened it, and urged her out.

A great warm emotion rushed over Ruth. She turned back a moment and caught Victoria in her arms.

"Oh, Vic," she said, "the pity of it! The other women never would understand —or spare you. God help—both of us!"

Victoria shook herself free. She seemed to be herself and smiling again.

"Cut out the 'God' stuff, kid; and just remember, honey, if you talk in your sleep, don't mention my name!"

She slammed the door in Ruth's face, and the key turned in the lock, but as Ruth turned away she heard a dry, racking burst of sobbing, terrible with the force which strove to control it. She went hastily down to the street and hurried back to her hotel.

The sound of the weeping followed her. It stirred at her ear as she wrote out a telegram at the hotel desk. It was to Cochrane:

Will arrive Newton two-forty unless you wire contrary.

After that she went to her room and packed her things as fast as her hands could move. More than one fine gown she jammed into the trunk without folding. Hats were tossed in without regard. It was a nightmare half-hour for her. It seemed as if all she feared in New York were waiting for her outside the door. Within an hour she was in a taxi in front of her hotel and started for the railroad station.

Then she remembered what Victoria had said: "When you start, leave no clues." She thought hurriedly back to the hotel. As far as she could remember there was not the slightest chance that any clue could be obtained there. Yet she did not feel utterly safe until she sat in the train.

The sense of power and motion in its rocking speed soothed her. It was almost as if she had given herself up to exterior forces to guide and direct her life. She sat back against the cushions and looked out the window with dimly unconscious eyes. After all, there was still brightness and happiness in the world.

It came home to her with double force when she stood at length on the platform of the little station at Newton. The train muttered off with its syncopated rattle down the track and left a taint of smoke in the

air a moment. Then a puff of wind blew the taint away and gave her the fresh scent of the field flowers. It made her tilt her head to the better breathing of it.

Two great shoulders blocked out the sun. She stood looking up to the face of Henry Cochrane.

"This," said his deeply musical voice, "is simply great."

"Henry," she commanded, with a rather wistful smile, "will you please stand out of the way? I want to see the sky! You can only see an imitation heaven over New York."

He led her down to the road and helped her into the big car. The self-starter whizzed; the engine crackled, and they surged off down the green-bordered way. She watched the large set of his shoulders, the big masterful hand at the wheel, the observant eyes which searched the road ahead. Once more she felt that surrender to motion and power which had been with her while she was on the train.

"I feel as if I were going home, Henry," she murmured.

He turned sharply toward her.

"That sounded desperately like a leading remark, didn't it?" she smiled with some embarrassment; "but it wasn't."

"That doesn't make me a bit happier," he grinned. "I never was an overpassionate worshiper of the truth."

"Where is your place?" she asked.

"The tips of those trees over the hill yonder," he answered, "that's Forest Rest."

"Forest Rest," she repeated, musing—"Forest Rest! That's a beautiful name, Henry, and I was never so tired in all my life."

She saw the big hands close a little harder on the wheel and the car leaped forward still faster.

"I sha'n't have to talk much or be gay for a while, shall I?" she queried. "I want so much just to rest and look at things — at green growing things—and flowers—and things like that, Henry. May I?"

"My dear—" began his gruff voice; but he had to stop and clear his throat before he could go on.

"I'm not going to ask questions about what you've been through in New York," he said; "but I have an idea that I'd like to wring some one's neck, Ruth. Of course you shall rest and sleep and dream—and never wake up from the dream, God willing!"

She sighed with content and leaned back limply into the big armlike cushions. They were following a winding road up and down hill, swerving over little hump-backed bridges and passing with a gentle rushing sound under overhanging limbs of the stalwart trunks. Now and then she glimpsed the country of fields beyond. It was all rolling land, and the grass was tall. The wind sent long ripples over it, and the sun marked the still waves with lines of light.

Lazy-motioned cattle raised their heads to watch them pass. At one point a horse stood on the top of a knoll with the wind catching at his mane and tail. He whinnied a shrill challenge at them and turned to watch them out of sight with pricking ears. They settled swiftly into a hollow where the trees grew tall and shadows kept a perpetual twilight.

It was such a place as one would go to in the middle of a summer day and sit for hours with no thought save that of the wind in the treetops. They rose easily from that hollow. Around the next sunshiny turn they startled a meadow lark into sudden flight and a burst of melodious whistlings. Still at the command of the large, strong hands the car swept on over hills and down small valleys until they came at last to Forest Rest.

It seemed an impenetrable wood from a little distance, but as they passed the last curve of the road Ruth saw two great stone pillars with opened gates of massive iron pendant from them. They swept through the gates, and as they did so a gardener touched his cap.

"He is a guardian spirit of the wood," thought Ruth, "set there to keep out the noisy world."

The speed of the car subtly decreased. Ancient elms arched the driveway in triumph and splotched the graveled road with multiform shadows; but beyond the guard-

ian elms were glinting stretches of lawns, smooth-cropped.

They came upon a broad circular expanse dotted with small evergreens and toward the center of a fountain where a marble faun crouched by the brim and scooped the water with a shell. She would have stopped the car then and got out to lie on her back on the velvet grass, and dig her fingers into the sod and look up into the blue sky through the branches, but the greater pleasure was to turn her eyes upon Henry Cochrane, him who owned this new Eden, watch him with a calm sense of content and comfort.

She thought back to Weaver now with a shiver for the unhealthy intensity of his manner, the cynicism of his thought, the midnight pallor of his face. He stood to her for those hysterical hours in New York. He represented in a picture all the danger and the suspense of that place. Cochrane was a new chapter. He stood for her return to her own kind. He represented the calm content of a healthy being. In his very silence there was a difference. The silence of Weaver was merely suggestive of words withheld, of criticism, of supernatural alertness. The silence of Cochrane was the courtesy of a gentleman who finds his pleasure in the pleasure he gives to others.

The car pulled up at the automobile entrance under brown stone pillars. A servant opened the door of the machine and took out the luggage from the rear seat. Ruth then entered the house.

The art of man had made the house what the art of nature had made the gardens and the forest. It presented the same restful spaciousness, the same absence of obtrusive objects, the same blended colors. There were slowly opening vistas down long rooms; there was a suggestion about the furniture that it was rather to be used than admired. The big chairs invited one to comfort, and the massive Italian tables pressed strongly upon the floor.

Henry's mother came eagerly to meet them. She was a woman browned by many seasons spent in the open. Taking Ruth by both hands, her eyes told how gladly the girl was welcomed. Up the stately sweep of the stairs Mrs. Cochrane herself led Ruth, and Henry stood below following them with his eyes and smile. At the top of the stairs Ruth turned and kissed her hand to him.

The room which had been set apart for Ruth's use was quite large, and at one end two big French windows opened upon a balcony where a softly upholstered *chaise-longue* invited to a sun bath. The room itself was delicately bright with color, with ivory tinted walls, a long mirror framed in dull gold, and a great rug of delightful Chinese blues and yellows on the floor.

"Oh!" Ruth exclaimed, stretching out her arms to this beauty within the room and to the more stately splendor of the trees outside. "I feel as if I had come home—home!"

Mrs. Cochrane surrounded her waist with a strong and motherly arm.

"I hope with all my heart that it *will* be a home to you," she said. "For three years I have heard so much about Ruth Burns that long ago I set about mothering you in fancy."

Ruth answered her with a rather misty smile.

"I must go out," she said. "There are those lawns which I simply yearn to feel under my foot, and a fountain I know I must splash in!"

But she refused the guidance of Henry when he proffered it.

"There's dad off there down the trout-stream," said Henry. "He'll want to meet you at once. At least let me take you to him, and after that you can go about alone just as much as you please."

"I'm going to introduce myself," she said, shaking her head. "Tell me what he looks like, so I'll know him."

"Like—well, like Walton's *Compleat Angler*," laughed Mrs. Cochrane.

With this clue she started off over the lawns toward the trout-stream. She could hardly tell why she wished to go alone in this place, but the idea of walking with Henry Cochrane momentarily bothered her. It was a prejudice, she decided, as groundless as the woman's typical "because"—but the sense of freedom which she felt in walking alone was undeniable.

So she came to the trout-stream. It was well-shaded with large trees and the banks were thick with shrubbery, but by picking her steps she was able to walk along the sand at the edge of the stream. The water ran shallow over golden banks of pebbles and sand in the splashes of sunlight which poured here and there through the trees, and now at a turning of the stream would be a deeper, more placid pool where the blue of the sky drifted down and lay cool and shifting as the ripples invaded the quiet of heaven with little storms.

Before Ruth had gone three hundred yards she had found twenty places, each one worthy of a day's acquaintance. She would stop a moment before each bend and close her eyes in smiling expectation of the changes which she would find, but each time the new bend surprised her, each time she found new vistas of yellow and gold. of black and blue, of brown trunks irregularly reflected in the shallow water, of green water plants which flowed shimmering on the current and seemed adrift. Once she heard a splash of a fish in the silence. She caught her breath and stood with lips parted for the wonder of it, the little crystal sound so shiveringly loud above the ripple of the creek.

She went on again, and coming around another turn she saw the man who might have been Walton's *Compleat Angler*. He was coming toward her up the current, a big, bearded man with a battered hat slouched on his head and boots that came well above his knees with the current making a continual ripple against them. At his side a creel was slung, and in his right hand he carried a rod with which he tossed the fly lightly before him at every few steps.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LURE OF PEACE.

SHE stood for several moments watching him, listening to the faint hum of the the reel as he wound it up. He was casting to a pool under the shadow of a group of low branches which thrust out from a shrub. Time and again the fly darted out with the snap of the line and drew back with a tiny wake over the water as he reeled in. Then came a little splash, the line drew taut, the pole bent slightly, an expression of great intentness came over the angler's face.

Now he was reeling in and in, the pole bent more, but the tip stayed at an even distance above the surface of the water. Now he held the rod in one hand and took his landing net in the other, lowering it into the water. A moment more and the net flipped up with a little shining trout twisting about in it's meshes.

"Bravo!" called Ruth.

He dropped his trout into the creel without hurry before he smiled up to her. Then he came striding toward her through the water and stretched out his hand.

"How do you do, Miss Burns? I am Anthony Cochrane."

"You know me, Mr. Cochrane?" she queried.

"Like a book," said the deep, rumbling voice. "Like a book that has been read aloud to me for three years."

She forced a smile.

"Please go on with your fishing, Mr. Cochrane. I love to watch you. Mrs. Cochrane told me to look for the *Compleat Angler*, and now I'm sure that I've found him."

"I've done my fishing for the day," he said. "Had a fine fight with that last fellow. Plenty of exercise. About a hundred yards down I caught the hook in a high branch on my back cast. I climbed the tree after it. Took me ten minutes to do what I'd have done in ten seconds when I was a youngster."

He had climbed up from the water and stood with her on the edge of the lawn beyond the hedging shrubbery which screened the stream.

"Yes," he sighed, "the country—and about everything that's fine—is made for the little tikes. Let's sit down here on the grass and talk, shall we?"

He sat down cross-legged like a Turk, and she lay resting on her elbow close to him.

"You see that hill over there?" he asked suddenly, pointing to a round, green top

far away and barely showing over the trees. "I used to stand on that hill when I was a youngster and wonder whether any one man could ever own such a place as this just to live in. I used to come down here then and walk around. There wasn't any lawn, but there were open, grassy places that were just as fine, to my way of thinking. It was a wonderland to me. Finally things came about so that I could own the land, but that was not until Henry was nearly grown up. I'd like to see some child start here from the first and learn right off what sky and trees and grass and water can be."

His eye turned rather wistfully toward her. She knew the question which the big, brown fellow wanted to ask her, but she was too busy asking it herself to know what to say to him.

"I'm a very blunt sort," he mused, half to himself.

"But I like bluntness," said Ruth.

She studied him for a moment, and he half frowned back at her.

"By the Lord," growled Anthony Cochrane, "at least it's a relief to talk to one girl like you."

She reached out an impulsive hand, and it touched his and went away again as lightly as the dip and rise of a swallow.

"I suppose I know in a vague way what you are thinking," she said, "and I'll talk with you about it if you wish. It won't hurt me."

He drew a long breath.

"Well," he said, "of course it comes back to the idea that this would be a wonderful place to watch a boy grow up."

"Of course," agreed Ruth gravely.

"And Henry—" he began, and then stopped. "The wife would be furious if she knew I were talking like this with you the first ten minutes we have known each other."

"No, no," she laughed. "You yourself admit that it's been three years."

"Right," he said, "if you will see it that way. The point is that when a man reaches my age it's the *little* children who count."

It thrilled her tremendously to think that this broad-shouldered business man of sixty should spend time thinking of children, especially little ones.

"So of course," he went on somewhat clumsily, "I'm eager for Henry to have a son—and it seems that about three years ago he made up his mind that he had found the right mother for the right sort of a son. Am I correct?"

"I guess he thought so," nodded Ruth.

"Well?" he queried very gently.

"Well?" answered Ruth, and could not meet his eye.

"I have thought and hoped that something might come of it since Henry told me you were coming up here."

"It is hard for me to think."

"And it *does* require thinking over?"

"I'm afraid so."

He studied the grass before him.

"You have no idea?" he asked.

"I am beginning to have," she said, "but I have been through a good deal, Mr. Cochrane. It is hard to even *think* so soon. I am just feeling the beauty of the place. I do like Henry immensely, of course, or I would not have come up; and now that I have met you and Mrs. Cochrane—why—why, I begin to see how much I have missed of life, you know."

He rose as she started to her feet, and again took her hands in his.

"Then it shall rest there," he said, "but whatever you decide, I shall back your decision as being for the best. We'll work this thing out slowly together. There is plenty of time. I feel that we shall all be happy in the end. It has been a long three years for Henry; a long three years!"

They went back across the lawn together. The late afternoon was giving gradual place to evening, and the trees and the lawns and the skies over Forest Rest grew doubly beautiful.

Through the quiet they heard the far-off puff and shower of a fountain. It was very faint. The passing of the wind through the nearest of the trees drowned the sound a moment later.

"Think what a whisper like that would mean to a barefoot boy," said Cochrane, "with his toes digging into the cool grass and his smile going up to a sunset sky like this. Think of that!"

"Think of it!" repeated Ruth breathlessly.

They went back to the house hand in hand and in silence.

It was still two days before the guests for the week end party were expected, and that time was happily crowded for Ruth. It occurred to her that she might be keeping herself so busily employed simply to give no room or time in her mind for the thought of Henry Cochrane.

Most of her moments were spent with Mrs. Cochrane and old Anthony. She had never met a type like the latter. He took her boating on the lake which bordered his estate, and he taught her how to bait and cast for small-mouthed bass, a complicated art which to the accomplished angler is the highest delight. The idea of sitting in a boat for hours and throwing out the little shining spindle and reeling it in again was not attractive to her, but she loved to row the boat slowly with silent oars and watch big Anthony in the stern of the boat puffing at a formidable pipe and humming an invitation to the bass.

And there were the rides they took before breakfast. She was given a tall bay with a high head and angry eyes. She chose him herself from the stables and mounted and controlled him to the secret delight of Anthony. There were any number of winding paths to ride with the branches swinging out so that one had to sway in the saddle to avoid them.

Then came the guests. There were a score of them all told. They were largely people whom she had met long before, all of the leisure class. pleasant spoken persons, and well dressed. In those few rapid days in New York she had almost forgotten the chatter of news, of clothes, of music, of plays. It came back to her now not so easily as she might have wished.

There was young Atherby, who cornered her on the first afternoon and held her for an hour in close conversation. She had rather liked Atherby before. He had been intensely proper, well informed, a fine dancer. She forgot his accomplishments now. It came to her with something of a shock that these people had changed or she had grown away from them.

"It is the call of the blood in me," thought Ruth; "I am becoming my father's daughter!"

How would the stern-faced man she had seen lying in the coffin have acted among such people as these? He would have laughed at them, she was sure. The surety, indeed, made her rather proud of his memory. When they sat about the rooms playing bridge after supper on the first night of their coming, the regular run of laughter, talk, and whispering filled Ruth with a big desire to spring to her feet and cry out, or do something which would shock them to the core, something which would make them forget their self-confidence.

She was glad that the gray head of Anthony Cochrane was not among them. She had heard him plead excuses and a few moments later he had disappeared in his ragged old fishing clothes with a casting-rod over his shoulder, equipped for an evening on the lake with luminous bait. She was casting about in her mind for some way of escaping Atherby and perhaps going in search of Anthony when the voice of Henry Cochrane arrested her. He had come toward the center of the room.

"A proclamation of general interest, people," he called.

The remainder of the room grew quiet.

"I've just gotten a telegram from Seymour Wilding. He's coming out here to spend the week-end with us.

A chorus rose from the guests, some of them crying: "Seymour Wilding!" and the others asking eagerly after his identity. For her part, Ruth had never heard the name mentioned before.

"There's a lot of you who apparently don't know who he is. You were with us in college, Bill. Suppose you tell the curious who Seymour Wilding is."

The man addressed as "Bill" was none other than William John Barneson, third, a round-faced man with small, white hands and large glasses.

"That's an awfully big contract," said Barneson, shifting a little in his chair as the other eyes in the room turned to him, "because in the first place Wilding was a bit inclined to live up to his name. I suppose he still is. The way we used to figure him

was that he had reached maturity when he was twenty. I can't imagine him other than pale and lean and a bit cynical. Mind you, he was always a good fellow, fine friend, and all that, but you get a sinister reaction out of him. He's the sort of man who has a large number of acquaintances and no friends. No one would think of offering to become a friend to Wilding. No one would imagine him ever wanting or needing a friend. Never talks of his own ambitions or desires, his own likes or dislikes. He puts everything in the third person. That's a pretty unfair picture of Wilding, at that, but you'll see him soon and then you can read him for yourselves.

" As far as accomplishments go, he had a lot of them. I remember he could play about anything on the piano and had a deuced good baritone. I think he even composed a bit himself; but his chief amusement was cards."

" I should say so," agreed several voices.

" Positively uncanny what that fellow could do in a card game. Personally there were several times when I thought that Wilding was a bit crooked with the cards—not in serious games, of course—but it wasn't that. It was just his infernal ability to read the mind and apparently the hand of his opponent. Wilding may be changed from this. It's been years since I've seen him. Have you kept in touch with him, Henry?"

" Used to get letters from him when he was in Europe after he first left college, then there came a long silence, and now I hear from him again. I suppose he's tired of wandering through cities and wants a little rest," answered Cochrane, " but that's Wilding. If any of you want to learn some new stunts, say in bridge, I'll wager that Wilding will be the man for you and the hero of the party. He ought to get here on the ten o'clock. I'll meet him at the station."

A little hum of conversation rose about the room again. Three or four of the men had known or heard a good deal about Wilding. They were busied relating anecdotes concerning him. Ruth craned an intense ear to hear their remarks. She had never heard a description of a man which interested her more. Afterward Cochrane came to her.

" Rather sorry I made such a splurge about Wilding," said he, " but I did it on the spur of the moment. He may have changed a lot. It's been years since I have seen or heard from him. Don't know what can be bothering him to make him look me up like this. Very queer—rather silent. I hope you'll do something to make him happy, Ruth; will you?"

" Of course I will," she agreed; " he sounds infinitely attractive. Somehow I have grown to rather like silent men—who do things. I'll go down with you to the station when you meet him if you wish."

" Nothing better," answered Cochrane. " I have to start for the station in a few moments. Will you be ready?"

She nodded and hurried to her room to put on a coat. In a few minutes they were on the way toward the station, the big car humming along the winding road.

It had been wonderfully pleasant to ride in the open day along that road. It was even more beautiful at night, and the square shoulder of Cochrane bulked big and black in her eyes. The sky hung low and star-dotted over them, with the overhanging trees blotting it out now and then with swift successions of shadows. The old feeling of pleasant surrender to a superior force came on her.

She became aware that the car was running slowly and more slowly—then that Cochrane was turning half toward her on the seat.

" Well?" he asked bluntly.

She merely stared at him with larger eyes. She knew what he meant, but could not answer.

" We will be late," she said, " unless you speed up a little for the train, Henry."

" We have plenty of time, as far as the train is concerned," he answered, " and I think there is time for me to tell you what I have on my mind. Will you listen?"

" Not now," she said, panic-stricken; " another time, Henry."

" I think not," he said in his slow way. " I have thought the thing out, and I believe that any one time is as good as another so far as you and I are concerned."

"I can't quite understand," she said.

"I suppose not," he said, "but I'll try to explain. I'll try to explain why I am asking you for the tenth time to marry me."

CHAPTER XV.

WILDING, ALIAS—

"I'LL listen if you wish," she answered, "but—"

"I know what you're going to say," broke in Henry, "but I want you to hear me out first. I've been thinking the thing out, and I have a lot to say. In the first place, the important thing which stands in my way is that you don't love me—now. Isn't it?"

She swept the indistinct landscape with her eyes and they came back to the strong, blurred outlines of Cochrane's face. Even in the darkness she could sense the strain.

"I hardly know even that," she answered; "it's so hard for me to think now. I just want to drift along for a while."

"We can't drift any longer," said Cochrane, "because for my part I have found the drifting hell itself. It's because I have wanted you and you only for three long years, Ruth, dear. That means something. I'm not a boy. It's no freak of fancy. When a man of my age with a man's business to occupy his mind finds himself stoping half a dozen times every day of his life to think of a woman it means that so far as that man is concerned she is the woman for him. Do you believe that?"

She laid a hand on his arm and pressed it faintly. It shook under her touch and she moved her hand away.

"I do believe you—absolutely," she answered.

"I have come to the point where I can't go on the way I have been doing with a half hope that is really worse than no hope at all. Tell me out and out if I have no hope at all and I'll be through with this business, Ruth."

He leaned so close to her that she could hear the quick sound of his breathing.

"No," she said, "I can't say that—unless you wish me to."

"Wish you to!" he cried under his breath. "Dear God, Ruth, don't you know I'm half frenzied now and have to hold this wheel with all my strength to keep control of my senses. Ruth, dear, I tell you I feel now that this thing is going to be between us. But no, I sha'n't talk like that. I'll be very calm. You say you have loved the peace of Forest Rest?"

"With all my heart."

"You do not dislike me?"

"I like you more than any *friend*."

He winced at the word.

"That is all I ask," he said, "but let's consider the whole affair quietly. In the first place there seem to be reasons why you should marry me. It would free you from this fight which you have been carrying on in New York, though I haven't any idea what that fight could be. It would give you back to the life of quiet and rest which you love. It would free your life from worries. Those all seem to be pretty strong arguments why you should marry me, do they not?"

"Yes."

"And the arguments against it are simply that you do not love me. That's enough. I suppose. But you have the beginnings of love, Ruth. You like me. That's a starter, and with time I know I can make that liking into something stronger and finer. Love is no mysterious and inexplicable thing. Love is no puzzle which defies analysis. It grows almost like a plant whose roots are in the heart. Kindness and care and affection will make it bloom. Don't you believe me?"

"I almost begin to," she said. "It is the power and the sense of control that I love, and I have been alone with myself for so long that I welcome this new thing. Perhaps this *is* the beginning of love, Henry. Suppose I say 'yes'?"

"Then I'm the happiest man in the world."

"It *does* mean a great deal to you, doesn't it?"

"I haven't changed for three years."

"Henry, it *is* 'yes.'"

He turned to her silently and caught her in his arms. He made no attempt to kiss her lips, but in the strong touch of his hand there was a caress as tender as mother-love.

It troubled Ruth and half frightened her—the emotion which she had raised in this big man with a single word. She drew a little away from him. He let her go without resistance. He was staring down the road and running the car slowly. She knew his thoughts were traveling the course of long years. She knew that he was reading the future like a book whose pages were spread before him, that he was seeing children with golden hair and hearing their voices as musical as running water. She pressed suddenly close to his side with a great feeling of loneliness.

"Henry, dear," she said, "kiss me once to show that—that I also believe—hope—that it may all come true!"

He kissed her almost reverently. After that there was silence for the few moments until they came to the railroad station—silence as they sat in the car waiting for the train to come in.

A gleam of light circled the fields farther down. They heard a mutter of wheels; the staring headlight rounded a curve and grew out upon them. It came to a stop with a roar and rumble at the side of the station, but only for a moment. A single man passenger alighted from one of the cars, a suit-case swinging in one hand and an overcoat flung over his shoulder. He seemed infinitely lithe and active as he dismounted and came across the platform toward the car.

"Wilding!" cried Cochrane, leaping from the car and running up the grading to the platform.

The other man stopped and turned toward Henry. As he did so the light of an electric globe directly above him shone on his face. Ruth saw Jimmy Weaver drop his suit-case and shake hands with Cochrane and then turn toward the automobile. Her mind whirled.

Then she remembered what Victoria had said: "Leave no clues behind you!" And again: "They are both on your trail—Collins first, but more important than Collins—Jimmy Weaver!"

So they *had* picked up the trail. They *had* found her out! But what would Weaver say when he met her so suddenly? She closed her hands tightly and waited. They came beside the automobile. For one thing she was grateful. The car stood in the shadow of the little station.

"May I present Mr. Seymour Wilding?" Cochrane was saying, "and this is Miss Ruth Burns."

"Miss Burns," said the calm voice of Weaver instantly, "I am very glad."

She murmured something. She could not remember what afterward, but when the machine started she was uncomfortably conscious of eyes from behind which stared at her and searched her very mind. It sent a series of little shivers down her back, but she dared not turn and address a remark to him. Such was her silence that as they got from the car at Forest Rest, Cochrane whispered to her, "Please loosen up a little toward Wilding. You'll find him awfully worth while—in his own way."

She laughed somewhat unpleasantly.

"I have no doubt—in his own way," she said.

"What's happened, Ruth?" inquired Cochrane with some anxiety, "have I offended you in some unknown manner? Tell me what is troubling you?"

The hasty search for reasons brought nothing to her mind except a headache. She proffered that time-worn subterfuge as an excuse.

"Wait till I can buttonhole you in a corner, Wilding," said Cochrane as they went up the steps toward the house. "You must have a thousand tales of adventure piled up during these years."

"You sha'n't hear a word," said Weaver; "I'll be too busy looking over your place to talk. It's rarely beautiful, don't you think, Miss Burns?"

As he spoke he turned to Ruth. She searched his face closely, but there was no hint of double meaning. It was simply a polite attempt to include a third person in a conversation.

The rest of the evening passed in a daze to Ruth. Before they had been in the house ten minutes people were seated at card-tables playing bridge, and Weaver was greatly in demand. He went about from table to table answering questions and now and then sitting down to play a hand to demonstrate a point. She watched the ease of his manner in amazement. She had seen

him before in New York, silent, introspective, careless of appearance. Now he seemed to fit in the brightest place of the gathering, a little aloof from them all, but the center of their interest. Several times he paused to chat with her casually and each time she managed to barely mumble an answer.

"What's the trouble," asked Cochrane at last, "don't you like Wilding?"

"I think it's this bothersome head of mine which may make me seem to dislike him," she answered. "I really have no cause."

"Let's go into the music-room," suggested Cochrane, "there's a lot of big windows there. The air will help you."

They passed into the adjoining room, a great high-ceilinged place which ran half the length of the house. At one end it passed into a sort of alcove with tall windows on all sides. They sat there in the semi-dark. She was glad to be away from Weaver. She was half afraid to be alone with Cochrane.

"Do you know," he said, after they had been sitting in quiet for a moment, "I have had to keep a stiff watch over myself all evening since we came back from the train? I have wanted to go about shaking people by the hand, and asking the men if I couldn't lend them money, and asking the girls if they didn't want to hear a secret. Return to childhood, I guess."

He laid a big hand over hers, and as she turned to look up to his bulky strength a doubt came over her. Just why she feared Weaver she could not tell. Perhaps it was the fact that his physical slenderness suggested a greater strength of self-control and self-sufficiency. Perhaps it was merely because he represented all the forces which had held and claimed her in New York and which had now followed her in her last refuge as Victoria had warned her they might do.

Weaver could not force her back to New York by any way which she could think of. For that matter, neither could she imagine how he had managed to find the clue which had given him her location. The doubt and the surprise of it served to unnerve her more and more and fill her with a greater dread for the unknown powers of Jimmy Weaver; the versatility which had made him equally at home in a New York gambling-house and in this dwelling of the rich.

Her fear of him was like the fear of a child for the dark, the dread of the unknown. And against Jimmy Weaver—slender, alert, adroit, soft of voice—the broad shoulders and the straightforward strength of Cochrane seemed insufficient. Yet Cochrane was her only guard. If he failed her she could rely on nothing except her own powers. She determined that moment to tell all that was necessary to Cochrane. Beside, it was only fair to him.

"I have made my mind up to tell you why I was staying and fighting in New York, Henry," she said. "I think it will make no difference to your love for, but it is something which you should know, at least in part."

"Not unless you wish me to know," he answered.

"Yes, yes," she hesitated, "I *do* wish you to know, for I'm afraid, and I hardly know what I'm afraid of except that it lies inside myself. It is myself that I fear. I can't tell you about that now. What I must tell you is that I have been in New York trying to make thirty thousand dollars to pay off a debt of my father's."

"Thirty thousand dollars!" repeated Cochrane, drawing a deep breath; "a girl—make that amount! Good Lord, Ruth, how did you plan to do it?"

"In a—a desperate way, Henry," she said; "that's all I can tell you. I know that I shall never feel honorable again until that debt is paid, and yet in trying to pay it there are a hundred forces which reach out after me—and I am afraid, Henry, afraid like a child!"

"You sha'n't fear it any longer," said Cochrane. "I won't ask you what you have been doing to get the money. You shall have my check to-morrow for the full amount."

"No, no!" she said with a half-shuddering denial. "I can't take it now, but—"

"After we are married, the—" he said quietly. "I'm glad, because it may hurry that."

He passed the strong arm about her shoulders, but at that moment she saw a dim figure pass slowly across the other end of the music-room.

"Who is it?" she whispered, as the figure paused, glanced toward them, and then walked on.

"I don't know," said Cochrane in a whisper. "It's all right. He can't see us down here, I'm sure."

The figure strolled over to the piano and sat down. They heard him play a few soft chords, and then the voice of Jimmy Weaver, clear but controlled, came to them in the strains of "Watch Your Step!"

Ruth pressed suddenly away from Cochrane, trembling violently. She remembered when she had sung that song in the studio of Collins; the faint sounds of Weaver working at the safe in the next room, the gay face of Victoria opposite her—it all came back to her like a painted picture. Weaver was warning her as she had warned him. What did he mean? What danger threatened her as it had threatened him on that night in the studio?

"What is wrong?" asked Cochrane anxiously. "It is simply Wilding playing an old song. Are you ill, Ruth?"

"It is something else; something I have just thought of."

"You keep yourself away from me; what is wrong? Will this thing you have just thought of make a difference between us?"

"No—I don't know—Henry—I am afraid!"

His arm moved toward her again, but she avoided it.

"No, no!" she whispered. "It is something against which you cannot protect me; it is myself, Henry."

"Let us get out of here," he answered, "and find a place where we can talk this over."

"No," she said, "please, please don't talk about it to-night. I am half-distraught. To-morrow—to-morrow, Henry! Let's go back where there are people, lights, noise!"

He rose without a word and led her back into the card-rooms. He passed to another part of the room, and she sat for a moment at a table where they had just finished a game. She tried to talk lightly of light things, but the sight of the cards kept a nervous tremor in her, brought back the memories of her father's place in New York. At last she could stand it no longer. She looked about and made sure that Weaver had not come back from the music-room. She rose and went unobserved back to where he sat at the piano, still fumbling soft chords. The light at that end of the room was very dim, but the pallor of his face was distinguishable through it. He rose as she approached and stood motionless with one hand resting on the keyboard.

"Miss Burns, I believe?" he asked.

She walked directly up to him and stood in silence.

"There is something you wish, Miss Burns?" he went on in the same emotionless voice.

"Why have you done this?" she asked breathlessly.

"I hardly understand."

"Why have you come here?"

He gestured vaguely in the darkness.

"If I had known you did not wish me here—" he began.

"No, no, no!" she cried in a controlled voice, "stop this pretending, Jimmy Weaver. Be frank with me now."

"I will try to be."

"Why have you come here?"

"The country is very pleasant."

She stamped with anger.

"I shall not stand it! Tell me how you found out that I was here!"

"As for that," said Weaver quietly, and she hated him for the ease of his voice, "it was amazingly simple. It is really not worth asking or answering. I was driving up to your hotel in a taxi when I saw you enter a car, and the suit-case was put in afterward. That's all. I told the driver of my cab to follow yours. You went to the railroad-station. Once there it was very simple to follow you to the ticket-office and see for what destination you bought your ticket. I bought a ticket for the same place. I was on the same train which you took. I saw you get off and I waited on the platform of one of the cars ready to jump off at the last minute and follow you to your destination. It wasn't necessary for me to

leave the train, however. I saw the man come up and shake hands with you. It was a strange coincidence, but stranger things happen every day. The man who shook hands with you was my school friend, Cochrane. I went on to the next station with the train, got off and took the next train back to New York. From there I telegraphed to Cochrane, giving him glad tidings that I was in town and would be pleased to visit him.

"That was all there was to it. Yet it was strange that you should have fled from me into the arms of one of my friends. It was more than strange. It proves what I have thought before. The gods have set the stage for this little play which we are acting out. They pull the strings and we are the puppets which dance. You wish to leave the stage and the play. It is not I who prevents you—Fate has the ruling hands, Ruth."

A half-sob formed in her throat and it was a moment before she could speak.

"Then tell me why you have come here dogging me?"

"Not to-night. There is a great deal of time for that. Just now you are too excited, but I may say that we agreed to act as partners, did we not?"

"That partnership is dissolved!" she insisted; "it is done with and forgotten!"

"By no means," smiled Weaver. "This partnership cannot be dissolved without the consent of both parties. At least, I think that is the legal way of phrasing it."

Once more she was silent for a moment.

"You will—not—try—to take me back to New York?' 'she asked very slowly.

"Not against your will!"

"My will!" she exclaimed. "I will tell you my will now. It is never to see you again; to forget you and all your kind forever!"

As she spoke she stepped closer to him and what she saw startled her. The pallor of Weaver's face seemed to deepen in the dusk light of the room and his face set and hardened as if in pain. It passed in a moment. She could not be sure of what she had seen.

"In spite of our partnership?"

He was laughing, and the sound went cold in her blood. Then in desperation she caught his thin hand in both of hers.

"Jimmy Weaver," she said, "if you have ever cared for an honorable girl, let me go. Do not urge me back into New York. Can't you see that I'm up here fighting my last battle to reclaim my old self? Can't you see that I am trying to close my eyes to the truth? Can't you see that I'm trying to destroy the claim of my father's blood? Oh, to-night, when I saw them bring out the cards, and sit about the tables with their light and silly talk, there came a nameless something over me as hot as a fever. It was intoxicating. It was maddening. I wanted to be back in New York. I wanted to be at one of the round and polished tables with an opponent opposite. I wanted to be playing in one of those games where the stakes run as high as death, and as low as hell. I wanted to be there, staking everything on my ability to read the minds of strong men and sacrifice at the altars of the great god of chance. And now that I see you here, representing all that New York meant to me, representing all the great chance and all the world of my father, I hardly know what to do. My strength goes. My blood grows weak as water. I am afraid of myself! Jimmy, go away!"

He dropped onto the piano-bench; his arm fell on the keyboard and made a faint and discordant sound. His head fell upon that arm and the other hand dropped loosely at his side. She watched it clench slowly and hard. Then she went to her knees beside him and sought the hand in hers.

"Jimmy!" she pleaded.

There was no answer.

"Jimmy, suppose we are still partners!"

She felt the hand which she held tighten spasmodically as she spoke the word.

"Partners are supposed to help one another, Jimmy, aren't they?"

She waited a moment praying for an answer. She felt that if she could make him speak then, he would win; but he said nothing.

"And you won't urge me back to that place in the city?" she went on in the same hushed voice, "because — because — oh, Jimmy, I think I would have no strength to resist! My heart is there now at the

gaming-table, in the place where my father fought and conquered Chance! It reached after me like a hand, Jimmy, that world which I have left. The hand is your hand; I feel it lying here clenched tight in mine! Jimmy, speak to me—for—for the sake of our partnership!"

He raised his head suddenly and turning to her caught her face between his hands and stared into her eyes. She felt as if something as fierce as fire were searching out the deeps of her heart. The strength it required to meet his gaze left her trembling, weak. He rose and stood with his back to her.

"What is it you would have me do?"

"Go away—away," she answered swiftly, and then hesitated; "never let me see you again. Help me to forget what I have wanted to do!"

Her voice stopped. She made a gesture toward him as if he were turned to watch her.

"Not that," she continued, "but at least not to see you for a long time—long enough for me to forget—and for my blood to grow colder."

"What would you do?"

He turned now and stared at her again, but his glance was more controlled.

"What would *you* do?" he repeated.

"You mean?"

"How would you pay your father's debt?"

She felt suddenly that she could not tell him how. Her head sank.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

THE road to the dugout back of the first line trenches where the American expeditionary forces were stationed, was winding and shell-pitted.

Down this road a badly-banged flivver flew as if the range was short and life was sweet. It rocked and pitched in the new-made crump-holes, it took the ditch at times, but it came on gamely and with speed like a skater over rough ice that might give way at any moment.

The driver of this flivver had cut his teeth with an American ambulance in the Somme sector. He knew that he was within range of the German heavies. This fact was brought home when a Jack Johnson, or a coal-box, woofed over the fringe of his service cap, flattened him with its wind, and exploded a hundred meters behind the flivver with a shock that racked the earth and filled the sky with descending dust and rocks.

The driver recovered his steering-wheel, pulled down the throttle and advanced the spark. The flivver leaped forward. A second shell was wide and off the road. The third that arrived found the driver below the exposed shoulder of the hill and safe in

the tiny valley that led to the dugout. He sprang out.

"Orders from the general!" he announced, giving the right front tire a kick. "Orders and the machine-gun ammunition! You'll find it in the rear of the car, captain."

The captain of the outfit rapidly ran over the orders. They were details and conformations that had already been sent by phone from headquarters. One, however, was different. It ran:

CAPTAIN STOCKBRIDGE:

Detail three of your men to-night for duty at the Devil's Elbow. Have them locate the German snipers who have sniped Roderick Folk, James Barker, and Top Sergeant Pope. I expect you to clear this nest out.

BRINKERHOFF, Commanding.

"Where in sin's th' Devil's Elbow?" queried Stockbridge, glancing at the driver of the flivver. "I'm new in this sector."

"Devil's Elbow's back there a piece—right this side the hill where the road dips into the valley. It's about two miles from the German firing line—maybe less. 'Suicide Corner,' they ought to call it. It's sure death and flowers to cross there with a light after dark. The other road's safer—but that's all crump-holes now and a sweet range. I thought we were going to drive the Fritzes out of this sector—they act as if they own it."

Stockbridge ran his finger alongside his stub nose. His was the face of a born fighter. His jaw was a block. His shoulders matched his jaw. His fists were the largest in his outfit.

"I'll get Red Slayer after them!" he snapped. "This is a job for him. Good thing we got one Indian in the bunch—I thought he'd come in handy." Stockbridge squinted toward the southern hillside where the road wound like a mottled serpent—the mottles being shell-holes.

"An Indian?" asked the driver.

"All-American—an Apache!"

"Where from, cap?"

"Carlisle! Foot-ball star! All-around athlete! Can take a machine-gun apart in the dark. Dead shot at eighteen hundred without a telescopic sight. Can lay out ranges as good as a commissioned officer. Knows something of telegraphy and wireless. He's a student and a soldier!"

"Oh, shucks!" said the driver. "I thought he was a real Indian!"

Stockbridge lowered his heavy brows with a gesture of dismissal. "Go over to the bunch," he said sharply. "I have some men for you to take back in about an hour—two boys are laid up with shell-shock. Take them to Field Hospital C. Tell the C. O. we'll tend to the Devil's Elbow."

The driver saluted with a grin, and sauntered down through the communicating trench to a series of dugouts captured from the Germans in a French advance.

Stockbridge watched him, then wheeled and passed into his quarters.

"Corporal," he said to a man at the field phone, "tell Joyce to send me Red Slayer, Goodwin and Big Flannagan after they're fed. Tell him to give them an extra ration apiece—no rifles, but the rest of their outfits."

The corporal saluted, pressed the microphone receivers to his ears, and plugged in on the firing trench.

"They'll be over in a few minutes, captain," he said, turning. "Anything else?"

"No! I'll wait."

Stockbridge sat down in his camp-chair heavily, and tapped the field-desk with the tips of his soiled fingers. There was an O. D. writing-tablet there and a photo of a girl so pretty she might have served for a model of a magazine cover. Underneath this photo was "From Harriett, with Love." He studied this as he waited.

The first of the trio of soldiers to enter the dugout was the Indian called Red Slayer by the American outfit.

Stockbridge glanced up and surveyed the form of a true North American. His eyes blinked in admiration.

The swarthy skin, the thick, mobile lips, the dark, steady eyes and the long black hair was the outward sign of the savage. The rest—the neat-fitting uniform, the high sloping brow, the hidden promise of muscle under the olive drab spoke of one of the finest soldiers in the outfit. Already slated for promotion, Red Slayer was head and shoulders above the other two who darkened the doorway.

Goodwin was a twisted youth with a loose mouth and a squint of humor which all the horrors of war had not downed. Flannagan was tall, loose-jointed and bent at the back from long stooping below the edge of the shallow trenches in that sector. His hands reached almost to his knees. They were not unlike a gorilla's. The strength that was in his fingers might have been found in a garroter's.

"Red Slayer," said Stockbridge, "you're to lead this squad to the Devil's Elbow, as soon as it's dark. There's been a lot of sniping done there and three men killed. The Germans have got the range with rifles —they are in No Man's Land, somewhere. They're picking off everything that moves after nightfall. We want them stopped!"

Red Slayer did not move.

"We want them killed," continued Stockbridge. "I'm going to leave it to you to figure out where these shots come from. Then you can stalk the stalkers—cheat the cheaters. The road isn't safe for man nor auto."

Red Slayer saluted.

"You know where the Devil's Elbow is?"

The Indian glanced at Flannagan in the doorway.

"He knows," he said.

"All right then! That's all!"

Red Slayer moved to the door and passed through. The soldiers fell in behind him. They vanished in the gloom of the valley. Stockbridge, watching keenly, saw that the Indian had loosed a revolver at his side and had fallen into a bent stride that was a far cry from a drill-sergeant's specification.

Turning to the corporal at the switchboard, Stockbridge said:

"Red Slayer's a mystery to me. I wonder if he will ever revert back to his true form. His ancestors were killing your and my ancestors, and now we're fighting side by side with him. He knows the game as well as we know it. He can figure the base of a triangle if you give him one side and its altitude—he can pass with those Plattsburgers any time, but he's an Indian, and I'm waiting to see him revert. Blood will tell."

"It's his first detail—it will be worth watching," was all the careful corporal would say.

It was a long mile down the shell-pitted road before Red Slayer turned, stooped, and glanced about. Flannagan laid his big hand on Goodwin's shoulder and pressed him down with a whispered word of caution.

The Indian was taking observation of the surrounding country and that section of No Man's Land that jutted into the cove of the valley where the road was that led over the Devil's Elbow. Star-shells burst now and then above the criss-cross of barbed-wire. Dead horses, men who had been torn by shrapnel, and ruined pill-boxes, dotted the sector before the two firing-trenches of the contending armies.

Below the brow of the hill, and almost midway between the lines, was a wrecked mill with charred outhouses that had been under fire from the American heavies. In one place the thatch of a small cow-shed showed against the stone of the wall. Red Slayer eyed this keenly as a star-shell drifted across the sky and shed its light down upon the ground.

He shook his head, raised his body to a standing posture, and listened. A three-inch gun or a supply wagon was coming over the brow of the hill above them. He could hear the urgent commands of the mule drivers. It reached the Elbow. A star-shell rose from the German lines. A rifle cracked from somewhere out in No Man's Land. It's report was followed by seven more shots in spaced succession. A driver cursed in shrill protest. A mule brayed. The heavy wagon was twisted from the road. A second mule was struck. The entire team broke into a gallop. It came thundering down the hill and overturned in the valley where the road reached the level stretch that led to Stockbridge's dugout.

"Sniped!" exclaimed Flannagan. "Th' Huns winged th' wagon. Now where in blazes did them shots come from?"

Red Slayer's answer was to grunt a warning, then to drop on hands and knees and crawl up the slope toward the white

roadway. Flannagan booted Goodwin and followed.

"Keep below th' skyline," he whispered as he saw that Red Slayer had taken this precaution. "Keep below, and follow the Indian—he's got a clue—an' may the Kaiser help th' Fritzes if he locates their sniping joint. He'll dig 'em out like old Haig dug them out of Lenz."

Red Slayer led the way through the gloom till he reached the edge of the white road just below the Devil's Elbow. He rested there as the two soldiers crawled up. They all turned and watched the wicked flares of the German guns as they stabbed the velvet line back of the firing-trench. Heavy reports over the brow of the hill showed where the shells had landed. The reply to these was a drum-fire of British and American heavies that died to a slow tocsin then lashed to hurricane intensity.

The Indian turned and studied the road. His dark face flushed and glowed as he made a mental note of the surroundings. He flattened himself upon the dust and peered down into No Man's Land with the steady expression of a waiting puma or cougar. He breathed slowly, his eyes holding expanding irises of super night sight.

He was a unit in the greatest fight in the history of the world. His part to play that night was simple. There were a thousand places in No Man's Land where the German snipers could be hidden. It would be impossible to find them in the good, old way. Modern science, and his years of intensive training at Carlisle, suggested that the matter should be taken through the agency of mathematics and applied angles.

He turned to Flannagan.

"Go back to the dugout," he said briefly, "and get a lantern and a long board with canvas frames on each side. Put the lighted lantern between the canvas and drag the board over the top of the Devil's Elbow. When the snipers fire—stop! Don't move the plank!"

"Very good, sir," said Flannagan, with a side glance at Goodwin.

Red Slayer waited as the tall American glided down through the gloom and was swallowed up by the underbrush of the valley. His eyes were fixed upon the wide shell-pitted expanse of No Man's Land. The hidden German snipers were undoubtedly equipped with rifles capped with flare-consumers so that the flash of their fire could not be seen from the road. They probably had telescopic sights as well, and a perfect range of that portion of the road that crossed the shoulder of the hill.

Flannagan appeared finally. He was bent almost double. Behind him scraped an eight-foot plank with a tiny lantern set down between two walls of canvas. The light shone through, as Red Slayer had calculated. It was for all the world like an ambulance crawling up the slope of the hill. Flannagan passed the waiting Indian and Goodwin. He went on in silence. He reached the exposed bend at Devil's Elbow. He crouched lower as he dragged the plank inch by inch along the stony road. It swayed, stopped, and went on to the top. Goodwin swore softly into the waiting Indian's ear. They both were watching with straining eyes the dark void that marked No Man's Land.

A shot cracked. A bullet whined upward. Another and another followed. There was a curse from Flannagan. Red Slayer dropped to his knees, wheeled, and crawled up the road. He rounded the plank and came face to face with Flannagan who was stretched upon his stomach. The lantern was out. It had been shattered by the first bullet. Red Slayer grunted with approval.

"Don't move it," he said. "We have got them—now!"

Flannagan watched as the Indian blocked the plank with stones taken from the road, then stooped and peered through the two bullet-holes that had snuffed the lantern. The line through them, from canvas to canvas, and carried down to No Man's Land would mark the spot where the German snipers were.

Red Slayer sighted through the openings. He grunted, then drew out a scrap of paper and a pencil. The figures he wrote with their algebraic signs were Greek to Flannagan. The Indian held them out finally, where a tiny patch of light came from the moon that drifted through a fleece of clouds.

"Not enough," he said. "We must try again. Move the plank just twenty yards for a base and light the lantern."

"The shade broke," said Flannagan.

"Light the wick—then get out of range. I want a second reading. Afterwards, we will get 'em!"

Flannagan liked the "we will get 'em!" It sounded like business. He moved the plank, waited, then touched a match to the wick. He dropped away in time. A bullet whined up from the gloom. It passed over the wick but through the canvas. Another came that struck the base of the lamp and dashed oil into Red Slayer's face. He wiped it off with his sleeve, flattened out, and crept to the canvas. The sight he took through the first bullet-hole was checked with a second sight from a different base distance. He went over the figures in the pale moonlight. He stretched his hand, and motioned for Flannagan to crawl up.

Flannagan followed the Indian's pointing finger and saw a white blur between two patches of broken roadway that had been pounded flat by the French and American heavies.

"They're in there!" whispered the Indian.

"What is it—Red Slayer?"

"Culvert — concrete bridge — blocked with stones." Red Slayer's English was almost perfect.

Flannagan started to draw his knife. Goodwin wormed along the dust of the roadway.

"You two stay here," said Red Slayer with a frown. "Stay right here and watch —I'll go alone."

"But," said Flannagan.

"An' me," whispered Goodwin with a half-whine. "I want to get a whack at them Fritzes."

"You'll both stay here!" Red Slayer's voice was final. It contained new strength. He tapped his revolver, bent and removed his army shoes, and glanced up keenly at the drifting clouds and the lighter spot that marked the moon.

"I'll be back in an hour." Red Slayer had lowered his legs over the edge of the road. "If I don't come back in an hour report to the captain—that's all!"

Flannagan lay back and closed his eyes.

"So long," he said unfeelingly.

Goodwin parted a clump of bushes and tried to watch the passing of the red-skin. He heard no sound. The form on the ground below the road blended into the gloom of the valley. It was like the progress of a jungle-cat. The silence of No Man's Land weighed upon Goodwin's conscience. It was not right that one should go against a nest of snipers. He had scant hope of Red Slayer being able to clean it out single-handed.

A star-shell rose from the German firing-line. It bathed the criss-cross of stakes and barbed-wire before their battered but defiant position. Beneath the glow of the slow-dying fire, Goodwin marked the position Red Slayer was advancing upon. It was almost impregnable. Blocks of concrete barred the entrance—its exit was screened by the wreck of the road that sloped off in rip stone and dirt toward the vigilant German first line where keen-eyed watchers were evidently stationed for any surprises.

Once, only, Goodwin saw any sign of the red-skin. This was upon a flat patch of light midway between the Devil's Elbow and the concrete culvert. The restless Germans had burst a star-shell with abrupt suddenness over the sniper's position. Red Slayer remained rigid, then, as the light paled, he had wormed forward to the deep shelter of a smashed hedge.

Goodwin narrowed his eyes. He saw no more. He turned to Flannagan, after a long wait, and asked him the time. Flannagan dragged out a battered watch and consulted its luminous dial.

"Eleven seventeen," he yawned. "Th' Indian's been gone three-quarters of an hour."

Goodwin twisted his mouth. He spread himself flat on the road and waited for the blood-curdling yells which were to be expected. The Indian had probably crawled to the German side of the sniping-post, and then had entered like a serpent. The snipers would be watching at the American end of the position. There would be a swift rush, Goodwin figured, and then yells as the Indian finished his work.

He strained his eyes as a sharp volley of machine-gun fire sounded from the German first line. This fire, he concluded, after a wait, was directed at the American line where Stockbridge had posted a squad of twenty men in an advance position. This position was in danger of a raid at any time. It would be possible for the Germans to cut it off from the laterals and the salients by a high-angle barrage fire.

The machine-gun stopped suddenly with a half-cough. The silence of the grave again filled No Man's Land. Goodwin nudged Flannagan who seemed to be sleeping. He rolled over, dragged out his watch for the second time and squinted at the dial. "Thirty-one—thirty-two," he said. "His hour's up!"

Goodwin turned. The silence of the valley below the road was broken by a slight sound. A figure, blurred and menacing rose before his straining eyes. His hand dropped to his automatic as Flannagan cursed and backed away.

"It's th' Indian," whispered Goodwin. "It's Red Slayer."

Red Slayer chuckled as he crawled over the edge and reached to the exact position he had laid his shoes. He drew these on and wound the laces. Goodwin glanced from his dark face to the revolver at the Indian's belt.

"How about it?" he asked.

"Got 'em! Two of 'em! Guns down there! No good—I broke them and threw them away."

Flannagan swore beneath his breath as he glanced at the Indian's face. The eyes of the red-skin glowed with half-suppressed savagery. Red Slayer caught the glance and rose.

"We'll report," he said. "Leave the plank and lantern where it is. Perhaps we can use it some other time.

Stockbridge was half-sleeping against the doorway of the dugout when Red Slayer arrived followed by Flannagan and Goodwin. He straightened his camp-stool and stood erect as the Indian saluted, then dropped his hand to his belt.

"I've to report, sir, that the two snipers who were sniping the Devil's Elbow have been taken care of. I got 'em!"

The captain of the squad shot a keen eye over Red Slayer's figure. He closed one lid as the Indian smiled grimly.

"How'd you get them?" he asked.

"I got 'em! They were fixed up nicely —too. I don't think you will have any more trouble at Devil's Elbow—captain."

Stockbridge glanced at Flannagan and Goodwin.

"Did you go with him?" he asked.

"Nope, captain! We stayed at the road. Red Slayer said he'd play it solo—guess he did! We didn't hear nothin', did we, Flannagan?"

The tall American shook his head.

Stockbridge turned again to Red Slayer.

"Well—if you got them—it's all right. It's two less snakes in the world."

Stockbridge paused and toyed with his mustache. He shot a quick glance toward the corporal at the field-telephone. His eyes wavered and fixed upon Red Slayer.

"Report to your position in the firing-trench," he said. "Tell Lieutenant Armstrong to keep well under cover with all his men. The chances are the Germans will discover their snipers are out of commission, and will try us with a few shells. They don't get over these things in a hurry."

The three soldiers saluted, then dropped down through the communicating trench that led to the firing-line. Stockbridge turned to his corporal.

"No sign of reversion to the primitive, yet. I rather thought Red Slayer would bring back a trophy or two. He's civilized!"

"The war ain't over yet, captain!"

"Nor the night—either—I'm expecting a few shells."

The shells came before Red Slayer and his two companions had reached the end of the communicating trench. The first to plunge in front of the American line was a "flying-pig" loaded with one hundred pounds of explosive. It shattered a wide area in the barbed wire. Other flying-pigs and rum-jars hurtled across No Man's Land from the German firing-trench. Back of this the Krupp-built heavies started a barrage fire upon the valley where the dugout was. It formed a fringe of bursting

steel and shrapnel through which relief reenforcements could not penetrate.

Red Slayer crawled into the shelter of a bomb-proof, straightened out, and looked around. Five of the squad were there with their rifles stacked against the dirt wall. Through the top of the dugout extended a periscope made out of a watering-pine and two trench-mirrors.

The view through this was one of wild wonder. The blackness of the night was stabbed in a hundred places by constantly bursting shells that were directed upon the rusted field of barbed-wire. Star-flares, Very lights, and the hidden flashes from the German guns were reflected from the sky. Somewhere out there a squad of German shock-troops were waiting for the raid. They had crawled through their own barbed-wire. They had been assured by their officers that the barrage would cut off all communication to the American firing line in that sector. The plum was ripe and waiting to be plucked. It was suicide for any of the squad in the dugouts to man the trench line with the barrage falling.

Flannagan succeeded in dashing from the dugout to another. He returned bringing word that Stockbridge and ten of a squad had worked their way along the communicating trench to the first line. This squad had two machine-guns, with ammunition.

Red Slayer with the others in the dugout nursed no delusions as to what was to come over the parapet of the firing-trench when the German artillery officers were satisfied that the barbed-wire was leveled.

They made ready by sorting out Mills bombs and rifle ammunition where it could be hastily snatched up. The fight would be at close quarters, however, and this called for bayonets and knives, and revolvers.

Red Slayer drew his revolver from its holster. He slipped two clips of revolver ammunition in his breast pocket where they would be easily got at in the final scrimmage.

His dark eyes swept from white face to white face, which seemed strangely ghastly and unreal in the half-light of the dugout. Flannigan rested by the doorway with his ear pressed to the crack. His gas-mask was in one hand, his revolver in another. The shock of the shells as they struck about and over the trench shook the earth with a racking reverberation that half-stunned the squad in the dugout. Their teeth chattered.

"Any gas?" asked Red Slayer.

"Not yet," shouted Flannagan. "I don't think they'll fire any gas-shells. You see—they're figuring on coming over the top pretty soon. It wouldn't do to kill their own men, would it?"

Red Slayer nodded. He bent his ear and listened. The hurricane of German projectiles had formed a steel curtain between their position and any possible reinforcement from over Devil's Elbow. The small American force in the trench would have to bear the entire brunt of the attack. They were as much isolated from the rest of the expeditionary force as if they were in the Pacific Ocean.

This hurricane fire deepened into an avalanche of falling shells that drowned out all sound. Red Slayer moved closer to Flannagan in the gloom and clutched his arm. He shouted in order to make himself heard. The dim and the turmoil—the rack and roar of the tortured earth, was as of a cataclysm. Nothing could live outside the dugouts. The trenches were being leveled—the road back of Stockbridge's headquarters had been effaced from the map of that sector.

The Indian held one idea in the fore—the Germans would swarm forward at the very second of fire secession. They, no doubt, had brought forward telephone lines. They were directing the barrage from a point close up to the outer fringe. They were crouched there with "hair-brush" bombs and long knives waiting for the moment of slaughter. Their game was to dash over the top and trap the occupants of the dugouts in the American firing-line. Perhaps, if this plan succeeded, there would be no prisoners.

Red Slayer loosed the catch to the door but did not open it. He rested on the balls of his feet with every nerve straining. At his side in the gloom he knew there was a trench sack filled with Mills bombs. These bombs needed but the pulling of a

tiny brass pin, a long overhand throw when the lever would fly away and drop the plunger down upon the cap and the three-second fuse, in order to spread death and disaster to the Germans. Each bomb was loaded with ammonal. They were the last word in repelling an attack or clearing out a trench.

The barrage fire hung at a tornado's height for a full ten minutes. Then, and suddenly, it died note by note till only the outer barrage was heard. Red Slayer pressed Flannagan aside, seized the sack of Mills bombs and dashed outside to the trench. Flannagan followed with the other troops who had been in the dugout. They were in time! A red haze, filled with powder and burnt gases, obscured the scene of a sanguinary struggle that was all but one-sided.

The Germans had dashed over the top in a score of places. They were the picked shock troops of the entire front. They had special orders to slay as many Americans as possible. Over fifty thousand shells had been fired to crush the spirits of the defenders of the firing line. A barrage of shrapnel sprayed the terrain beyond Devil's Elbow. It had severed all communications.

Red Slayer mounted the rear wall of the trench, stooped and crept through the gloom to the dugout where Stockbridge and his newly arrived squad were trapped. They had waited too long after the cessation of the inner barrage. A full score of German troops, in gas-masks and shrapnel helmets, armed with long sword-bayonets with saw edges, had surrounded the dugout. One of their number had called for surrender as Red Slayer flattened himself on the ruined earth and reached for a Mills bomb.

Stockbridge's answer was to fire point-blank through the door of the dugout. The German went over. Another kneeled to one side of the door, loosed a hair-brush bomb, and struck a match. The flame never reached the fuse. Red Slayer, with an overhand swing and a war whoop, let drive a Mills bomb in the center of the German squad. It struck the edge of the ruined trench, rolled to the bottom, then exploded in a white flare of death and flying steel.

The Indian rose to his full height. He rained bombs down along the trench. The Germans fled over the top of the dugout. A second party had rounded by Flannagan. The work was at close quarters and in total darkness.

Flannagan's shout brought reinforcements. He and Goodwin, who had joined him, were fighting with cold steel. The German squad were joined by others who had streamed across No Man's Land. The fight became general. Stockbridge had succeeded in getting his men out of the dugout. Some were cut down by close range revolver fire. Others charged along the trench and met the Germans with bayonets and knives.

Red Slayer held his bombs for fear of killing friends with foes. He backed to a lateral trench, searched about, and found a Lewis gun that had been overturned by the German barrage fire. It still was in working condition. His fingers went over the breech mechanism and the drum in position. He spread his hand along the dirt and found two other drums almost buried. With these and the gun on his shoulder, he détoured close to the German barrage till he reached the ruined road and the concrete culvert where he had killed the two snipers. It was an ideal position to rake No Man's Land fore and aft.

He set the gun across a block of stone, laid the drums at his side, stretched himself flat and squinted along the air-cooled barrel. The grin on his face was unholy.

"I'll get 'em," he said through the grime and blood of his lips. "By and by they go back—then I'll get 'em!"

His wait was not long. A star-shell burst overhead with a reassuring blue flare. It was the signal that the Americans in the support trenches and billets had succeeded in penetrating the barrage. It was a call to hold on. Red Slayer blinked at it, then waited for complete darkness.

A tiny green flare from the American firing trench was the German signal that they were quitting the position. The barrage hesitated, then shortened in range. It fell close to the trench. Germans streamed back from the American line. A few had

prisoners. Some carried dead—their own. Red Slayer waited with his finger on the trigger of the machine-gun. The range was short—deadly. The German raiders were jubilant over their first success with the Americans.

Red Slayer sighted for the second time along the black barrel. His aim was directly upon a German sergeant who was rolling up a field-telephone line. The burst of fire that sprang from the dark mouth of the viaduct was a blast from an unexpected quarter. It sprayed the German raiders. It scattered them. It brought the most of them to their knees and then over in the dust of death.

Red Slayer released the back-drawn trigger, reached and capped a second drum of forty-seven bullets upon the gun. He aimed with the cool precision of his race. He wasted no bullets. A Lewis gun had been known to decimate an entire regiment. Red Slayer remembered this as he drove a hail of lead and steel along the open space of No Man's Land. He picked out prone objects and compressed his lips as he saw them galvanize into life and then fall to death.

The few raiders who escaped back through the German barbed-wire lanes had abandoned their prisoners and their booty. They gave the position of the machine-gun and its hellish fire to the commander. Spotting shots of high caliber crashed close to the culvert. Red Slayer drew back like an animal in its den. He was satisfied with the turn of affairs. He remembered thinking about Stockbridge, and Flannagan, and Goodwin, when a shell better aimed than the others struck squarely overhead and exploded within the concrete. A roar was followed by a rack and a convulsion. He rolled over, spread out his hands, and slept with the blood pouring from his ears.

His awakening was a nightmare of aching limbs and whirling senses. The dawn was breaking over No Man's Land. The barrage fire had ceased. The crumpled heaps of men where the machine-gun had struck, still lay with their faces up to the sky.

Red Slayer wormed his way out of the shattered culvert, then crawled back over the trail he had taken to reach the snipers. He reached the first of the American barbed-wire. A lane showed there which had been blasted by the German shells. Down this he went, reached upward and lifted himself to the parapet of new-laid sand-bags. He fell over in a heap.

A muttered challenge greeted him. A score of forms hurled themselves upon him. He called the pass-word as a bayonet pressed to his chest.

"It's Red Slayer!" went along the line of alert Americans behind the wall. Stockbridge, badly battered but game, came forward. He stooped, wiped Red Slayer's face with his handkerchief, then called for stretcher-bearers.

Red Slayer rose at this, steadied himself on one knee, then stood erect and saluted.

"Good boy!" said Stockbridge. "The general's been asking about you—wants you back in the field headquarters. Wouldn't be surprised if he had something waiting for you."

Red Slayer stumbled along the dusk of the communicating trench. He turned at Stockbridge's dugout.

"I'll fix up a bit before I go to the general's," he said with a glance at the waiting flivver and the grinning driver.

Stockbridge nodded. We watched Red Slayer stride to the shelters under the first trenches. He did not see that the Indian had reached in his shirt, taken out a bundle of matted blond hair and dried scalps and pushed this deep within the soft earth at the back of the shelter. All that greeted his eyes was a washed and correct soldier whose stride was firm, whose glance was on the sky as he emerged from the shelter.

"To think," snorted Stockbridge as Red Slayer in the flivver disappeared over Devil's Elbow on his way to the general's headquarters. "To think, corporal, we ever said that fellow would revert to scalping and things like that—why, he's far more scientific than any of us—we were scrapping with knives and bayonets when he dragged out the Lewis gun."

"Civilization is a wonderful thing, captain," grinned the corporal as he plugged in on the field telephone.

Steamboat by Gold

G. W. Ogden

Author of "The Holy Scare," "The Bondboy," "The Crucible of Courage," "Cowards," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JOHN RANDOLPH, son of Captain Walt Randolph, of the Missouri River steamboat Morning Star, which was snagged and sunk in 1864, learned from his father that, unknown to any one but himself and one other, there was one hundred thousand dollars in gold in the steamboat's safe. As soon as his duties as mining engineer would permit, John started west to the town of New Bend, near which the Morning Star—due to a shift in the river channel—lay buried under many feet of silt. There he met, first, Captain Moss Gregg, his father's pilot at the time of the sinking; Gregg's daughter, Mystery, and his son, Arkansaw; also a strange character, a sort of lawyer and office-seeker of the neighborhood, Joel Langworthy by name.

From Gregg John learned that four men in the last twenty-five years had come to get the treasure of the Morning Star; but one of them had been found dead and badly clawed, and the other three simply disappeared without a trace. He also learned that Caleb Moore, an old storekeeper now owned the land where the Morning Star lay, and had always refused his permission to excavate. When Moore learned of the gold, however, he decided to allow the search to be made.

The excavation was begun, but was found a difficult task, due to quicksand. But John kept at it, learning in the mean time much of the local gossip; among other things he discovered that the schoolmaster, Hugh Atchison, a man of attainments far above his position, was deeply in love with Mystery Gregg, who in turn was fascinated by Joel, who had set his eyes in the direction of Juliet Moore. He learned also that there was something sinister about Joel, whom Hugh regarded as little better than a demon in human form. John thought little of this, however, until in conversation with Juliet he learned that she, too, felt and feared Langworthy's strange influence.

One day came a rumor that the river was rising; and that night John was attacked by a creature which bore the shape of a man, but made noises like a wolf.

The next night he disappeared, leaving no trace, and the excitement waxed supreme, for, with the exception of Hugh, every one believed him another victim of the mysterious curse that hung over the old wreck. For four days they searched in vain, the river rising all the time until it became necessary to throw a dike across the Narris to prevent its breaking into its old course. The fourth night, while watching the tent for the strange beast which had attacked John, Hugh was startled to hear a faint voice calling his name. He put out his hand and felt the iron pipe that had been used in sounding for the wreck. He almost doubted his senses, for the voice that called up to him out of the ground was John Randolph's voice.

CHAPTER XIX.

DAYLIGHT BREAKS IN THE NARRIS.

HUGH stood sweating, his length of pump-casing in his hand. His legs trembled, his tendons strained to fly, but he gathered reason enough out of the tumult to hold himself there. If he should retreat one step, he knew, his fear would multiply and grow shameless; he would streak the night like a meteor.

The one thought that grew big above the confusion was that the dead are voiceless. If Randolph was under the earth there, he must be living and, if living, able to answer to his name.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for February 16.

He fitted his length of pipe into the hole and put his mouth to it, Randolph's name shaping on his tongue. It was a foolish thing to do, he said, philosophy back in its seat in all severity, but nobody ever could charge it up to him.

"Randolph—John!" he spoke softly into the pipe, like a telephone. "John, are you down there?"

He laid his ear to the pipe and listened. The result was no less disconcerting than the first cause of his panic. Randolph's voice answered him, a little thick and weak, but plain enough to be identified.

The schoolmaster's doubt and fright disappeared immediately. He was as steady as a rock, even a little resentful that Randolph should set him puzzling over his apparent defiance of all physical laws.

"How did you do it? How in the name of sanity *did* you do it?" he demanded.

"Get me water—I'm dying for water!"

"What are you in—have you got air?" the schoolmaster inquired, the wonder greater on him than the sense of Randolph's need.

"I must have water — water, or I'm a dead man!"

There was something so solemnly imperative in Randolph's thick voice that Hugh woke suddenly to the gravity of his necessity. How Randolph had forced himself down a two-inch hole, and how he had accommodated himself at the bottom of it for more than two days; why he had not come out the same way that he had gone in—these were questions which wait for adjustment between them. Just now Randolph was perishing for want of water; his voice was thick from thirst.

"Have you got your hat?" Hugh shouted down the hole. Randolph replied that he had it. "Hold up a few minutes longer then, I'll get water to you."

Hugh hung his own hat on the pipe to help him find it quickly again, and within five minutes he was back with lantern, bucket of water, and cup. He directed Randolph to hold his hat under the hole, and began pouring.

"Go easy on it, the dirt will make you sick," Hugh cautioned.

Randolph begged for more, which Hugh denied him. He bent over the tube and urged Randolph to tell him how he came to be buried under forty feet or more of earth, and how to proceed to get him out.

"Langworthy's mine. I found an iron door in the old drift and broke it open. When I tried to leave it was fastened on the outside."

"You mean the mine's a blind? You mean it's a tunnel to the wreck?"

"Give me more water—a little more water, please, Hugh."

"Go on to that door and pound on it so I can find it and let you out."

"The drift comes out under a big elm with grape-vines on it. Is it morning?"

"Almost morning, John."

"If you'll just pass me down another drop of water, Hugh—"

"Go to the door—I'll be there ahead of you."

Hugh hurried to the tent for an ax and crowbar. Armed with them he soon was groping among the trees on the bank of Skillet Lake, looking for the mouth of Langworthy's mine. It was a tangle of brush and vines there, with matted weeds encumbering the feet. More than one elm had grape-vines on it, and it was all strange territory to the schoolmaster, who never had visited that spot before.

He plunged frantically through the tangle, shouting Randolph's name, full of the fear that he might not be able to find him in time to bring him from his tomb alive. It was Randolph's faint pounding on the hidden door that guided him to it at last, the sound coming dim and smothered, like the ticking of a death-watch behind a wainscot.

Even with that to direct him, Hugh had a bewildered time to locate the door. It was far back from the mouth of the old tunnel, around a sharp angle, a heavy log propped against it. It was made of riveted boiler-iron, and had been locked at top, bottom, and center with padlocks which Randolph had broken off to enter.

Randolph staggered out of it, his face as white as milk, and dropped to his knees beside the water-pail that Hugh had carried with him in his struggle through the thickets. The cup clicked against his teeth

as he drank, the schoolmaster supporting him with tender hand.

"That will be enough for now," Hugh cautioned, taking the cup away, upsetting the pail with his foot.

Randolph was steadier now, and came to his feet with little help. He put out his hand behind him with a fearful gesture toward the door, leaning away from it as if to flee from the horrors which he had so miraculously escaped.

"Shut it up, Hugh, for God's sake! It's full of dead men!"

The schoolmaster closed the door quickly, and set the log against it as it was before.

"Come on, let's get out of this—you must have something to eat," he said.

He hung the lantern on his arm with the word and started to pick Randolph up and bear him off in his arms. The secret of Langworthy's mine was second in his consideration; that could wait.

"I can walk all right, Hugh," Randolph protested; "I'm not so far along as that. I've had plenty of rest, such as it was." He shuddered as he stood with drooping head, his shoulder against the tunnel-wall. "They're all in there, Hugh — the whole story's there!"

He stretched his hand in that movement of staying some terrible thing crowding after him, and staggered on away from the door, the schoolmaster steadying him, for his legs were as weak as clay.

"When you get something to eat—you can tell me then, John."

There was a cold, creeping feeling at the schoolmaster's back as he hurried Randolph along to the tunnel's mouth. When they reached it, and the rescued man saw the stars bright over him, he freed himself from the schoolmaster's restraining hand, threw his head back and breathed, long and deep, as if he drank from the fountain-head of life.

"Now, I'm a man again!" he said.

"You must be hungry, John," suggested Hugh, with mild wonder.

Randolph stood as if he did not hear. He had faced back, and was looking at the black hole in the bank.

"They're in there—those missing men!"

"Come on away from here, you can tell me later," the schoolmaster urged.

Within fifteen minutes Randolph was breaking his long fast on bacon and soft-boiled eggs. The schoolmaster was of the opinion that six were enough to start on; Randolph being equally firm in his contention for eight. But Hugh carried the basket off and hid it in the corn, and had his way.

Sober and harsh as Randolph's face had been before, the ashes of his experience lay upon it now like a shadow, making it older than the age of years. It was a thing that would not wear away. Jonathan Randolph was marked as one who had suffered in the tomb and come forth again, its terrors cold upon his soul, to walk the world of men.

There was a distant candle paleness in the east when Randolph finished his meal, which had been broken only by an immaterial word here and there, for Hugh would have none of the story until the fast was broken. Hugh put out the lantern now, and Randolph stretched himself with a sigh.

"I'm twice a man now, old fellow," said he, reaching over and clasping the schoolmaster's hand.

"So that was the secret of old Sam Langworthy's dreaming and mining all the time," said Hugh. "The shrewd old devil never was crazy at all!"

"Far from crazy at the beginning, but if he isn't crazy now he ought to be, and his precious, imp-faced son as well. I doubt the sanity of any men who can carry out such a diabolical, systematic plan of wholesale murder as they've put through down there."

"It was that old man's plan to tap the wreck when he came here — I can see through it now as plain as glass, John. He knew about that wreck—before he ever settled across there from Moore he knew it. Do you think they've—"

"No, they've never found the wreck, close as they came to it. It's been a groping in the dark; but they came mighty close, mighty close!"

"That accounts for Joel's interest in the progress of our work. He feared we'd dis-

cover his mole-hole under here, and the secret he's been hiding in it."

"The bones of the poor devils who came here ahead of me on this unlucky hunt. They're down there, Hugh; the three of them unaccounted for—they're down there sitting in a row."

"It's like him," said the schoolmaster grimly. "But they may not be the bones of those men; they may be victims of the wreck."

"No; these men never were buried; they were shut in there till they shriveled up and died. Their hair and their shrunken skin is still there on their poor pathetic skulls."

"It must be the missing three. He lured them in there; he murdered them."

"Like he intended to get rid of me. They're sitting there with their backs against the wall, like men asleep."

"The fiend out of hell!"

"Too hideous for even hell, I think. One of them has been crudely articulated, bound together with baling wire."

Randolph was standing, gaunt of face, pale, his eyes hungrily on the east, where the morning glow was spreading. A miracle was being heralded there which he never had hoped to behold again. The schoolmaster stood near, the light of the growing day strong on his face.

"There isn't a mark on their bodies to tell how they died," Randolph said. "They were shut in that cave until their tongues swelled and choked them, like dry rags crammed down their throats!"

He reached to the collar of his flannel shirt, already loose about his neck, and opened it; dipped a cup of water and drank thirstily. The schoolmaster touched his arm.

"How did you stumble onto that door, John?"

"I'll go back to the start of it—I'll tell you."

They sat down again. Randolph told of the attack of the biting savage, and at the hearing of it the schoolmaster nodded slowly many times, as if some suspicion in his own mind had been confirmed.

"Next morning," Randolph said, "I found tracks leading off toward the lake. The rain had distorted them and nearly blotted them out—all I could make of them was that they had been made by bare feet when the ground was soft. I felt pretty sure that creature had gone that way, but you people came before I could follow them up. I didn't want it spread around that Arkansaw's snapping ghost had been after me, so I kept still about it that day. But you noticed I had my wrist tied up."

"It's known now; Arkansaw found the cloth."

"It's too bad. I'd rather—but no matter. After supper that evening, quite a while before sundown, I took up that trail again. It led me to the woods on the lake-shore, and I found it there. I'd given it up, and was looking around in the brush for some ripe pawpaws when I stumbled onto that tunnel. I remembered Langworthy's gold-mine, and I also thought that it would be a natural lair for the Narris vampire."

"A logical conclusion; a very logical conclusion," said the schoolmaster, again nodding slowly.

"No; there was nothing to it. I got a club and went in as far as the door. I was so amazed when I ran up against that boiler-iron door that I stood there and burned all the matches I had, kind of hot under the collar and a little panicky, like a man feels, you know, when he begins to sense it that he's been tricked."

"I understand your sensation—I have gone through it myself."

"From the general plan of the thing, I knew then that the tunnel ran under Moore's land. So I came back and got my flashlight and gun, and that little carpenter's bar of Gregg's—I guess you've missed it?"

"No."

"I believe that door is over Moore's line, and I didn't question my rights as lessee to investigate what was back of it. I pried off the three locks you saw the hasps of there on the door and went in. The tunnel's narrow all the way, like you saw it there in front, but deep enough for a man to walk upright. All propped up like a coal-mine, and walled solidly with logs a hundred feet or more from the door—back to the point

where the exploration drifts were run out right and left during the years that old Langworthy was groping around and sounding for the wreck. It's even floored with split logs in front, as if it was designed to keep anybody from digging either in or out. There hasn't been any work done in there for a good while — several years, I think.

"I went on back along the lead, somewhat stunned by what I'd found. They've made a chamber at the inner end, where soundings have been made for the whisky barrels—they've got a pump in there already. But they didn't hit them; they weren't far enough in. When I saw all that I started back, red-hot and fighting mad, to tell Moore about it. The door was shut; I couldn't budge it."

"You might have shouted your head off, too, and nobody would have heard you unless he was right there, listening."

"Yes, I thought of that, Hugh; but it didn't keep me from setting up considerable noise, I guess. I'd left the bar outside; I had nothing but my bare hands to tackle those timbers with, and I knew I couldn't get out. I tore around there like a wildcat for a while, until I began to get thirsty and came to my senses. Then I figured it out that if I'd keep still, go back to the skeletons, and wait, somebody was bound to come in there after a while to see what he'd caught. I hunted around for a seep where I might collect some water, but there wasn't a trickle. It's a horrible hole!"

Randolph was so shaken by the recollection of his tortures that he seemed unable to carry his story to its close. He stood, drawing his breath deeply as if to make sure of his freedom.

"Tell me the rest," said Hugh, touching his arm, an eagerness on him that made his hand shake. "Nobody came; you didn't see—"

"No, he didn't come."

Randolph sat again, his chest heaving, his hands clenched as if for battle.

"I walked a beat from chamber to door, Hugh, and watched daylight come and go around the chinks of it. This place where that poor crazy vampire bit me throbbed like it was infected, but it got easy after a while, and I slept. That was the second night. I wanted to keep alive long enough to meet the man that would come to sit me out against the wall with the other three. The thought of water was the hardest thing next day; it was harder every hour. But I watched daylight go again through the little cracks around the door, and I hammered on it with my gun till my arms gave out."

"I was right here, John, but I might as well have been five miles away. Not a sound as big as the tick of a watch ever reached me."

"I know that, old man—you'd have been down there like a hornet. But I was asleep when you began to drop those pieces of weed down that hole. I didn't know the hole was there, but I was under it, and the little, broken bits of weed fell in my face."

Randolph reached for the water again and drank. He caressed it in his mouth like a gourmet rinsing a precious wine to give his tongue a prolongation of a seldom-met delight; he drew his breath long when he had drained the cup, and sat with his hands clenched hard.

"I stood on a keg and felt the timbered roof over inch by inch, for my battery was dry. I had no more light. I found the hole; then I called you."

"How did you know it was I?"

"I knew there wouldn't be anybody else with courage enough to come here, much less to stay."

"You're wrong there!" said the schoolmaster triumphantly. "You are altogether wrong."

Randolph's face lighted with a flush; a softness as of tears came into his eyes. He looked steadily at his friend a moment, then rose as if lifted by the wings of joy.

"Did she—come down here, Hugh?"

"More than once. I'd bet all I've got that she hasn't closed her eyes this night."

"God bless her!" said Randolph, his voice soft and low.

"And keep her," the schoolmaster added. "She is as noble as she is true and brave. Well, the rope that will hang Joel Langworthy is woven at last."

"It's doubtful, Hugh. A man that can

hide a secret like that for twenty years is going to prove a mighty hard customer to corner."

"How do you suppose the crafty devils lured those men into their trap, and what was their motive for doing it, John?"

"I think Joel was lone-handed in that part of it, Hugh. You know he had the old man declared incompetent about that time and himself appointed guardian over him. But that may have been a blind—all a part of the scheme. One way or the other, it don't cut much figure now; but my theory is that old Langworthy began tunneling to tap the whisky. Joel may not have been very keen on the work at first, but when those men began to come here and nose around, he believed there was something more than whisky that they were after, and he set his crafty mind to work to get it out of them. There are a hundred pretenses that would induce a man to walk into that hole."

"That would be the smallest part of it, John."

"Maybe he got their secret out of one of them, first or last; or maybe the tale of the treasure is only a golden lure to lead men to their graves. Old man Moore told me it was; he said no man's hand ever would lift it from the place where the Missouri had buried it."

Hugh stood a little space in front of the treasure-hunter, his face set strong against the light of the east, his chin up, reaching forward a little in the poise of his body, as if the last hurdle was just ahead and he was sure of the leap.

"Or else those men were suspicious of Langworthy's activities down there, and their suspicions led to the discovery that Joel and his still-mouthed, black-hearted old father were probing for the wreck," Randolph said. "They would have murdered to keep the fact of their tunneling from Moore."

"They would have done that, and more," Hugh agreed.

"But the last man—it's harder to account for him. He seems to have been an innocent who escaped the tortures of death in that hole to fall in even a more terrible way. He doesn't fit into the theories which dispose of the others, Hugh, for they're only theories, of course, and must wait their justification until the final day of reckoning with Joel Langworthy, the specter of the Narris."

"It was the same hand all the way through," the schoolmaster said. "The last man was escaping with the secret of the tunnel; he was going toward Moore's house when he was killed."

Randolph lifted his bandaged arm and looked at it, a shadow of distress and fear darkening over his face, like a man who hears himself pronounced mortally stricken without a warning symptom.

"You mean—you mean— Oh, that's impossible, Hugh! He's a murderer—he's a cowardly, treacherous murderer; but not —not *that!*"

"He's the whelp of a wolf!" the schoolmaster said.

Randolph was shocked, incredulous, dazed at the monstrous charge.

"It's impossible—it can't be, Joel! Even the devil in his face doesn't foreshadow a trait as base as that."

"It's Joel," the schoolmaster insisted. "The curse of blood-thirst is on him! I've known it a long time, but I lacked proof that would give me ground to whisper it to even you. Jonathan Randolph, I tell you that man's breast is the house of a demon."

"I can believe that; but I can't charge him up with this night-roaming, this blood-thirst of a beast. It's the work of a crazy man, Hugh; and Langworthy is anything but that."

The schoolmaster stretched out his hand toward the woods, his face as grim as judgment.

"I've walked that road at night in the hope that he'd spring out on me as he has on others—many and many a night I've waited for him. I've seen him; I've pursued him; but he's as swift of foot as a deer. If he'd tried to set his hell-forged teeth in my flesh I'd have put my seal on him. I'd have marked him to the bone!"

Randolph sat down on his cot, his wounded wrist clasped in his hand as if it had sprung a hemorrhage at the mention of Joel Langworthy's name. Sweat stood on his forehead; his hand trembled.

"I thought it was the work of a madman—I charged it to another!" he groaned.

"Another?" The schoolmaster looked at him strangely. "Who else is there outside of hell to charge with a crime like that?"

"I thought it was some half-witted person known to Moore—some poor creature who suffered these wild relapses—somebody that he was responsible for in some way. I thought that—I even thought at times that *it was Moore himself!* God pardon me for the unspeakable wrong I have done him!"

"Moore!" said the schoolmaster in horrified astonishment, looking at his friend in more of censure than sympathy for the grueling of conscience that he was suffering that moment. And again, his face white, his eyes staring: "Moore!"

"Oh, I've had a thousand wild conjectures around him and his lonely old house," said Randolph, grinding his face into his hands like a groveling penitent; "but I never suspected Langworthy. I thought Moore might have somebody, even a crazy son, locked up in some room of that old house—he gave me such mysterious hints; he had such spasms of what seemed to me nothing but colic of the conscience."

The schoolmaster was silent, pondering it from this view of a stranger.

"He warned me against something"—Randolph looked up almost defiantly—"in a vague, incoherent way the very night this"—lifting his arm—"happened to me. He was shaken to the foundation. I thought he was carrying some secret—and I believed Juliet partly knew—that he was afraid would come out on him, and add to his shame and sorrow in the end."

"It was not an unreasonable conclusion, all considered, John."

"Poor old soul! I'm sorry I wronged him by a suspicion so hideous. God knows what it was that he fancied he saw at the window that night—he threw his glass at it—his jaw was set like a dead man's. A man would have to look beyond the things of this world, Hugh, to freeze the blood in him that way."

"The day of specters in the Narris is nearly past, thank God!" said the schoolmaster fervently; "the holy water that will disperse the demons is distilled."

"Do you think Moore knows it, then? Do you believe it was Joel he warned me against?"

"If he knew it he'd shoot him down like a wolf! I don't know what it was he warned you against—he spoke about it to me, too, in a rambling, insane way, only yesterday. The old man's mind is going, John."

"Maybe if we could get him away from here, and these gloomy associations, he could be cured. It's a place of doubt, dread and insane horrors! I feel it in my own blood, Hugh—I'm sick, sick of it to the bone—I could almost wish I'd never come!"

He seemed sick, in truth, the reaction of his long strain upon him. He bent forward, his face hidden in his hands, shivering as if the day was coming in cold instead of red with the fire that the sun was bringing, still hidden in its brazier below the horizon.

"You're not through yet, John," the schoolmaster said. His voice was gentle, but there was a spur in it that was almost a taunt. Randolph shook himself, got to his feet with something of his natural force and sprightliness, and looked round him at the green summer world.

"No, of course not—I haven't much more than begun!" he said. He put out his hand in apology and appeal. "Don't get it that I'm a coward from that break I made a minute ago, old fellow—it was only a passing chill."

"I couldn't think of you as that," the schoolmaster said, in simple sincerity.

"Even if I never discover what I came to hunt, Hugh, I'll not go away from here any poorer. And I don't believe it's there, the thought that it isn't haunted me like a delirium while I was down there. Oh, let it go to hell!"

The schoolmaster turned to him from his mental hurdle-leaping, a smile in his solemn eyes.

"It's there, John," said he calmly.

"How do you know that, Hugh?"

"Because we were within a foot of the old safe when we quit work the last day.

That mush of quicksand has settled around the sides of the pit where we'd dug deeper to let the casing down—you can see the corner of the safe sticking out."

Randolph was not excited over the news. He did not leap, shout, fling his hat nor laugh. All he did was color a little in his lean cheeks—leaner for his days of privation in Langworthy's trap—and look at the schoolmaster with something near to comic incredulity in the puzzled alertness of his eyes.

"Well, that's funny!" he said.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TREASURE SAFE.

WITH the windlass over the mouth, it was still dark in the shaft as Randolph and the schoolmaster climbed down the ladder nailed to the casing side.

Hugh was first down, with the lantern. Randolph followed eagerly, the chill of discouragement gone out of his blood, which was bounding in his veins again with all the romantic fire of his dreams.

"I thought it might be a piece of the machinery," Randolph said, on his knees beside it, scraping away the wet sand, "but there's no mistaking it, it's got the shape of a safe."

Within an hour they had laid the face of the safe bare. The schoolmaster sent down sledge and bar, and followed to spring the rusty hinges.

Time had not weakened the safe that hid the treasure, however great or small, of the Morning Star. Rather, it had cemented the seams of its door with rust, and set it in its place so firmly that all the schoolmaster's strength was spent on it in vain.

Randolph took his turn at the sledge. The steel of the old safe mocked them, throwing back the hammer with no more effect on the metal than if they had pelted it with a pill.

"It 'll take a charge of dynamite to do it, Hugh, and we haven't any."

"I'll go up to Richfield and get some—I can be back by noon."

Randolph stood looking at the brown iron of the safe, scaly with the rust of its buried years. The sun was white on the windlass above, the strong light of day struck down to the bottom of the shaft. It whitened like a nimbus on the treasure-hunter's tumbled, sunburned hair, and shadowed in the hollows of his gaunt face. He stood pensively silent thus a while, then turned to the schoolmaster.

"I wonder if there's anything in it, Hugh?"

"Can you doubt it now, after coming to it through so much faith?"

Randolph looked at the safe again, bent to it, ran his fingers along the rust-bound seams of the door.

"But I haven't come to it in the way I had it all imagined, Hugh, the way I've already discovered it a thousand times. I don't feel the thrill of it like I should to make it seem true to me."

"The gloom of that hell's pit is on you—you must get up out of here into the sun."

"I guess you're right, old philosopher."

"Half a stick of dynamite will crack that rust and tear the door loose," said Hugh. "Come on, let's get out of here. It can't get away now."

"I don't seem to be able to believe it's there," Randolph told him, laughing a little at his own want of conviction in face of the material fact. "I'll go on up and look at it from a distance again—maybe that will help."

The sun was up the height of tall corn, its arrows coming hot from the forge.

"They'll be stirring by now," Randolph said, looking toward the house on the hillside. "I'd almost forgoten that my first duty is to relieve the anxiety of my friends."

"How much should they know—all of it?"

"I've been considering that, Hugh. It's got to be explained, but I think it would be wiser for me to stay under cover a little longer and let that scoundrel go on thinking he's got me shut in his trap and out of the way. As soon as we blow the safe and see what's in it, I think we'd better have the sheriff and coroner over here to investigate that tunnel."

"I was thinking the same. If Joel knows you've got out, he'll more than likely leave the country."

"Then I'll lie low, Hugh, till we can get the county officers down here. I'll be back to nobody but Juliet and the old man. Langworthy will hardly be going to look in on me to-day—it's too soon, he'd expect me to be alive, with a fight left in me yet."

"It's the best plan. I can stop in as I pass and tell Juliet, unless you'd rather risk being seen to go up yourself?"

"I'll wait till evening; I'm in no presentable shape anyway, with all this mud and whiskers and stuff. Hugh, does she know about the safe?"

"I left that for you to tell her, John."

"But you didn't know I'd ever come back. If I hadn't, what then?"

"Nobody ever would have known it then but myself. I'd have blown the pit up, as Moore suggested, and buried it again for good."

"What a case you are, what a genuine old character!"

Randolph slapped him heartily on the shoulder as the schoolmaster turned to go on his double errand. There was a mistiness in his eyes as he watched the master away up the corn-bordered road, and a softness in his heart for the treasure that he had found in that place, even though the safe of the Morning Star should prove empty at the last. The treasure of a good man's friendship and a good woman's esteem—or kind interest and good wishes, at least. A thing more tender, lying close to his heart like a new-unfolded leaf, he could not so boldly claim.

He felt weak and trembling, shaken in the legs as if the sap had been drawn out of them, after his vain exertions to open the safe. He seemed to have entered a cold shadow, which deepened as the schoolmaster passed out of sight. The hardship of his imprisonment must have dried the courage out of him, he charged, as he hung his mirror on the tent-pole to shave, and felt his lean jaw, and passed his finger-ends over the deepened hollows of his cheeks.

And yet there might be reason in his low spark of enthusiasm over the discovery of the safe. Perhaps that indefinable coldness of dread was intuitive; maybe it was guilty treasure, a thing carrying its curse with it, as Moore had said. No matter, said he, in a burst of defiance. He had yet to hear of anybody's curse or clinging misfortune impairing the purchasing power of a dollar.

He was bending over the basin washing off the lather when he first saw Joel Langworthy. The front flap of the tent was down to shut out the sun. Joel doubtless had taken it, from the appearance of things, that the camp was deserted. He stood between excavation and tent, looking about him with animal alertness and suspicion. Randolph stepped back out of sight, watching him through one of the numerous holes in the canvas.

Now the fresh earth on the dump drew Joel's attention. He took a long, leaping stride, leonine in its grace and swiftness, stopped, head thrown back. He seemed to be sniffing the wind for a scent of human presence which neither his eyes nor his ears could tell him of. Now he went on again toward the shaft, cautiously, half-crouching, and stopped at the mouth, leaning over to peer down.

Randolph reached for his revolver in its wear-polished holster, went out and stood in the sun at the tent-side, his arms folded, in the severity of one who waits to pass judgment and enforce its decree. His battered and soiled campaign hat was pulled down to his eyes, the shadow of it making his serious face almost grim; his feet were firm beneath him now; the weakness had gone out of his limbs.

Langworthy was at the ladder, hand on the scantlings of it which extended above the casing. A moment after Randolph's appearance he bent there, gazing down into the excavation, one foot far back from it, hand extended, as if balanced to spring away at sight of anybody below. Then the wind, or some sharper sense than ordinary man has to stand guard for him, seemed to tell him that he was not alone.

Joel straightened from his stealthy investigation, turned, saw Randolph, waved his hand in greeting and came forward.

Randolph remained as he had drawn himself up beside the tent, giving no heed to Joel's salutation, his bearing stern and unfriendly, watching every movement that Joel made as he came up the bank in long strides as if the eagerness of joy at a friend's return hastened him on.

"Back again!" said Joel, sprightly and confident as always, the good side of his face presenting, a smile making it more winning, his small, even teeth sparkling between his lips.

"Against the expectations of everybody and the hopes of some," Randolph replied. He looked darkly at Joel, ignoring his offered hand. A shade of perplexity, astonishment, humiliation, clouded Joel's fair features at this apparent affront; he stood back a little, his despised hand sinking slowly to his side.

"Expectations and hopes?" said Joel, recovering himself in a breath. "Why, school-teacher and I knew very well you'd be back in good time, and no mystery in the case at all. Gregg was for raising a terrible row over it, and bringing the sheriff in to hunt you."

Joel laughed over it, quite himself again. It was difficult to identify this confident, free-mannered man with the stealthy creature who had stood sniffing the wind like a hound only a few minutes before.

"The schoolmaster's faith is the finest thing that ever came into this hell-hole of the Narris! But you didn't expect to see me on top of ground any more, Langworthy, for all of your confidence in my ability to come back."

"I didn't expect?" Joel searched him from head to foot with slow, amazed look. "Why, sir, you—you confound me, you stun me!"

"Langworthy, there isn't any need beating around the stump — your graveyard didn't hold me. It's kept its secrets a long time; you've got an interesting collection down there."

Joel surveyed him again, slowly, with injured surprise.

"Mr. Randolph, you seem to have a strange capriciousness to joke this morning, sir," he said, "but the subject of your pleasantry is very obscure. Maybe when I'm in a brighter mood I'll be able to appreciate it, but right now I think I'll trot along."

Joel set his foot forward on the intention. Randolph stepped in front of him, holding up a commanding hand.

"You'll stay right here, you'll not leave my sight till you go with the sheriff."

Joel fell back, his face white. "Your conduct is felonious, sir! I'm not armed—"

"I am," Randolph said, lifting his blunt-nosed revolver from the holster, pushing it back again when Joel had seen it.

"You forget that I'm an attorney, Randolph, that I know my rights!"

"Heaven knows I wouldn't take any of them away from you, Langworthy, such as they may be! You'll need them all, and more, to get you out of the pit you've been digging these twenty years. The county authorities will be here before night to investigate the mysteries of the catacomb you've been building under Moore's farm."

Joel flashed a quick look of intelligence. "Oh, you've found it at last, have you?"

"At last," Randolph nodded solemnly. "And you thought you'd fixed it so I'd keep the secret, like the others down there have kept it."

Langworthy laughed, with apparent sincerity in his mirth. "I understand your absence now. You were shut in, was that it?"

"The joke seems to have turned," said Randolph dryly, "but the humor of it passes over my head. I was shut in, and you shut me in, like you shut the other three in to die of thirst and starvation."

"My advice to you would be to withhold your judgment on that, Randolph, and not go around making any rash charges."

"Judgment! If I gave you the judgment that's your due I'd shoot you in your tracks like a wolf."

"Randolph—" Joel raised his hand as if to soothe and pacify, his voice low and gentle, his gaze frank and steady—"I don't blame you for your feeling in this matter. A man who has suffered what you must have gone through down there is in no condition to render judgment, or even to see the truth in the evidence before his eyes.

I didn't have any hand in shutting you in; I never turned a key on any man that ever went in there and failed to come out."

"I'm not trying you here, Langworthy; that will come in its place."

"You're mistaken on that—it will never come!" Joel spoke with heat; his face reddened, he bent his slender brows in a frown. "You think right now you're going to hand me over to the sheriff, but you're not. You'll not hand me over to anybody, you'll keep that gun in your pocket, and you'll set up and eat my dough-cake out of my hand, that's what you'll do!"

"There's no use blustering and bluffing, it won't get you anywhere, Langworthy."

Randolph was careful to stand clear of him, leaving space enough between them to give him time to sling his gun if Langworthy should attempt a sudden assault. He regarded his prisoner with a feeling of loathing, of untinctured hate. Truly the humor was on him to treat the man like a wolf and send him out of the world with a bullet without waste of another word.

"I'm not bluffing, Randolph. There are people here in the Narris that I could bring to their knees inside of fifteen minutes, and I expect I could have you hunkerin' down with them, beggin' me to keep my mouth shut. Well, I don't know whether I'm going to keep my mouth shut much longer or not!"

"I suppose people commonly go down on their knees to you, Langworthy," Randolph said contemptuously.

"No," Joel returned, seriously, "I've never put the screws to them yet. But I can do it, and I will do it. I'm tired of totin' other men's burdens around, by God!"

"You're going to tell me you didn't dig that tunnel, and didn't shut those poor devils up in it to choke on their swollen tongues. No, you didn't do it, you poor damned innocent!"

"Yes, I had a right smart to do with the tunnel from first to last. But I didn't go it on a lone hand, I didn't trap those men—there's not a speck on my conscience nor a smirch on my soul on their account."

"You didn't?" Randolph seemed to have forgotten that Joel was not on trial.

"If you want to know who did that—" Joel caught his words up there as if he had reconsidered it and would not tell.

"Well?"

Joel wheeled back again, anger in his face.

"If you want to know, go and ask old man Moore! But keep your gun in your hand when you do it."

"Oh!" Randolph dismissed the indictment against Moore in that sneered word. "You couldn't make a case stick against that old man if you had twenty years more of free-handed villainy ahead of you. You've spun the rope that will hang you, Langworthy, as the schoolmaster said not an hour ago."

"It 'll quicker hang him—or you," said Joel earnestly. "I can't make a case? Well, I tell you Randolph, I'm nothing but a country lawyer, and maybe not overly sharp, but when I play with fire I keep a bucket of water handy, and when I work with a madman I lay a club up where I can reach it any minute of the day. I've been storin' up evidence against Caleb Moore since the first man went into that place down there, lured in to starve him into giving up what he was supposed to know."

"You may have your evidence, but you'd never be able to convince anybody with it. Moore knows no more about those bones down there than I did three days ago."

"All right, I'll not try to convince you. It's entirely immaterial to me what you believe, Mr. Randolph. But men like you don't make up the juries in this county, nor in any one around here that he could take his case to on change of venue. The evidence 'd hang him, whether you believe it or not. That's plenty for me."

"You'll tell it that Moore had you and your family dig the tunnel to try to find the wreck. Is that your game?"

"Moore inspired the tunnel, he engineered it, from the first shovelful that was thrown," Joel declared, vehement in protesting this thin and foolish charge.

"Very likely tale, good business for a man as shrewd as Moore to go tunneling for five or six years to find something that

he knew where to put his hand on all along. That's another thing you'd never make stick."

"He never knew where the wreck was—he believed it lay over there on the shore of the lake. Don't doubt I'll make it stick, when the time comes."

"You're a precious example of — oh, well, it don't matter. Better sit down over here in the shade, Langworthy; it 'll be some little time before Hugh Atchison comes back from Richfield. When he comes, we'll consider disposing of you till the sheriff can get here."

Joel ignored the invitation. He stood straight as the cornstalks in the field around him, looking at his captor with frowning brow.

"Moore took me up as a boy," he said, "and shaped me to his hand. He helped me, he did a lot for me, in his way. Gratitude made me loyal, and kept me loyal many a year, but I tell you, Randolph, it will not keep me loyal to the hazard of my good name and my neck. You can hand me over to the sheriff—I'll save you the trouble of guarding me till he comes, I'll furnish the horses and we'll ride over to the county seat this morning."

"I prefer to wait."

"But I prefer to go now, and have it over with. Then you can talk, Randolph; you can talk as loud as you please, and show off what there is to be seen, but the more you say and the more you show the tighter you'll knot the rope around the old man's neck. I'll not hide his secrets any longer, damn my soul if I will!"

Randolph was turning the probability of the outcome of Joel's presentation of what he termed his "evidence" against Moore. He was considering the prejudice that had grown and thrived against the old man in that place for half a century, and the grim notoriety that had gone abroad. Langworthy would have little trouble in convincing the public that Moore had been the inspiring force behind the tunnel. He could cover the improbability of such a tale under the old man's well-known stubbornness and dislike of publicity. To the people of the Narris, and that county outside of it, it would be only natural that Moore should avoid an open exploration for the wreck after he had talked so bitterly and openly against the cargo that it carried.

A jury would find against Moore on Joel Langworthy's word alone. He could convince them with a word that Moore had imprisoned those adventurers who had come seeking the wreck. He looked at Langworthy. Joel had worked up considerable heat. He was sweating, his face was inflamed. Now he raised his fist and hammered with it into his palm.

"Look here, Randolph! I had my own father declared incompetent by a court so I could have authority over him and keep him out of that hole after Moore began to shut men up in it and try to starve their supposed secret out of them. I've kept him out of there, he's never set eyes on the rack of bones that crazy old murderer keeps piled down there. You know they're there, and I know it. No other living man but Moore does know. Set your tongue clappin' and by God! I'll have you up as a witness to help hang him!"

"If this tale of yours is true, Langworthy, assuming for argument a moment that it is true, why did Moore give me permission to explore the wreck, when he knew that I might uncover his secret while I hunted for the other? Why didn't he lure me into the tunnel, and try to starve it out of me?"

"Because the plan failed on the others. He was wiser when he was older; he let you uncover your secret first."

"Then he locked me up?"

"I didn't see him lock you up," Joel returned, with a small lawyer's caution.

"But you knew where to look for me, all along, didn't you?"

"Of my own personal knowledge, I did not."

There was no use trying to tie an eel. Joel was confident, he was cool again, he was serene.

"I don't know that a case could be made against you, candidly, Langworthy," Randolph confessed.

"It does your legal mind credit, Randolph."

"I'm not yielding a point on my belief in your absolute and damnable guilt, only

I'm inclined to take my hand off to spare that old man the added trouble that your prosecution would bring him."

"His own prosecution you should have said. The grand jury never would return an indictment against me."

"Probably not, considering the—considering everything in this place. I'll tell you what I'll do, Langworthy; if you'll leave the country between this and sundown and not come back as long as Moore is alive, I'll agree to drop it."

"I'll accept no conditions," returned Joel loftily. "You started out to hand me over to the sheriff; go ahead."

Joel was defiant, triumphant. Randolph felt that he had made a grand bluster and come to a bluffer's end, although his intentions at the beginning had been serious.

"Langworthy, you win," Randolph said at length. "I know that ruin and desolation would result from opening the case against you. The murderer of four defenseless men—"

"If you'll say that before witnesses I'll make you prove it!" Joel flashed.

"Wouldn't stop at the indirect murder of one doubly defenseless in his age," Randolph finished, unmoved by Joel's outburst. "But there's one thing standing between you and me that calls for no court to adjudicate. You must stop forcing your attentions upon a young lady who shall be nameless in this controversy."

"I don't take 'must' from any man!"

"You'll take it from me!"

"I've taken more from you already than I ever took from any man, you upstart adventurer, you unknown!"

"That will be enough." Randolph gave it to him as counsel calmly. "Your attentions are distressing to her; keep away."

Langworthy turned to him with a quick little start, but stood silent a moment as if fighting to restrain his hot words. Then he said very quietly: "I am going to marry her. Do you suppose I've kept silence twenty years for no reward? It's understood, I tell you—it's arranged. I'm going to marry her."

"You lie, you scoundrel!"

"You'll settle with me one of these days for all this when we meet on equal terms," said Joel as a man speaking of a debt for which he held surety. "Juliet—"

"Don't speak her name, you beast! It's profaned in your mouth—there's blood on your lips, you whelp of hell!"

Langworthy sprang back at the charge—a swift change coming over his face. The darkness of the withered portion seemed to spread in it, drawing it, distorting it in horrible grimace out of all resemblance to its cast of a moment before. The man crouched like a creature gathering itself to spring; his limbs trembled; his eyes glowed green in bestial rage. His face, wrinkled like a snarling cat's, was blackly red with gorged blood; his thin red tongue-tip ran like a flame from side to side of his parted lips.

He was a creature possessed by a destructive passion — his human soul submerged in the wild raging of a beast. He began to creep forward, low-bent, his arms reaching out with stealthy uplifting, his mad eyes gleaming.

Randolph fell back a step or two, his revolver drawn. Amazement had displaced his first cold horror of the transformation. Langworthy's hair stood like the bristles of a wolf—like a wolf scenting hot blood, he whined.

A few seconds, Randolph was saying to himself, in a leaping, lightning stab of thoughts: "When he comes that far I'll shoot!" But before he came to Randolph's imaginary dead-line, Langworthy shook himself and stood erect again. His fearful hair sank down; the blackness cleared out of the fair half of his face. He stood panting, his thin, delicate nostrils flaring.

"Randolph," he said, his voice deep in his throat, thick with falling rage, "there'll be a settlement between you and me before long, and when it comes—when it comes!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE INVASION OF THE NARRIS.

JOEL had made his case, it seemed, and had no more to say. He was gone through the corn before Randolph had recovered from the shock of the man's amazing transformation.

Randolph stood, considering all that had been revealed to him in the experience of those past few days. How much of it must be revealed to, how much kept hidden from, for his own welfare and peace, that old man in the weathered gray mansion on the hillside yonder? He turned to face that way with the thought.

Juliet Moore was hastening down the dust-white road.

If he had followed his heart he would have leaped to meet her like an eagle winging from his rock. She came like incense into that place to purge away the foul shadows which lingered after Joel Langworthy. Randolph went forward with a hushed sense of holiness over him, as one who approaches a shrine.

She saw the story of his suffering in his hollow face. A little way from him she stopped, her cheeks paling, fear settling in her eyes. She lifted her hands with a tender illustration of sympathy; he heard her moan in such deep sorrow as only comes from the sacred places of the heart.

He hurried to her to relieve her sympathetic suffering, holding out his hand.

"I'm sorry that I caused you so much trouble and anxiety, Miss Moore," he said.

"Are you—are you—*safe?*" she asked, looking up with that in her eyes which would have paid him for even a greater peril.

He took both of her hands, with no doubt any more, and no question of his right, and folded them to his breast with a convulsion in his throat as if he swallowed tears.

"I was as the dead, but you have brought me life," he said.

"I didn't wait a minute—I came as soon as Mr. Atchison told me—I ran."

"He didn't tell you where I've been?"

"Only that you had come back. But I saw in his eyes that something terrible had happened to you—he couldn't hide it, and he hurried away."

"Sit here," he said, bringing camp-stools into the shade of the tent, "and I'll tell you, Juliet."

To assure her that he had come living out of the mystery that had swallowed other men, perhaps, he held her hand as he told her the adventure of the tunnel and his rescue from it that dawn. When he came to that her face was hidden on his shoulder, her hands were clinging to his as if she feared the mysterious hostility of that place would drive him again from her side. He pressed his gaunt cheek against her hair and felt her sobs of pity for his past pain wrench her like death dragging at a reluctant soul.

He spoke to her endearingly; he quieted her grief and soothed her fears.

"Does your grandfather know that I—that I'm—here again?"

Juliet shook back her hair in her pretty way of girlishness. "He doesn't know; he was away at dawn to see the river and hasn't come back."

"Hugh and I concluded that it would be best for nobody to know it but you and your grandfather, for we believed that Langworthy would run away if he learned I'd escaped his trap."

"The wretched scoundrel!"

"But there's no need in concealing it now, Langworthy knows; he was here just a few minutes before you came."

"Here—you saw him? What excuse—what defense—"

He told her, without reservation, of Langworthy's accusations against Moore. She agreed at once that it would be best concealed from her grandfather, not alone because of the trouble and danger that an attempt to prosecute Joel would throw the old man in, but of graver consideration the certainty that Moore would take the law into his own hands.

"He'd hunt him down and shoot him—he'd never give him time to bring his horrible, wicked accusations!" she said.

"I believe he'd do it," Randolph agreed.

"We'll have to leave it to time and his own devices to tangle him," he said.

"Grandpère has not been the same since they built the levee — he has brooded so and become so silent and grim."

"The levee? What levee, Juliet? Why?"

"I forgot, it was after you—after *that*. The river was threatening to bring grandpère's old prophecy true—they were afraid it would come back to him."

"Joel did it," he nodded; "there would be nobody else."

" He directed it, but, of course, nobody could rightly blame him for that."

Randolph sat turning the news in his mind as if it had stunned him. He looked up the old track of the river to the Narris head, where the strong wall of tree-tops stood green and secure.

" So it was threatening to come back to him?" he said speculatively, as one speaking in the shadow of a graver thought.

" They say the danger is past, the crest of the flood is here, the weather bureau reports. But, oh "—whispering, clinging to him fearfully—" what if it had broken in while you—while you—were down there!"

" I was thinking of that a minute ago," he said. " Well, I'm not down there—I'm up here in the sun—in the sun!" He repeated it slowly, looking into her eyes.

" I was almost sorry, for poor old grandpère's sake, when I heard that there was no danger of it coming back. But, of course, I didn't know you were in that place then."

" Of course you didn't. Well, there are a good many people living along the Narris who would have to scramble pretty lively for their necks if it ever broke that levee."

Below them, on past the old store and wharf, a dwelling could be seen here and there, submerged to the eaves in corn; the brown of a haystack, the soft yellow of stubble fields. Cattle grazed in the half-wild brushwood meadows.

" It is such an innocent scene to cover the cause of so long a sorrow!" she said.

" Perhaps it is like me—keeping the best till the last, Juliet."

She turned to him quickly, his secret half-guessed, as betrayed by her lively eyes. " The best till the last, Jonathan?"

" I hope it will prove the best, Juliet. We have found the safe!"

" Oh, the safe—the treasure!"

" It revealed itself rather while I was —down below. The sand settled around it and left a corner bare—Hugh saw it first."

" Did you— Was it—" she whispered, rising to tiptoe, her hands on his shoulders. Her face had grown white, and the greatness of anxiety was in her eyes.

" No, we couldn't open it, Juliet. Hugh's gone to Richfield for dynamite. But I don't care—I don't care one little old sigh—whether there's a cent in it or not—not now!"

" But I care whether the treasure's there, Jonathan—for your own brave, hopeful sake, I care."

Randolph was sincere in what he had said. Just at that moment the safe down deep among the rotting ribs of the Morning Star was of second importance, for all the long lure that it had been in his life. Life was fuller for the past peril of death; the golden key of the world was in their hands as they stood there smiling in the shadow of the corn that fair, still summer day.

So Juliet must see the safe, leaning with hand on the windlass, whispering as she looked down, as if afraid that a loud word might break the enchantment and dissolve the long-sought treasure before her eyes. A soberness had settled on her; there was a paleness in her cheek as she lifted her head from peering down at the safe, plainly seen now at the bottom of the pit, for the sun was feeling down into it like the sly, still hand of a thief.

" I wish Mr. Atchison would hurry!" she said.

" He'll be back before noon, and when he comes we'll make a regular ceremony of opening the safe."

" You feel it, too—you feel it!" she said, laying her hand on his where it rested on the windlass, as one seeking assurance of another under the same doubt. " Grandpère said no man ever would raise the treasure out of the wreck—he told you that. He repeated it to Mr. Atchison only yesterday!"

" We're all full of fancies down here in the Narris," he said, trying to smile, making a poor flicker of it, like a light struck in a wind. " There may not be anything in it, Juliet; I haven't set my hopes very high."

" I wouldn't leave it—I wouldn't leave it a minute!" she said. " That—that man —that demon with the hideous treasure of dead man's bones—would be so jealous of your discovery if he knew!"

" He knows; he was here looking at the safe when he saw me."

" Then he'd blow it up, or do something to keep you from having it, if you turned your back a minute. Watch it; don't take

any chances, Jonathan. Oh, you must not lose it now, after all you've gone through to find it!"

"I'll not take any chances with him," he said. "I'll stick right here till Hugh comes back. When he passes, come down with him, and bring your grandfather, if he's home by then. We're going to get into that safe this morning."

Randolph felt himself as hungry, when Juliet had left him, as if he had taken no nourishment since his rescue. He prepared himself a meal, and rose from it with new courage, laughing at his past fear of a fantom danger. The treasure was there; his long dream was coming to a happy end.

Past eleven. Hugh might come the next minute, and it might be an hour. He would have time to go down and take another look at the safe and feed his imagination at the old fire and speculate over what it might hold for him, with it there before him where he could reach and put his hand on it at last.

His legs trembled on the ladder in his eagerness to reach it. It was as if he had not found it before, as if the labor of the morning had only been the entangled striving in a dream.

So it was there, the far-leading treasure, at last—to be brought up presently and spread glittering in the sun. Cold under his hand was the proof; the sands had kept it secure, as they had hidden the guilty mystery of Joel Langworthy's victims' bones.

The sound of a foot scraping on the boards around the hoist made him leap and turn. The dead battering against the casing of his excavation could not have given him a sharper wrench of sudden alarm. The fright passed out of him electrically. Hugh had come, of course.

"Is that you, Hugh?" he shouted up the shaft.

No answer. The sound of lumber being disturbed came down to him, and again he called Hugh's name. Nobody answered. He clambered out of the little beveling hole at the bottom of the shaft and started to mount the ladder.

This was a pieced and crude contrivance which had been extended from time to time as the pit grew deeper. He looked up as he climbed, a sense of danger so heavy over him that it seemed a clogging weight. Bits of earth were falling, loosed by the unseen feet at the top, and now a heavy blow on the protruding timbers of the ladder started the upper section from the wall.

"Get away from there; leave that ladder alone!" he shouted, mounting fast.

There was but one thought of who was trying to imprison him in that pit of his own making—Joel Langworthy, skulking out of the corn with some new diabolism in his shrunken soul! Remembering that he carried his revolver, he leaned back arm's length from the ladder and fired, although he could not see anything but the heavy plank that was being used to spring the timbers as it plunged in quick blows.

Something came over the edge of the pit, clattering down the ladder as it fell. He flattened himself against the timbers; a heavy piece of scantling struck his arm, almost breaking his hold.

For a moment he clung uncertainly, his arm numb from the blow. Then up again, as fast as rage could drive him. His hands were on the section between him and the top when the unseen person, having freed it from the timbers to which it was but loosely nailed, laid hold of it, wrenched it free at the bottom, and drew it out of the shaft.

Randolph stood with hands on the top rung of the broken ladder, yelling commands and threats. Nobody answered him, even with a taunt. The windlass spanned the shaft twelve feet above him, its rope far out of his reach. The planking of the cofferdam was closely joined to keep out seepage; there was not a crevice in it that would give him a finger hold.

The only possible way of getting out before Hugh came and hoisted him from that humiliating situation would be to climb one of the six-by-eight perpendicular timbers of the casing. As these presented but three sides, and no knee-room against the boards, he knew that such a feat was impossible without claws.

What Langworthy could hope to gain by making a prisoner of him in this way was not plain. At the best he could keep him there no longer than Hugh came—or Juliet.

It seemed a vindictive little trick—a last bit of detriment which Joel, seeing it possible to interpose, could not resist. He had drawn up the ladder and run off like a cowardly boy.

He clung there between bottom and top considering his ridiculous situation. It wasn't such a bad joke for a man with so little humor in him as Joel Langworthy.

He looked up, his tongue suddenly dry in his mouth. A little cascade of water had broken over the top of the cofferdam. It was falling with a musical sharp plash on the wet earth below; it struck his hands where they clung to the ladder; it lashed a cool spray into his face.

For a little while the sight held him in voiceless surprise. Then he shouted, shouted till his throat ached, and tore at the timbers of the cofferdam until his fingers bled.

Out of his reach stood the windlass, the sun white on it, the strong rope wound short; higher the blue sky, calm and pure. There was no storm blowing; no deluge from the heavens had loosed that stream. He knew that the river had broken the levee at the head of the Narris and was sweeping back to claim its own.

From three sides of the pit the cascades of brown water came tumbling in with growing volume. The noise of it had swelled in those few seconds from the pleasant tinkle of a musician tuning his instrument into a full orchestral roar.

There had been little possibility of climbing the timbers of the cofferdam to the first cross-brace at the beginning, less now that they were wet and behind a curtain of water. But he made a desperate effort to do it, and groped back to the ladder almost drowned.

He shouted for help, conscious of his voice alone through the physical effort of producing it, leaning out the length of his arms to keep his head clear of the descending flood. It was a hopeless cry—terrible with the visions of that cruel end!

The water was not far below his feet—spray of its breaking stifled and blinded him. Death was pressing close—the gloom of it was thick in that roaring pot. Randolph struggled and lifted his face to look again on that last hope—the little gleam of glad blue sky, like a man giving farewell out of his grave!

Something was dangling there, swinging, snatched now by the eager waters now within reach of his clutching hand. The hook of the bucket—the rope of the hoist.

He held it in both hands and swung clear of the ladder—life flooding back to him like a surge of fire. There was a fight to be made now; again he was a man. He could not see the windlass, or who was there, for the water was pouring over him, but he felt the upward jerk of the rope that told him he was being drawn out through the pounding, inrushing stream.

Juliet, her wild hair flying, her feet braced against the sucking current which struck her half-way to her knees. He knew that it was Juliet before his head cleared the curb, and he saw her straining at the windlass to drag him up to life.

It was a struggle to get out of the down-dragging water that had almost filled the pit, and swirled in it, and pulled at his limbs to tear him away from her hands. How he accomplished it Randolph could not have told. There were two pictures only of that crowded moment remaining to him afterward out of all the overstrained emotions. One that of the dangling hook, dim before his eyes in the mists of the cataract; the other of Juliet as she turned with outstretched arm, her wet clothing pressed against her body like the garments of some heroic bronze pointing up the river.

The river was sweeping down the Narris—a wall of water thirty feet high, whirling uprooted trees like straws under a winnowing rake. The gigantic wave stood above them like a muddy horizon, the roar of a tornado in its coming; an awful thing, sublime in its wild terror and all-obliterating might.

That charging wave seemed not more than a thousand feet away—fully a fifth that distance separated them from the high-lying shore where the tent stood almost taunting in its untroubled security, white in the sun. Randolph caught her hand and shouted to her to run. Together they went splashing through the lake that had formed in the sunken ground above the wreck.

The river was to be satisfied that day

with taking from him the treasure of the Morning Star. Its running shore-wave caught them as they staggered to high ground, flung them down and trampled them, he holding her in his arms and fighting it in a struggle so fierce that it seemed his breast must burst. His mettle tried so, the river released him, and he drew her upon the shore among the marshaled ranks of corn.

They stood there on that old-new shore still dumb with terror of the thing that they had defeated, clinging to life, precious life, so timid and weak in their hearts that moment and so inestimably dear.

In full head the river was driving through the Narris, high above the old shore marks, for the years had filled its bed, and this sudden flood could not be contained within its former bounds. So it must run for a time until the swift current could ream the old passage clear.

The roar of its advance wave was dimming; soon it would plunge out of the green gate through which Caleb Moore had watched the boats from his high veranda and join the old river, its work of reclamation done. The corn fields which had grown in the reclaimed river bed were hidden; roofs of houses and barns which had stood in fancied security an hour ago came sweeping by, as if the Missouri was hastening to remove these usurpers from its old domain. Tumbling great trees went lashing past, roots seen this moment, their draggled, muddy branches the next, their strength humiliated, their majesty despised, by this mighty river which bent to no force but the rocky ramparts of the hills.

The Missouri was digging its way through the Narris, a great, marauding, savage, cruel river; swirling a deep whirlpool over the shaft reaching down to the lost treasure of the Morning Star.

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.

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

BY C. P. McDONALD

WHAT are you waiting for? Why not go after the prizes you think you're entitled to get? Nothing is gained without tears with the laughter, and ease is the offspring of labor and sweat.

Make up your mind *merely waiting's* a blunder; that action is what the world calls for to-day. Roll up your sleeves and go to it like thunder and grubstake yourself to a claim that will pay.

What are you waiting for? Just look about you and notice the toilers who battle the gaff; glad when you're with them or doing without you and, failing, renewing the scrap with a laugh. Making each minute pay something to-morrow, or maybe the next day, but—making it pay; robbing the future of man-breaking sorrow by driving their bargains with fortune to-day.

What are you waiting for? Get into action no matter how hopeless the "going" may grow; steep though the road, let your efforts give traction to deeds that will carry you up from below.

Do something—start—cut the loafing, time-killing, stand in the trenches of business and fight; dive deep to-day in the moiling and milling—you can't win on time that has taken to flight.

The Prince Decides

by

H. F. Huntington

FROM an upper balcony of his ancient palace the Maharaja of Falpur looked down upon the scene of European convention that would have made his father cringe with disdain. The maharaja did not cringe, for he was admittedly modern; granting that his state, which was vast and rich, owed much of its prosperity and security to the influence of British rule, he dutifully accepted the British innovations. But he wore them as a cloak, to concede to the ruling fancy, and to shield himself from political inclemencies, so lightly that it could have been shaken off at a single profane touch.

For he was a Rajput, and a Rajput cannot change with the changing stratum of life because the principles of his will are as constant as the laws of the universe. The Rajput blood is the finest thing in Asia, because the Rajputs have kept their honor stainless and their race pure these four thousand years, while all other races of mankind have suffered more or less loss and blight in the melting-pot of miscegenation.

It was a Red Cross reception that the maharaja watched, presided over by his only daughter, a very modern princess of advanced education and views, who was betrothed to a Rajput prince as broad-minded as herself. Around her fluttered a bevy of smart, enthusiastic Anglo-Indians, with a fair intermingling of wives and daughters of native nobles, none of whom interested the prince in the slightest degree; he looked steadfastly at the very beautiful face of his daughter as she listened to the talk of his lately appointed prime minister, Sir Desai Nardekar, a young Indian officer of astonishingly European address and appearance.

A crisp English voice came up from the flower-garlanded terrace and cut into the prince's reflections like a knife-blade. "Thirty years ago, when I first knew India," it said, "this typical English function in a raja's domicil would have been impossible. Truly we have changed the old order of things remarkably, and I think we'll eventually be well paid for our pains. Take the case of young Sir Desai, only two generations removed from downright freebooters, and now guiding the affairs of state in a thoroughly modern fashion. Quite evidently he aspires to still further elevate his position by an alliance with this ancient house of Rathor—though it is plain to see that he's fervently in love."

A laugh answered the little speech, followed by a clear-sounding second voice: "Um, yes—quite so. Well may he be in love with the Princess Lorene. Upon my word, she's the most beautiful woman I ever laid eyes on!"

"Ah! Be careful, Baramede—"

The voices drifted away somewhere in the fragrant shadows of the vast garden, and the prince focused his whole attention upon his prime minister. There was not a drop of aristocratic blood in Sir Desai, for he had sprung from the Maratta freebooters that rose to power and wealth overnight and dominated the greater part of India early in the nineteenth century. His father, the second " peer " of his line, had early renounced the gods of his ancestors for venal reasons and squandered most of his wealth on sporting extravagances, but he had given his son every possible educational advantage.

Desai had traveled extensively in Europe and the United States, where he had been much fêted and flattered, and his striking photograph had adorned half a dozen sporting magazines that had made the most of his hokey expertness. He was, in fine, as nearly European as an Asiatic can possibly be. Between him and the Rajput prince was a great gulf that will never be bridged " till earth and sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat."

The prince knew that Sir Desai was deeply in love with the Princess Lorene, but he hardly blamed the young man for the presumption that would have cost an upstart his life under the old régime. He knew, also, that his daughter would marry her Rathor prince—her Rajput pride would see to that—but he did not know that Sir Desai would not first break her heart.

So the prince was profoundly disturbed in spirit. In the early year of his rule he had met at the brilliant court receptions of Lady Curzon an idle, beautiful Englishwoman who had elected to teach him the meaning of passionate love, for vanity's sake; and for a while she had held his life in her fragile, inexorable hands. His Rajput pride had saved his honor—it could always be relied on for that, thank the gods!—but not his heart. For years thereafter Lorene's mother had been cheated of her dues. Even now the bitter memory stung deep. His daughter must be saved from the life-pain that had sacrificed his heart.

" I know of but one honorable way," he told himself finally, " to give treasure for treasure."

He withdrew, then, to select the treasure that was to save his daughter's peace.

The keeper of the maharaja's riches was not of his father's kind. It was an up-to-the-minute European steel safe, a monster of strength and ingenuity, built into the stone masonry of the palace strong-room. Although the magnificent royal pile was five centuries old, it was now thoroughly modern except in a few details that had been left untouched by the prince's orders, perhaps for sentiment's sake.

The maharaja took from the steel guardian of his available wealth an old silver jewel-casket that contained the treasures of five generations of gem-loving princes, emeralds easily worth two million dollars. They were well known all over India, for he had worn them on occasions when the native princes are officially required to appear in the full regalia of their native states. He opened the casket and looked at its incomparable contents admiringly.

" There is not another collection of emeralds like this in the whole world," he said with quiet certainty. " I will present it entire to the British government as a war gift." Already he had made the second-largest war contribution in India, but this after-gift would surpass, in magnificence and value, every other single donation in the whole history of the world's most prodigal war.

He decided that Sir Desai could best look after the shipment of the splendid gift; accordingly he sent the young man word to call on him directly the reception was over. And Sir Desai answered the summons as if it was the one thing in the world that he most wanted to do. That courteous eagerness was part of his undeniable charm.

" I have a special charge for you, Sir Desai," the prince stated after a pleasant greeting which was quite sincere, for he liked his prime minister personally and trusted hs political integrity. In fact, he was rather sorry for the young man, whose father's venality had made him what he was. For is it not written in the annals of the Rajputs that the man who sells his gods for gain sets the pariah seal upon his house forever?

"You have heard of the Rathor emeralds?"

"Heard of them, prince? I have seen them twice. The last time was at the viceregal reception at Delhi," the young man zestfully reminded his royal host.

"Oh, yes, certainly. I had forgotten, for the moment, that you were present there. Well, here are the emeralds at close range." The prince lifted the casket-lid, and the late afternoon sunshine set ablaze hundreds of absolutely flawless green gems —assuredly the finest collection of their kind in existence. Sir Desai had never seen so much magnificence crowded into one small container.

"I have decided to present them to the government as a war gift," the prince quietly observed.

Sir Desai could not believe his ears. "But you have already made the next biggest war gift in the country, prince!" he exclaimed in frank amazement.

"Yes, but that was from the ruler of Falpur. This is a personal donation. I want you, Sir Desai, to look after its transportation to the treasury at Agra. I have a fancy to send it direct to Sala Mey," the prince added matter-of-factly, touching a jewel here and there with delicate tenderness, as one would touch the flower-soft faces of babes.

"Sala Mey. Yes, yes, prince," Sir Desai absently agreed, with a steady brightening of his brilliant black eyes.

Sala Mey was a Rajput scholar-clerk who had lately been appointed sub-treasurer to the central provinces, thereby increasing the native generosity and loyalty a hundred-fold, for it gratified the native world beyond measure to have one of their kind lord over their contributed millions. He received and accounted for all the native tax moneys, gave out improvement appropriations, and distributed the various charity funds. In fine, he had access to a vast amount of the government's wealth. He would no more have touched an anna of it than you or I would steal from our parents.

"I am well aware that there are many unusual risks involved in this simple charge," the prince stated, when he had seen what he expected to see in his minister's handsome face. "The war excitement, together with the confusion caused by the recent border rebellions, have created risks where none existed before."

"Yes, indeed! Especially the border rebellions," Sir Desai emphasized eagerly. "Why, those bold cutthroats—the Pathan leaders that escaped the soldiery — might very well wreck a train or even blow up a station or two for the sake of getting hold of these enormously valuable gems. They could buy up a new country—say over in the South American continent—and set up like princes with the money the emeralds would bring."

"Quite so. Therefore we must be extremely cautious. I have already thought up a little ruse by which the gems can be conveyed to Sala Mey with comparatively little risk. They can be hidden in a crate of fruit—you know the palace orchards grow the finest mangosteens in India—and expressed direct to Sala Mey's home, under his personal address. I will send him a private wire in advance of the shipment, so that he may know what to expect and act accordingly. You will be able, I trust, to have the crate conveyed from the palace to the station in secret."

"Oh, yes, surely. As things are especially quiet just now, I can take the matter in charge immediately, if you wish. My steward will see that no one shall suspect my brief absence from home."

Sir Desai lived far beyond his depleted means, as the prince well knew. Only a few months ago he had established his clever widowed sister over his bachelor household, with an up-to-date social secretary aid, so that he would be able to meet Princess Lorene much oftener than would otherwise have been possible, at the charitable entertainments that the secretary arranged. This the prince knew, also.

"Is it your pleasure to send the gems off immediately, prince?"

"Yes, to-morrow. I will have them ready for shipment by noon, so arrange to take them in charge early in the afternoon. That is all for to-day, Sir Desai. Thank you."

The jewel-case stood open when the

Princess Lorene came in to ask her father's advice about a reform measure that she could not decide upon alone. She was as exquisite as the emeralds, and as fine in looks and manner and bearing.

"Let us take our farewell of the Rathor emeralds together," said the prince, with a smile of deep and quiet affection, "for we shall not see their like again."

"You are not parting with them, prince!" the girl exclaimed incredulously, speaking in her native tongue as she invariably did when alone with her father.

"Yes, I am parting with them in a good cause—to swell your favorite fund. Tomorrow they leave the Rathor possession for the war treasury at Agra."

"But, prince, if you feel that you have not been generous enough, why not make a second money donation?" she asked in growing wonder. "Parting with your dearest treasure is too great a sacrifice, I think."

"If it fills the hoped-for need it will be no sacrifice at all, my daughter. Could you but know how worthy the cause really is! But no; that cannot be. But you will trust my judgment, I feel certain."

"In all things, prince." Yet she sighed involuntarily as she looked her last at the glorious heirlooms.

When Sir Desai arrived, at the appointed time, he found a well-made fruit-crate awaiting his disposition. It was addressed in large, clear English print to Sala Mey, Sunset Road, Agra, and marked "Ripe fruit; to be forwarded without delay."

"The jewel-case is so well secured within a few inches of the top-side of the crate that no rattling will betray its presence," the prince assured his minister, whose extreme nervousness could hardly be wondered at, since he was to be held responsible for the safe transportation, through disturbed territory, of a two-million-dollar shipment of war-funds. "No one would dream that this ordinary-looking box contains a fortune, think you?"

"No, unless they already had an inkling of the facts, no. It is a cleverly contrived hiding-place. But your servants, prince—are they incorruptible?"

"How can one be sure, in these days of bought service? In my father's time servants were born to loyalty, but the old régime has passed, it seems. Still, I do think the two men who had to do with this business are honest. At any rate, they have no idea where the box is to go."

He shook hands cordially with Sir Desai and wished him a safe and agreeable journey to Agra. Then he went out on the lookout balcony, where his father had taken kingly leave of the world with the ending of the old régime, and watched his minister's departure from the palace grounds. Yet his thoughts did not all concern Sir Desai or his mission, for his whole mind was centered upon Princess Lorene and her saving heritage of Rajput pride.

There are three things a Rajput cannot do—lie, steal, or betray a trust. He may worship strange gods in strange ways; he may even commit murder under certain provocations without besmirching his conscience, but theft is to him an absolute impossibility. A Rajput prince may fraternize with an honest beggar—indeed, the lowliest born of Rajputs considers himself a king's equal—but he will not permit a thief to breathe the same air with him. The Princess Lorene would cut a thief out of her heart and memory without hesitation.

Three days later the Maharaja of Falpur received gruesome news by the two telegrams that accompanied the returned fruit-crate. One of the messages was from Sala Mey. The other was from the faithful freight-agent of an isolated railway-station some hundred miles north of Agra. It said that he had been roused from his rest on the previous night by cries of human distress, only to find a sahib writhing in mortal anguish on the floor of the freight-shed beside a partly opened crate. The sahib had died shortly from the bite of a kariat (the tiniest of all India's deadly serpents). The agent had notified the authorities of the sahib's death and sent the damaged crate back to the sender for repairs.

The maharaja had taken the untouched jewel-casket from its hiding-place among the fragrant fruit and set it in plain sight, when his daughter came in for her usual morning talk with him. The flash of the uncovered gems caught her attention instantly.

"The emeralds have been returned!" she exclaimed in natural astonishment.

Silently he laid before her the two telegrams. As she read, all the healthy color ebbed out of her exquisite face, and for a long while she stared fixedly at the wisp of buff-colored paper that had wrecked the whole radiant structure of Love in one lightning-swift stroke. When she met her father's searchingly tender gaze, her eyes were bitter-bright and hard as polished stone.

"The ways of the sahibs are very good and efficient mostly," the prince conceded in grave undertones, "but sometimes the ways of our fathers are better. I sent with the emeralds one of the little faithful guardians that kept such vigilant watch of my father's treasures—the kariat."

The princess said nothing.

"Because Sir Desai Nardekar had great need of money to cover his pressing debts he sought to take possession of one of the emeralds—perhaps the smallest of the lot. He did not know that Death was in the box, you see. But he is better dead than — a living thief. Do you not think so, my daughter?"

In that hour of supreme anguish Princess Lorene's regal pride sustained her well. "A thief is too contemptible to dwell in our thought even for an instant, prince," she answered without a tremor of either voice or look, "wherefore I cannot pass judgment on the dead." Then she bowed to her father and withdrew with steady steps and firmly upraised head, as became a queen of her race.

Once more the maharaja thanked his gods for the matchless Rajput pride. "Already she has put Sir Desai completely out of her heart," he told himself confidently, yet with a pang of deep and poignant sympathy. "She will marry her prince without a sign of hurt; and by and by her wound will heal and children will fill her empty heart with maternal contentment. Yes, life will go along well with her again very presently."

In due time Sala Mey presented to the powers at Agra the most precious war contribution ever received from one donor. "A princely donation, surely!" the chief of the department exclaimed in amazed admiration. "I don't quite understand why the Maharaja of Falpur should send us this magnificent second gift. Do you, Sala Mey?"

If Sala Mey understood, he kept his own counsel.

ʊ ʊ ʊ

MUNITIONS TRUCKS AT MIDNIGHT

BY MURRAY GARDNER BREESE

GRUMBLING by in the hollow dark,
Carting the kisses that lay men stark,
They shake my house and they shake my bed,
They shake my heart and they shake my head—
Till it rolls like a dead man's from side to side,
And my soul is sick and fain to hide—
But the trucks go rumbling on.

Each is as loud as a braggart's joke;
They are endless as tears of the women-folk,
And they rattle the blood in my heart with fear;
For their green side-lights have a ghastly leer
As knowing their purpose, nor wondering why
Men must fight for a cause and die.
These trucks go rumbling on.

Too Many Crooks

by E. J. Rath

Author of "When the Devil Was Sick," "Too Much Efficiency," "A Good Indian," etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SHOW-DOWN.

SOMETHING was amiss among the fraternity. Charlotte sensed it as quickly as Bidwell Wright himself. They discussed it in hushed voices at the dinner table, watching, meanwhile, their motley house-party.

"They act," whispered Charlotte, "as if they had a secret among themselves. I hope it is nothing I ought to know."

Wright looked at her sharply. He knew the secret. Should he tell it?

"They're not saying a word," added Charlotte. "They just watch each other—and us. It's rather disconcerting."

The hand of the master crook chanced to discover hers under the table, and transmitted a quick pressure of reassurance. And then the hands remained clasped. Charlotte was conscious neither of surprise nor disinclination. Certainly Bidwell Wright was a comfort, despite occasional lapses of discipline.

More and more she found herself relying upon his quick resourcefulness and calm authority. There were brief occasions when she found time to regret that one of such extraordinary talents should have turned the career of his youth into ignoble paths; when it brought a sigh to her lips to realize that he was, after all, an outlaw in the sight of honorable men—if only the honorable men knew. Yet when such reflections came to her unbidden, Charlotte always rallied herself and put them swiftly aside; at least, as well as she could. From a personal standpoint, she could not permit herself to indulge either in hopes or regrets concerning this savant in the breaking of laws. The play was the duty that lay before her, not Bidwell Wright.

Nevertheless, the touch of his fingers steadied and heartened her, and unconsciously she returned the pressure, very gently.

"They are a people of moods and whims," he told her, guarding his voice. "Between them there exists a telepathy unknown to most of us. The mood of one often infects them all."

"Sh!" warned Charlotte. "They're watching. Particularly Benny."

It was quite true. Benny's habitually roving glance wandered oftenest toward the end of the table where Charlotte and Wright sat. To-night there was something accusative in it. And when Benny looked, the eyes of the entire company followed the direction of his swift gaze. Of conversation there was none. Even Boston Fanny was silent and in a state of obvious disquiet. She ate little.

Twice the Chipmunk arose from his place and went to a window, where he cautiously drew aside a curtain, careful to avoid casting a shadow upon it, and peered out into the gloom. It was soon after his second trip that he suddenly cast his nap-

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for February 9.

kin on the table and pushed his plate from him.

"Dicks (detectives)!" he said abruptly.

Frisco Jimmy started violently and the silverware and china rattled from one end of the table to the other. The Walrus half rose from his chair and then subsided back into it. Boston Fanny hastily sipped water. Even old Bill Remington, veteran of many a long campaign, displayed a trembling hand as he laid down his coffee cup.

"What did you say?" asked Charlotte.

"Th' joint's framed," snapped Benny, eying her suspiciously. "There's a lotta dicks outside. What's the idea? Hey?"

"Yeh—wot's th' game?" demanded Frisco. "I got a rumble (alarm, suspicion) myself. Where's me alibi?"

There was menace in the look that he cast at Marshall Blackstone.

"I don't understand what you mean," said Charlotte.

"Then it's about time you made it," declared Fanny, as she tapped a significant finger on the table. "I been rap to it (I understood it) for the last two hours. Where's the protection stuff? Who's been hollering murder? What do we do—stick around or flag it for the jungle?"

"Has anything unusual happened?" asked Charlotte, turning to Bidwell Wright.

Before he could answer Fanny was speaking again.

"Unusual! Somebody's crocked (talked unwisely), that's all. Or else we're all framed. There's a lot of fly cops and flatties hangin' around outside. Ask Frisco; he knows. Ask the Walrus."

The latter gentleman nodded affirmatively.

"Hey, you, Wright!" cried Fanny. "You got us here. What's the game? Anybody rapped?"

"Of course not," said Wright. "You're unduly nervous."

"Who? Me nervous?" Fanny laughed unmusically. "No, I'm not nervous. But I'm a sensitive woman, and I want to know what these bulls are horning in for?"

Charlotte looked anxiously at Wright. "Is this true?" she asked.

"True?" snarled the Chipmunk, as he made a third trip to the window. "They're fallin' over each other's feet. What have we got a mouthpiece for? Hey? Where's this here protection?"

"Where's me alibi?" repeated Frisco Jimmy, in whose mind a solitary idea persisted.

"This is the first I have known of any trouble," said Charlotte. "You surprise me. Have you heard of any trouble, dad?"

Mr. Browning shook his head with emphasis.

From father to daughter the crooks looked alternately, growing bewilderment on their faces.

"Just a word, madam," said the Walrus in his booming voice, as he turned to Charlotte. "We have discussed this matter among ourselves. We do not like the looks of it. Something has gone wrong. Unquestionably there are outside—er—certain persons whom we do not care to meet under present circumstances. Why are they here?"

"Slip us the low-down, princess," urged Frisco huskily and even hopefully, for he still retained a glimmer of faith.

"I know nothing whatever about it," declared Charlotte. "But if you are uneasy about anything, I'll go outside myself and see what the trouble is."

Benny was at the door with his back against it before she had half risen.

"Nix! Nothin' doin' like that," he cried. "We gotta have a show-down. If I gotta go down below (to an Eastern penitentiary) I'll croak somebody first."

Marshall Blackstone exchanged glances with Wright, but failed to receive inspiration.

"Let's get the straight about this protection," said Fanny in businesslike tones. "Is it fixed or not?"

She was looking at Wright, but that gentleman affected not to observe her. He was thinking rapidly.

"I, too, would like an explanation," observed Erastus P. Browning from the head of the table. "What is meant by all this talk of protection?"

A company of amazed crooks directed their glances at him with one accord. The mouth of Frisco Jimmy hung wide open.

"Listen to that—from the old one!" cried the Chipmunk. "Gawd!"

Blackstone had risen to his feet and commanded silence with a gesture. Then he looked down at Charlotte.

"Perhaps I should explain to you," he said nervously. "In order that our friends might feel perfectly at ease during their stay, it was deemed wisest to give them assurances of complete protection. That matter was placed entirely in my hands." He steadily averted his eyes from Wright. "That is what they all mean when they speak of protection."

Boston Fanny laughed satirically.

"Hey, you mouthpiece (lawyer)," she jeered. "Where do you come in to teach the princess anything about protection?. She knows her way around. If we haven't got protection, then somebody's ditched us —and I know who."

She stared belligerently at Charlotte, who sat frowning and still bewildered. She was not the only puzzled occupant of the room. Grafton Goode had desisted from eating and sat in mute and obvious perplexity, jingling a few coins in his hand. Percy had shuffled off into a corner, from which he furtively watched the entire company.

"But why should anybody have required any protection?" inquired Charlotte, turning now to Bidwell Wright.

"Aw, cheese!" bellowed Frisco. "Don't make no crack like that, princess."

"We're bein' crossed," snarled the Chipmunk from his place at the door.

"Shut up!" commanded Wright.

"Shut nothin'," retorted Benny. "We ain't got no protection, we ain't got no alibis, and what's more, we ain't had our split. I wanta know who's doin' the dealin', and don't I get no cards?"

"Same here," growled Frisco. "I been workin' like a dawg. Goin' out on rallies (expeditions) all by meself. Wot do I get? Nothin'!"

"To which I may add," interjected the Walrus, "that my own work has been brought to naught and my personal liberty placed in jeopardy. For what? Nothing!"

Charlotte looked about her helplessly. On every hand she encountered a hostility that caused her even more astonishment than it did dismay. Bidwell Wright avoided her gaze. Blackstone resumed his seat.

"Somebody will have to explain," announced Charlotte. "I haven't the slightest idea what you are all talking about."

Boston Fanny pushed her chair back from the table and arose grimly.

"If that's the game you're playing—this 'don't know' stuff—then I'll explain," she said. "You don't get away with this on any misunderstanding, kiddo. Here's where we lay all the cards. What I'm going to tell you is what you know—but I'm going to spill it, just the same. Then you can't go beefing around with this mystery stuff."

Wright, his lips tightly compressed, was watching the speaker narrowly.

"When Bid brought us out to this joint," said Fanny, "we all had a little get-together—Bid and the mouthpiece and the rest of us. We were to work in a swell mob, Bid told us—every kind of work. The old one, being the main Jukes, had the big drag. Everybody fixed. The princess, being a Jukes herself, is in on the work, too. 'Go to it,' said Bid. 'Get busy. Clean up. Nothing can touch you. You're in the hands and under the protection of the two grandest crooks on this side of the ocean.'"

Fanny paused and looked at Wright for confirmation. He shrugged.

"So what do we do? We hop to it. Why not? What are we here for? Frisco and the Walrus, and the Chipmunk and me—we all start workin' the line. Safe as church—that was the word we got. Bid said so; the mouthpiece said so. We'd get a big split from the old one. We had a fine line of family-tree stuff handed to us about the original Mr. and Mrs. Jukes, and the little Jukeses, all the way down to the old one and the princess. Oh, yes; a swell joint, with a 'No Trespass' sign up against all the dicks."

Charlotte, her cheeks white, was gripping the table with both hands. Opposite sat Erastus P. Browning, his portly form rigid and his face alarmingly red.

"Well, that's the layout we get from Mr. Bidwell Wright, who says he's a Jukes himself," declared Fanny with fine scorn. "How does the game go? Is it on the level? No, it ain't! As near as I can find out, all we get is nothing at all but rough talk from Princess Kiddo and a

whole fleet of flatties hanging around outside, waiting to pull the joint."

The little woman turned savagely upon Charlotte.

"There's the cards on the table," she said. "The whole outfit. How about it?"

Charlotte Browning paused for an awful instant, trying to steady herself in the midst of a room that seemed to whirl madly. At last she turned and looked Bidwell Wright squarely in the eyes.

"Is this horrible thing true?" she asked hoarsely.

He regarded her calmly and thoughtfully before he spoke.

"Miss Browning, I cannot deny it," he said.

Slowly she turned and surveyed Marshall Blackstone.

"Marshall!" she gasped. "Is it—really—true?"

The lawyer nodded and began shuffling knives and forks.

With an effort that seemed to cause acute physical pain, Charlotte arose slowly, grasping the back of her chair for a little support.

"This—this is infamous!" she cried.

Boston Fanny sneered and tossed a significant glance at the Chipmunk, who still guarded the door.

"Infamous—horrible—unbelievable!"

"Blooey!" growled Frisco Jimmy.

Even the venerable Mr. Remington regarded Charlotte with cold and cynical eyes. With a shrug of his shoulders, he turned to his old friend and observed:

"Erastus, it appears you have been hiding something from me."

Mr. Browning made a snorting noise, but no words came from his lips.

As for Charlotte, pale to her very lips, she stood swaying beside her chair, one clenched hand pounding upon her breast, her eyes shining with horror and rage.

"Oh! Oh!" she cried. "It isn't—it can't be true."

Bidwell Wright's thoughts were moving swiftly. There were possibilities that alarmed him, yet still a bare chance to play the game through; at least, to play it until he found a way to extricate a lady who found herself in a shocking situation. He arose and whispered to Charlotte:

"Cut the tragedy! Don't deny it—give me a chance!"

She drew away from him as though he were a poisonous thing.

"You unspeakable villain!" she cried.

He shook his head and frowned, then turned to the company.

"Miss Browning is somewhat overwrought. If you will listen a moment, I think I can make everything clear. We are all fellow Jukes, and therefore—"

"Stop!"

Charlotte was glaring at him with a ferocity under which even Bidwell Wright was forced to pause.

"It's a lie—all a horrible lie!" she exclaimed. "Don't dare tell them it's the truth!"

He made a signal with his hands, but Charlotte ignored it.

"It's a lie! Do you all hear me?" she said hysterically.

Wright gestured helplessly and sat down, with a swift glance at Blackstone.

The lawyer merely shook his head despairingly.

"By and by we're going to get down to cases," remarked Boston Fanny calmly. "Somebody's been smoking too many pills. The princess says it's a lie. Well, what's a lie?"

"It's a lie that I am a crook! A lie that my father is a crook!" stormed Charlotte.

"We are none of us crooks, madam," said the Walrus pompously. "The term is not permissible. Yet I take it that we have interests in common, nevertheless. Let us be frank with each other."

"If her and the old one ain't on the wire (picking pockets), then I'm a harness bull," observed the Chipmunk.

"She ain't kidding anybody," said Fanny with a short laugh. "This bunch is trying to get away with a hold-out and ditch the rest of us. Believe me, pals, you're lamping some swell work now—new stuff. But she won't put it over on little Fanny, at that. If Fanny leads in the bubble (police station), so does the Princess Kiddo."

Charlotte suddenly mastered herself and

viewed her guests with stern, calculating eyes.

"I shall prove to you every word I say," she said calmly.

Then she turned and walked swiftly toward the door, where Benny stood with his arms spread, barring the way. She whirled him aside with a strength that left him aghast and ran across the hall to the library.

Wright followed her.

"What are you going to do?" he demanded.

"Don't speak to me!" she commanded, as she bent over a desk and unlocked the drawer.

"I insist on knowing, Miss Browning," he said firmly, laying a hand on her arm.

Charlotte recoiled from his touch, opened the drawer, and seized a pile of manuscript.

"Keep away—you common crook!" she warned. "Don't dare to interfere!"

"Until you tell me what you intend to do, I will not permit you to leave this room," he said. "Come, now; I mean it."

For an instant she stared witheringly.

"I intend," she said, "to tell them the absolute truth."

"All of it?"

"All!"

"But consider, just for a moment—"

"Not for a tenth of a second. Step aside!"

She brushed past him, reached the threshold, and paused long enough to fling back:

"I shall tell them that I am a playwright."

"Good God!" murmured Bidwell Wright.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"AS ITHERS SEE US."

WHEN Charlotte reappeared in the dining-room she found her guests talking rapidly and simultaneously to the old one, who could not to save his life have managed to interject an answer, even if he had been able to frame one. He was simply waving his hands in general dissent and shaking his head from side to side with all the emphasis he could command.

"Ah!" exclaimed Boston Fanny, as Charlotte marched directly to the head of the table. "Now for an earful."

Voices died away into silence, and Charlotte became an object of attention.

"I said," she answered calmly, "that I would prove to you that I am not, as you believe, a crook. Well, there is the proof!"

She held aloft a thick pile of manuscript and waved it defiantly.

"Documentary evidence," murmured the Walrus nervously. In his profession this was dangerous stuff.

"Well, whadda y' call it?" demanded the Chipmunk.

"It is a play," answered Charlotte triumphantly.

"A play!" echoed several voices.

"Oh, sure," drawled Fanny, with a significant look at her colleagues. "She's making some kind of a phony play right now, and I think it's crooked."

"You are nearer right than you know," said Charlotte. "The play itself is not crooked, but it is about crooks."

Frisco glanced up sharply.

"Come t'rough clean," he advised menacingly. "Give us th' works."

"It is a play—a drama," declared Charlotte, tapping her manuscript. "It is written for the stage. Now, do you understand?"

Unbelief was written on the faces of her guests.

"Who wrote it?" demanded Fanny.

"I did."

There was a sneer of incredulity from the Chipmunk, while Frisco Jimmy shook his bullet head slowly to indicate that he was unconvinced.

"Suppose we admit, for the sake of argument, that it is a play," observed the Walrus judicially. "What has it got to do with us? At present I think none of us is interested in the drama." He sent a nervous glance toward the window. "We are more concerned in other matters. How does this play concern me, for instance?"

"It concerns you because you are in it," answered Charlotte coolly.

"Madam!"

"Every one of you is in it," she added. "Every single one."

"Who? Me?" demanded Frisco, squinting.

"Oh, yes; quite importantly, in fact. Also the Chipmunk, and Miss Hathaway, and all of you."

"The whole push in a play," mumbled Frisco, still shaking his head. "Wot for?"

"For the education of the American people," said Charlotte quietly.

There was an instant of silence, and then Fanny rallied.

"Give us the goods, kiddo," she advised. "I'll bite at anything."

"I can explain easily in a few words," said Charlotte, as she laid the manuscript in front of her. "Some time ago I decided to write this play. It deals entirely with—er—persons of your professions. In order to make an accurate study of characters, it was necessary to meet them in close association. Therefore, you were all invited to my home. That is the reason you are here—and there is no other. *You* are my characters."

She met unflinchingly a series of bewildered stares.

"Gawd!" exclaimed the Chipmunk.

"How about this, Bid?" demanded Fanny. "That ain't the layout you gave us."

Bidwell Wright was standing behind Charlotte, his arms folded, and his manner one of abstraction.

"Whatever this man may have told you to the contrary," said Charlotte frigidly, without even a glance toward him, "was absolutely untrue. He knew why you were here; he brought you here for the very purpose I had in mind. This is not a headquarters for thieves; it is my residence. My father and myself are not crooks; he is a banker and I am a playwright."

"But this guy tells us to get busy and clean up," declared Fanny, pointing at Wright.

"He did it without my knowledge or consent," replied Charlotte.

"And this mouthpiece," pointing at Blackstone, "said the flatties were all fixed. How about it?"

"I never heard of it until to-night."

Wright disdained to notice the scrutiny to which he was subjected; his own gaze was fixed steadily on Charlotte.

"It doesn't listen straight," remarked Fanny with a shake of her head. "Stage stuff, eh? Nix. I never worked that side of the street."

Charlotte picked up her manuscript and turned over the first few pages. Then, with a glance at Fanny, she said:

"Let me prove it to you. As I said before, this play deals with persons of the underworld. Among my characters is a scheming adventuress who makes her living by levying blackmail upon wealthy men. Another of my characters represents a prominent and elderly citizen."

Erastus P. Browning coughed faintly and looked self-conscious.

"These two characters meet in the first act," continued Charlotte, oblivious to her father's embarrassment. "Having informed herself fully concerning her intended victim, the adventuress, on the pretext of having been a friend to the daughter of this man, proceeds to lay her snares. She has introduced herself under a false name, and, after the first exchanges, the dialogue proceeds:

"ADVENTURESS *(laying hand gently on old man's arm)*—Your daughter spoke of you *so* often. She was a dear girl. Now *(looking up at him)* I understand why. How I should love to meet her again!

"OLD MAN *(patting hand of adventuress)*—You must come to visit us. We shall both be delighted.

"ADVENTURESS *(archly)*—Both?

"OLD MAN—Both. I shall look forward to it.

"ADVENTURESS—How perfectly dear of you! It—it must mean a lot to have a father. *(She sobs softly.)*

"OLD MAN *(placing his hand gently on her head)*—You have no father, my dear?

"ADVENTURESS—None—nor even a mother. *(Still sobbing.)*

"OLD MAN *(wiping his eyes)*—Then you shall come and stay with us as long as you wish. Our home is open to you. Come!"

Boston Fanny was sitting forward on the edge of her chair, her lips parted, and her eyes wide. The old one's face had attained an alarming redness. But of these things Charlotte was unconscious.

"Having thus ingratiated herself with an unsuspecting old man," she continued,

turning a few pages, "we come to a scene wherein this woman meets one of the villains of the play, with whom she is in a conspiracy to ruin her victim. This dialogue runs:

"VILLAIN *(roughly)*—Well, did he fall for it?

"ADVENTURESS *(laughing as she lights a cigarette)*—Bo, the old geezer fell all the way from the roof to the cellar. I could have had his white silver and his leather (watch and wallet) any time I wanted 'em. *(Blows cloud of smoke into air.)* He's as easy as that!"

Boston Fanny suddenly banged a small fist on the table and her eyes glittered with anger.

"Hey!" she cried. "You gotta tie a can on that stuff, or I'll put the rollers under you. Think I'm gonna have my business ruined? I'll sue you—I'll sue you for defamation of character! I got a reputation, kiddo; don't forget that. I never pulled any coarse work like that. Gee, Walrus! Wouldn't that get you?"

The Walrus nodded affirmatively, but Charlotte chose to ignore the interruption. She decided to make her proof cumulative.

"There is a burglary as a climax to the first act," she explained in a steady voice. "The scene is a large library in the old man's house. Built into a wall is a small safe which, it develops later in the play, contains certain priceless family records. It is late at night. Listen!"

She began reading again:

"Noise is heard at window on left and sash is slowly raised. Man's head is seen dimly. He looks about cautiously, then steps into the room. He is thick-set, bull-necked. A handkerchief is tied across lower part of face. After listening for a minute, he produces flash-light and begins to explore room. At last he reaches safe. Drops his bag of tools, and kneels before it. He tests knob, then shakes his head in despair.

"BURGLAR *(in heavy voice)*—Curses! A harnessed box! (Pressure-bar safe.)

"He selects a drill and tries it on door. Drill snaps.

"BURGLAR—Aw, gee! I've gotta snuff (blow) it. Where's me soup? (Nitroglycerin.)

"Begins searching in pockets for bottle of nitroglycerin, but cannot find it.

"BURGLAR *(alarmed by imaginary noise)*—A rumble! (Alarm.) *(Then shakes head.)* Nix; I'm just crimpy (cold). What 'd I do wit' me soup?"

Frisco Jimmy had risen to his feet and stood swaying with indignation.

"Hey!" he shouted.

Charlotte looked at him inquiringly.

"Bum stuff! Cheese!" he growled. "Where d'ye get it? I never busted a stem (drill) in me life. An' I never travels wit'out me soup, neither. An' I never seen no pete yet who couldn't tell a harnessed box from a keister (steel safe). Gee, princess! Rotten!"

"Understand," said Charlotte hastily, "that this is merely the first rough draft."

"It's rough," assented the Walrus, nodding.

Bidwell Wright's face was an impassive mask as he stood behind Charlotte, a listener and onlooker.

"So far as your criticisms are concerned," added the author, "they do not interest me in the least. I do not expect you to understand dramatic values. I am merely reading to you to prove what I say—that you were all brought here for the purposes of my play, and for no other reason."

"Hey, am I in this?" demanded the Chipmunk.

Charlotte turned to the second act.

"We have here a scene," she said, "wherein the papers that were taken from the safe by the burglar are stolen by a pickpocket. The burglar is sitting at a table, drinking, in a den of thieves. The adventuress is at the table with him. She is smoking a cigarette. At a table near by is a well-known confidence man talking earnestly to a counterfeiter."

The Walrus and Ten-Dollar Bill straightened up in their chairs and exchanged furtive glances.

"The pickpocket," continued Charlotte, glancing at her manuscript, "who represents a low type of cunning, enters and seats himself at the table with the burglar and the adventuress. He suggests another round of drinks."

"Not never! Impossible!" interrupted Frisco Jimmy, looking the Chipmunk squarely in the eye.

"While drinks are being served," resumed Charlotte, "the pickpocket suddenly lurches forward in his chair, falling against the burglar. He pretends illness. Recovering presently, he exits. Soon afterward

the burglar claps a hand to his coat pocket. The scene goes on:

"BURGLAR *(hastily searching his clothing)*—I been frisked!—The dirty little moll-buzzer (stealer from women).

"ADVENTURESS *(laughing)*—Sure you've been frisked, you big stiff! I was next all the time.

"BURGLAR—You was in on it? You sit here an' let him fan (search, go through) me an' say nothin'?

"ADVENTURESS *(shrugging shoulders and lighting another cigarette)*—Why should I squeal on him? He was buying, wasn't he?"

"She ain't left none of us out," affirmed the Chipmunk. "Gee, Frisco! Remember the time—"

Frisco Jimmy remembered, and shot such a vicious glance at Benny that the latter left the reminiscence unfinished.

"All through the play," said Charlotte, when there was silence again, "is a character who mystifies the audience. He is a crook, but the exact type of his villainy remains unknown until the very end. This character has a veneer of education and refinement, but is actually the most desperate of all thieves."

Bidwell Wright started, looked about him, and then relapsed into his attitude of attention.

"The other thieves, with whom he is supposed to be operating, discover in the last act that he has been playing a perfidious part toward them," added Charlotte. "They plot to kill him. We have, as a result, a very big scene, in which the master crook, although realizing that he is in peril of his life, mocks them disdainfully as he is plotting a way of escape."

Wright became conscious of the fact that he was a sudden object of suspicious scrutiny.

"I will read some of the dialogue," said Charlotte, referring to her manuscript.

"Aw, cut it out!" interrupted Boston Fanny wearily. "It's too punk, kiddo. How about it, Walrus?"

The Walrus stirred himself to speech.

"Beyond doubt," he said, "this is the worst play in the world. Any playwright who derived royalties from such a production would, without question, be liable under the statutes dealing with obtaining money under false pretenses."

Charlotte flushed and compressed her lips.

"Yeh," affirmed the Chipmunk. "An' what's more, any guy who kicked in for a ducket (ticket) to see it would squeal he was kangarooed (swindled)—an' he'd have it dead to rights."

"I'd be mortified," observed Old Bill Remington testily, "to be identified in a professional capacity with any such production. It's bad beyond all mere words."

"It's a turrible thing," said Frisco Jimmy.

Even the Bum seemed anxious to hear no more of it, for he shuffled out of his chair uneasily and stood fumbling his ever-present hat.

"I want to hit the road, lady," he said plaintively.

If Bidwell Wright had an opinion he refrained from comment. He was awaiting the next development.

"At least," said Charlotte coldly, as she laid the manuscript on the table, "I have convinced you that I am a playwright and not a crook."

Boston Fanny arose from her seat and surveyed the company with an all-embracing glance that finally came to a rest on Charlotte.

"I'll hand you this much," she said. "You're no crook. That's a pipe. Ain't it, Chipmunk?"

"You said it," he affirmed.

"Yes, kiddo, we'll all admit you proved it," continued Fanny, as she looked steadily at her hostess. "But when it comes to proving that you can write a play—nix!"

Bidwell Wright rubbed his chin thoughtfully and watched Charlotte. She was standing rigid, with a high color in her cheeks.

"She's got an alibi that she ain't wrote one," declared Frisco. "Yeh?"

There was none to deny his statement. Even Erastus P. Browning remained silent.

"You're no crook and you're no playwright," said Fanny. "But you've come pretty near proving something else."

She moved a step closer to Charlotte, and her eyes became ominous. For several seconds Fanny maintained a dramatic pause.

"All this stuff in this play," she said, punctuating her remarks with an incisive finger, "reads like a bunch of police records, kiddo. You've got us all in it. Everybody's identified; a blind man couldn't miss that. What's it for? You can't put that play stuff over on us. Belasco 'd go to the electric chair singin' if he only had a chance at the guy who wrote a play like that. It don't listen like a play; it listens more like a lot of info'."

There was a stir among Charlotte's guests.

"That's one thing," resumed Fanny. "Here's another: we come out here and get the office to get busy, and we do it. And then the first we know there's a lot of fly mugs and bulls horning in. They're outside now. Somebody slips us a fairy story about protection, but I don't see any. So what does it all mean?"

Fanny paused again and made another survey of her fellow guests. They were breathless with attention.

"Well, here's my idea," said Fanny, with a piercing glance at Charlotte. "You and the old one are a couple of dicks!"

There was a murmur of consternation and an exclamation from the Chipmunk.

"It's all a plant to frame us, that's what it is," added the indignant little woman. "It looks like a round-up to me. You get the goods on the whole bunch, and then the tip-off goes to headquarters."

At the magic word "headquarters" every guest of the Browning household was on his feet. The Chipmunk made another hasty trip to the window and came back trembling.

Frisco began swearing to himself, while the Walrus showed symptoms of panic.

"I'll bet you know every bull at headquarters," snapped Fanny, shaking a finger under Charlotte's nose. "You're a couple of stool-pigeons!"

"That is absolutely untrue," said Charlotte with dignity. "If there are police outside, I know nothing about it."

"Yeh?" snarled Frisco belligerently. "Don't know nothin', hey? Well, you're gonna know how I can flag it outa here, or there's gonna be a mattance (fusillade) in about half a minute."

He crowded forward toward Charlotte, followed by the Walrus and the Chipmunk. Even Old Bill Remington pushed himself into the group, his gray beard wagging nervously.

"I tell you that neither my father nor myself is a crook or a detective," declared Charlotte firmly. "We—we are just people."

"Quit pulling that stuff on us," warned Fanny. "We're wised up at last. It's a wonder we didn't get next quicker. What are you going to do about it? You're running a long chance, kiddo, if you think you're going to land me in the callie."

Charlotte, finding herself the center of a ring of excited guests, became apprehensive.

"If it is really as you say," she began, "that there are police outside, I'll speak to them at once and explain—"

"Not on your life!" cried Fanny. "You'd go out and hand over the whole bunch, would you? Nothing doing! It 'd be bad for your health. Watch the door, Chipmunk! If she makes a break, Frisco, grab her. Hey, you, Walrus; keep your lamps on the old one. The pair of 'em 'll cross us, sure as gun!"

Charlotte tried to draw away from the closer crowding guests, but they followed menacingly. It was then that Bidwell Wright took a hand.

"Leave this to me," he said sharply, addressing everybody. "I'm in charge."

Until that moment Charlotte had been oblivious to his existence. Now she turned and regarded him suspiciously, yet not without a faint feeling of hope.

"Mr. Browning," he commanded, "take your daughter out of the room, if you please."

There was a growl from the crooks.

"No, you don't! They'll call the flatties!" snapped Fannie.

Wright raised his hand for silence.

"Keep still, you fools!" he said angrily. "They'll hear you outside. I'll take care of this business. I'm the boss now."

"Yeh? An' howda we know you ain't a dick yerself?" demanded Frisco.

Wright answered him with a look that made even the veteran yegg draw back.

"Go ahead, Miss Browning," he added, turning to Charlotte. "You and your father go into the library or up-stairs. Leave these people with me. I'll attend to them."

Mr. Browning came forward nervously and took his daughter by the arm. As they moved toward the door the Chipmunk started to block the way.

"I'll climb the first man that interferes," said Wright. "Stand aside, you little rat!"

Benny slunk as Charlotte and her father made the passage to the door that led into the hall. At the threshold the playwright turned and looked behind her. Bidwell Wright, his hands clasped behind his back, stood facing an angry group with the utmost composure.

Charlotte shook her head in bewilderment. He was more than ever an enigma.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GETAWAY.

WRIGHT surveyed his audience with an attentiveness that each of them repaid with interest. He appeared to be working upon some sort of mental calculation.

"Well?" demanded Fanny in a shrill tone, when the silence became exasperating. "What's the word?"

"Lam (run)!" answered Wright.

"Huh?" mumbled Frisco.

"Beat it—flag it—screw your nut," the master crook elaborated.

Fanny made a gesture of impatience and alarm.

"We're rap (hep) to that," she said sharply. "It ain't what we're going to do—it's how!"

"I'll arrange it. Get your stuff—all of you. Hurry!"

There was an interval of hesitation.

"What's the game?" asked the Chipmunk suspiciously. "Hey? Howda we know we ain't all gonna get sloughed (arrested)?"

"You don't know," answered Wright coolly. "You're just taking my word for it."

There was an unpleasant laugh from Boston Fanny.

"That's a hot lot of consolation," she said, addressing her colleagues. "Maybe this guy is the main bull. How about it?"

There was an angry growl from Frisco Jimmy, supplemented by deep undertones from the Walrus.

"You goin' wit' us?" inquired Frisco cautiously.

"I wouldn't insult myself by traveling in your company," answered Wright with placid effrontery. "My own plans are none of your business."

"He'll ditch us and then fly the coop," announced Benny. "Not fer mine! When we go, this guy goes with us."

"You said it, Chipmunk," nodded Fanny. "Everybody in the soup, or nobody."

Wright smiled and shook his head.

"You'll do as I say," he advised, "or it's over the river for the whole outfit. This place is about to be pulled. If you stick around they'll get the whole bunch. If you try beating it out by yourselves, they'll get you just the same. If you try any queer stuff with me, I'll call in the bulls now. Leave it to me, and you'll go clean. Cross me, and you'll all sleep in the callie (police station)."

There was an interchange of dismayed glances.

"He's got us right," admitted Fanny. "The big rally's (campaign) over. Any kind of a getaway is good enough for me. Shoot, Bid."

Wright looked at his watch, a proceeding that caused an instantaneous stir.

"Ten minutes for everybody to get their stuff," he said briskly. "Then meet me in the hall. And mind, now—none of you is to disturb Miss Browning or her father. They're up-stairs in the den. Beat it!"

There was a scramble toward the door, a swift dash into the hall, and a tattoo of running feet on the staircase. Wright turned to Marshall Blackstone.

"Find the chauffeur and send him here in a hurry," he commanded. "After that go out on the porch. Make yourself conspicuous. They'll be watching. Stroll away from the house as far as you can—on the east side. Understand? And make sure they're following you; the more the.

better. Keep walking around until something busts. That's all; and hurry, Marshall. The door-bell may ring any minute!"

Blackstone, without questioning, departed on a run. Wright stepped swiftly to one of the windows and made a cautious reconnoissance. He shook his head impatiently as he turned away. A moment later the chauffeur entered the room.

"Here's a ten-spot," said Wright. "Do as I say and there's another coming. Get the limousine. Have her at the servant's door on the west side in exactly eight minutes—and keep the engine running!"

The chauffeur, who had worked for other persons than Erastus P. Browning and who had a knowledge of life, nodded as he pocketed the bill.

"If anybody asks you where you're going, tell 'em you're going to take the servants for a ride," added Wright hurriedly. "Stay at the door until I come; there'll be some passengers. After they're in, give her all the gas she'll stand. And *don't* make for the main road through these premises, for you'll find the gates closed."

"What'll I do, then?"

"When you round the corner of the house, cut straight across the lawn and keep going until you reach the hedge along the border of the Smythe place. Know what I mean?"

The chauffeur nodded.

"And then keep right on going—through the hedge, across Smythe's place and out to the road that way. And don't stop until you hit New York. Can you do that?"

"I can do even worse," the knight of the car assured him.

"Good! Here's another ten-spot. And if anybody gets in your way, run over him!"

"I always do," replied the chauffeur.

Wright again glanced at his watch and then fell to pacing the floor, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his head bent forward meditatively, his whole attitude that of a man who is ready, yet unhurried.

On the second floor of the Browning mansion, the Chipmunk, whose preparations for departure were completed when he put on his hat, was swiftly rummaging the dresser in the bedroom of the old one and transferring to his pockets such articles as a hasty inspection suggested. He whirled about as the sound of a light step reached him. It was only Fanny. She paused as she saw him and stooped to stuff something into her stocking.

"Cleaning up, eh?" she observed with a short laugh.

"Who's got a better right?" demanded Benny, as he pocketed a scarf-pin. "Don't we get nothin' outa this deal?"

"Oh, I got a little," admitted Fanny. She stepped toward a mirror and adjusted to her satisfaction a wonderful mink stole that ordinarily graced the shoulders of the princess.

"Been doin' some cleanin' yourself, I notice," said the Chipmunk sourly, as he explored a drawer in the dresser. "Maybe you think you'd work this side, too. Gee, Boston; you're a terrible hog!"

"Don't you bawl me, you cheap little hoister (shoplifter)!" warned Fanny. "And if you stick around here too long, you'll miss the boat. What are you lookin' for—the last nickel?"

Benny made no answer, his attention wholly concentrated on his work, and with a snort of disdain Fanny stalked out of the room.

At the same instant, Frisco Jimmy was hurriedly descending the staircase, his manicure set in hand. He paused at the door of the library, glanced in and, discovering the room to be empty, entered. Frisco made directly for the little safe and knelt worshipfully before it, for this, indeed, was one of his gods.

It needed no examination on his part; he was familiar with every detail of its pleasant countenance. Nor did it constitute even a problem to him, for this domestic strong-box of Erastus P. Browning's was nothing but a keister, after all.

Selecting a small, sharp-edged jimmy, Frisco inserted it in the crack of the door and threw his weight against it. The door was sprung open with an ease that would have chagrined the keister's owner, had he been present, instead of up-stairs in the den, trying to soothe an excited daughter. Frisco made a quick transfer of articles

from safe to pockets and was about to close the door again when he glanced at his kit of tools. He shook his head and sighed.

"Nuttin' doin' wit' them, if th' flatties win out," he muttered.

Seizing the bag, he thrust it into the safe and slammed the door, springing it back into place again with the aid of his pet jimmy. The latter he tossed into a fireplace and then kicked some ashes over it. Frisco was packed for the journey. Being an astonishingly spry person under pressure, he still had minutes to spare.

He was relighting a half-smoked cigarette when the Walrus entered the room, a vision of doubt and dejection.

"A fine business," he rumbled. "It's got me crimpy (cold). A thousand to one we're framed."

"Aw, shut up!" counseled Frisco. "Suppose it is a cough-up? Wotta we gonna do to stop it? Yeh? Take a chance, Walrus; take a chance."

"Do you know anything about the trains?" asked the Walrus irrelevantly.

"There ain't no rattler y' can hop tonight. Anyway, y'r too fat. There's a dangler (freight-train) goes t'rough in about an hour. But, oh, gee! Wot's th' use? We all gotta make this getaway in a bunch. An' if we lose out—down below!"

The Walrus shivered, despite the fact that he was wearing Mr. Browning's best fur coat.

It was during this cheerless colloquy in the library that the Chipmunk and Ten-Dollar Bill met in the hallway up-stairs. The bearded one had just descended from the attic, where, with a vigor surprising in a man of his years, he had ruthlessly destroyed a chemical laboratory and many works of art. The pair exchanged no words; their contempt was mutual. And yet, as if an invisible bond of sympathy joined them, they descended side by side to the lower floor.

In the dining-room was still another scene. Boston Fanny, swathed to the chin in her new furs, was looking anxiously up into the face of Bidwell Wright.

"Is it on the square?" she asked. "Don't kid me, Bid."

"On the square, Fanny."

She was doubtful.

"Where are we going?"

"I'm shipping you back to the big burg."

She sighed and glanced about her at the luxury that was slipping from her life.

"Will I see you there, Bid?"

"Perhaps."

She affected a trembling lip; art was instinctive with Fanny.

"Bid," she whispered, "it's all off between me and the old one. It skidded. And—and I was always strong for you."

He checked a smile and glanced at his watch. It was nearly time.

"All ready?" he asked.

"Sure. And say, Bid; how about it—to-morrow—New York? That is, if I make it?"

There were near-tears in Fanny's eyes.

"I think we'll be going now," said Wright. "The car is waiting."

The unemotional reminder that the game was played brought a quick change in Fanny's mood. Her last card had failed to take the trick.

"Choke!" she rasped hotly. "I wouldn't wipe my kicks on you! You can't even ring up a good front. If this getaway blows up, Gawd help you! If I get settled for twenty years, I'll croak you when they turn me loose. You baster (shop-lifter)! You mush-talker (umbrella-mender)! You bum door-rapper (tramp)!"

Wright's smile was friendly and irritating beyond endurance. Fanny turned her back and started toward the door. He glanced once more at his watch and followed

The others were in the library and Wright, cautioning silence, motioned them to follow him. He led the way down the hall toward the rear of the house, the Chipmunk close at his heels, the others strung out in single file, with Fanny constituting the rear guard. Passing through the servants' hall, Wright reached a side door and opened it cautiously.

The big Browning limousine was there, her engine coughing in an alarmingly irregular staccato.

"It's all right; she'll go when I step on her," the chauffeur assured Wright.

"Somebody better hurry. There's a couple of guys at the corner of the house, watchin' us."

"Pile in!" commanded Wright briefly.

The Chipmunk was already in the car and the Walrus was wedging himself through the doorway when another figure joined the group.

"Just a moment, old man," he called to the Walrus. "If it's convenient, I'd like—"

Wright turned and seized Grafton Goode by the collar.

"In you go!" he cried, and the artist was propelled violently into the lap of the Walrus.

"Hey!" screamed Benny. "Whadda y' mean? What are we totin' this guy for? Slide outa here, y' bum!"

It was too late for anybody to slide out. Frisco Jimmy hurled his own bulk after that of Grafton Goode and next came Old Bill Remington, precipitately and grimly bent upon his getaway.

"Make room for a lady," said Wright, as he seized Fanny by the arm. "Jump in, my dear; I never saw you more charming."

Fanny looked up in surprise.

"Do you mean that—truly?" she purred.

"Oh, absolutely. At this instant, you're utterly lovely."

Fanny, with a ravishing smile on her face, gathered Charlotte's furs close about her and, for a brief instant, forgot the fact that she was hop-scotching with Fate. In the last analysis, Fanny was a woman.

"Bid, I'm sorry. Will you believe that? I'll never forget you, Bid, and some day—some day—"

Her voice broke pathetically.

"Come, my dear, you must hurry," said Wright, urging her into the car. "And now kiss me."

Fanny threw both arms about his neck.

"Damned if I don't!" she cried.

The door slammed on a squirming carload of crookedness, Wright signaled the driver and the limousine jerked forward. As it gathered speed, there were sounds of scuffle within and a voice—

"Get off my foot, Walrus, you big fat dub! Ain't a lady got a chance here? Hey, Frisco, slip him a wallop for me. Who's this crowdin' me? Get your woods outa my face, you old queer-shover! Who let you in? Gawd! I'm gettin' all mashed up. Somebody's friskin' me! You moll-buzzer, I'll—"

That was the last that Bidwell Wright heard of the voice. He sighed and smiled.

"Admirable woman!" he murmured.

There was moonlight enough to discern objects distinctly, and as he stood in the doorway he saw two men dart out from the corner of the house and run toward the rapidly moving car. One of them reached the running-board, to be sent backward into the roadway by a thrust from within. There was a shout of alarm and a shot.

The limousine swerved sharply from the road, lunged across a flower-bed and ran out upon the lawn. Several dark figures pursued hopelessly.

Wright watched and listened. The swiftly moving bulk of the big car became dimmer. Then it was lost to sight among the trees. A few seconds later there was a heavy crashing, as if some giant bull-moose were tearing through a forest. The car had taken the hedge.

The master crook turned and went back into the house.

CHAPTER XXV.

EXPOSURE.

IN the library stood Charlotte, surveying an empty room with an air of perplexed unbelief. She had visited the dining-room and found it similarly barren of human tenants. It seemed unreal that the house should so suddenly have become quiet.

True, she had heard the noise without; she knew that one of the cars had driven away. But she had no understanding of the events that took place within a space of ten minutes. No longer were there any guests under the Browning roof; she was certain of that much; but whither they had flown, and how, puzzled her. Wright and his extraordinary company had vanished, and Charlotte had a sensation as of

suddenly waking from a dream and finding herself alone in a wilderness.

"May I have a word, Miss Browning?"

She whirled about with a low cry and beheld Bidwell Wright, who had stepped across the threshold and was drawing the portières behind him.

"You—here?" she whispered.

"In the flesh, fortunately," he answered.

"The others?"

"Gone."

"All?"

"To the last crook."

She sighed, and it seemed to Wright that it was a token of relief.

"The detectives—the police?" she asked quickly. "Were any really here?"

"Oh, they're still outside. I expect them shortly."

He spoke with an equanimity that amazed her.

"Then—then you, too, must go?" she said.

"Yes, when my time comes."

There was a sound of footsteps moving along the porch, and the pair exchanged glances.

"Oh, go! Go!" she cried. "Don't you hear them?"

"I am not quite ready to go, Miss Browning. There is still time."

But sudden anxiety had taken possession of her and Charlotte did not share the placidity of the master crook.

"Please—please go!" she urged. "They must not find you! They must not—"

She paused in sudden confusion.

"It is very kind of you," he said, bowing. "When I decide to go, none shall stop me. Rest assured, Miss Browning. Meantime, may I not have a few moments?"

For answer she merely nodded, for Charlotte was far too nervous for speech. Why had he chosen to remain? Why should he, of all, have risked himself in the jaws of a closing trap? His coolness in the shadow of peril she looked upon as half bravado, half insanity. If the law must find a victim, why did it have to be Bidwell Wright? In that instant of silence there were many things that Charlotte forgot, many others she was willing to forgive.

"I merely wanted an opportunity to say good-by," he said, "and to tell you why it was so necessary to place yourself and your father in such an anomalous light. Had I foreseen its consequences I should not, of course, have even considered it. More than once I have regretted it. I can only offer you the humblest of apologies. But there seemed no other way; in fact, there could have been no guests otherwise. It would have been necessary to abandon your project. Unless they believed that you and your father—"

She interrupted him with a gesture.

"You need not say it," said Charlotte. "I guessed the explanation while I was upstairs."

"I felt that you would understand," he nodded. "Of course, it would have been better to have explained. For that I hold myself guilty."

"I am willing to acquit you, Mr. Wright."

He looked at her in surprise and then shook his head slowly.

"You are generous beyond belief," he said gravely. "This is more than I deserve. I can ask no more of your consideration or your time. If we should ever meet again—"

"Please! Wait! Isn't there still a moment?" she broke in impulsively.

"Why, yes—if you will grant it, Miss Browning. But I did not think—"

"But I *do* grant it! I wanted to say—to ask—"

She faltered, as a high color showed in her cheeks, and showed a sudden confusion that caused the master crook to forget all else than the woman who stood before him.

"Perhaps I can help you," he ventured. "Were you about to be so truly kind as to suggest that I might lead a different life?"

Charlotte nodded without looking at him. It was exactly what she wanted to say. What a mind-reader this man was!

"That you should even bother to think of such a thing fills me with gratitude," he said sadly. "It is a memory I will always cherish. You are good, Miss Browning; your interest touches me deeply. But—"

She glanced up apprehensively.

"—I fear that my life work must go on."

She made a sharp, emphatic gesture of dissent.

"What folly!" she exclaimed. "What utter waste of a career! Why should you lead this life? Why should you deliberately make yourself a hunted creature? You have brains; you have character; you have education. Why should you choose to follow a path that can lead you only to ruin? I cannot believe that you follow it merely to live. Then why—why?"

"And why not?"

"For a thousand reasons. Your own self should be reason enough."

Bidwell Wright was not wholly satisfied with the answer. He had hoped that she might express a reason based upon her own desire.

"I dare say I do not take myself seriously enough," he remarked lightly.

"Do you ever take anybody seriously?" she demanded.

"Oh, yes."

He regarded her so intently that Charlotte averted her gaze. As she reflected, she was astonished at her own impulsiveness; yet she did not regret it. What a pity it was—this man bent upon destroying himself!

"And you will go on—as you have gone?" she asked.

"I fear that I must, Miss Browning."

"I am very sorry—very."

Her voice was so low that Wright barely caught the words, but as he gathered their import a gleam of pleasure lighted his eyes.

"I have chosen my career," he said slowly. "I do not defend it; I do not praise it; I do not expect you even to look upon it with a feeling of charity, despite the goodness of your heart, Miss Browning. But a grown man seldom changes. In my own case—"

There was a swift parting of the portières and the chauffeur stood in the doorway. His collar was torn, his uniform covered with dust, and one eye was almost closed.

"Beg pardon, miss," he gasped, as he observed Charlotte. "I was looking for Mr. Wright."

"You're back in a hurry," said the latter. "Didn't they get away?"

"Yes sir; they got away all right."

The chauffeur tenderly rubbed the swelling under his eye.

"I told you to drive them to New York. Certainly you haven't been there and back."

"You're right I ain't, sir. I didn't get more'n a quarter of a mile down the road, after I crossed the Smythe place. I was just hittin' her up nice when somebody reached out from behind and stuck a gun in me ear. So I stopped. Wouldn't you?"

"I certainly would," observed Wright interestedly. "What then?"

"Two of the big guys got out, pulled me off the seat, hit me a couple of wallops and told me to beat it for me health. What could I do? But I stopped long enough to see what they were goin' to do. They turned the car around and the last I seen it was doin' a good sixty and takin' all the room there was in the road."

"You mean the big limousine?" demanded Charlotte breathlessly.

"Yes'm."

"Who was driving?"

"The lady, ma'am."

Charlotte sat down abruptly in the nearest chair and held tight to the arms. Only Bidwell Wright remained unruffled. He handed a bill to the chauffeur.

"Don't bother to send out an alarm for the car until to-morrow," he said. "You've done excellently. That's all, thanks."

As the chauffeur vanished Wright nodded his head with slow emphasis.

"What a superb woman!" he murmured.

Charlotte flushed with quick resentment.

"That woman!" she cried. "She appeals to you? You admire her?"

"Many people appeal to me," said Wright thoughtfully. "Even the Chipmunk, after his own fashion. But Fanny—ah!"

"She's a thief!"

Even as she said it, Charlotte was sorry—it seemed such a pointed commentary upon Bidwell Wright himself.

"Of course, in her case it is entirely different," added Charlotte hastily. "Please don't think—"

"I think of nothing but the fact that I

am about to say good-by," he interposed. "It has been a happiness to know you, Miss Browning, to work with you, to watch you winning your way toward a triumphant ideal. It is with regret that I leave your home. Once more I set out into the world alone."

"Alone?"

Instantly Charlotte was again sorry that she had spoken so hastily. This time, she realized, her exclamation might be interpreted in a singularly personal and embarrassing way. She did not mean it in that sense; and yet— Did she? It was true that she hated to see Bidwell Wright go out into the world alone, back to his magnificent crimes. Not that she had the most remote notion of going with him, or even hinting at it.

It would be better, she thought furtively, if he did not go out into the world at all. No; not exactly that, either. It would be better if he reformed. That was it! In the play she had almost made up her mind to reform him.

But if Wright sensed the fact that an embarrassing interpretation might be placed upon her impulsive exclamation, he was too gallant to pursue an advantage so obviously plain.

"Yes, alone," he repeated. "It is better so. Alone I have been in the past, alone I shall be when I take my leave of you. The mistake of my life, Miss Browning, was when I consented to associate myself with the lower types of the criminal world. Their ways are not mine; my ideals are not theirs. We are a people foreign to each other. As objects of interest, I must confess their attraction. As coworkers, they are impossible to one whose endeavors follow channels wholly different."

He paused for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Hereafter I sail the uncharted seas without a crew," he said with finality.

Charlotte sprang to her feet, her hands clasped in front of her, her whole figure tense.

"But if you would only—"

He studied her gravely and shook his head.

"My good friend, you have a heart of gold," he said. "I shall remember you—always. And now I must go."

"I—we shall not see you again?"

"Who knows, Miss Browning? Even in the trackless seas there are meetings."

"But stop! Think! Can nothing persuade you to change your ways of life?"

Charlotte's agitation was becoming extreme. To what lengths it might have carried her she had not the slightest idea, nor did she at that instant care. But it was checked by an ominous interruption.

A key turned in the lock of the front door, there was a cautious opening and closing and the sound of a step in the hall.

"Go! Go!" she whispered quickly. "They are coming!"

"They will never take me," answered Wright, his eyes turned watchfully toward the portières.

"Please—please hurry! You mustn't be caught!"

"I honor you for your sentiments," he said softly.

"This way—quickly!" she exclaimed, grasping his arm with trembling fingers.

He looked down at her with ardent eyes.

"You are inspiring me to stay and face them, my friend."

"No! No! No! You cannot! You must not!"

He reached for the hand that gripped his sleeve and took it in a warm pressure.

"We shall meet again; I know it," he affirmed quietly.

"Yes—yes! Even—even if you don't reform. And now go!"

With a sigh of resignation, he bent his head and lifted the hand to his lips. Charlotte breathed deeply and swayed for a second.

"Save yourself!" she whispered.

Slowly he released her hand and walked across the room to a French window that opened upon the porch. He lifted the latch, then turned and looked at her. She was standing with one hand at her throat, her eyes wide with apprehension, her ears attuned to the slighest sound that might come from the hallway. Suddenly she motioned to him frantically. He bowed low and smiled.

"Good-by, dear lady," he said distinctly.

At the same instant that Bidwell Wright started to back out through the window, the portieres were thrown aside and Marshall Blackstone stepped into the library.

"Hello, folks," he said. "Where are you going, old man?"

Wright had paused on the threshold of the window.

"Hush! Hush, Marshall!" commanded Charlotte, in a low voice, as she ran forward. "He must escape! Let him go!"

"And what in Sam Hill does he want to escape from?" demanded Blackstone.

"The police!"

Blackstone laughed.

"He hasn't a chance to escape 'em if he goes that way," he said brutally. "Or any other way, for that matter. They've got the house surrounded. They'll be in in a minute."

Charlotte clenched her hands together.

"Help him! Save him!" she pleaded. "Oh, Marshall, don't you understand? He'll be caught—caught!"

Bidwell Wright, still standing in the embrasure of the window, showed not the faintest sign of agitation. He was watching them with impassive eyes.

"And what would they catch him for?" asked Blackstone.

"I—I don't know! Something—anything! And we mustn't let them!" The lawyer again laughed unfeelingly.

"Say, Charlotte, I never saw you so fussed up in your life. Not even when you went swimming with your best dress on. You don't have to worry about this bird over in the window."

Blackstone looked at Wright and deliberately winked.

"The police don't want him," added the lawyer. "He's not interesting enough. He's not even a crook."

Charlotte stopped breathing for several seconds as she turned slowly and stared at the figure in the window.

"Not — even — a — crook," she echoed faintly.

"Certainly not," said Blackstone. "Come back into the room, old man, and shrive yourself. The jig's up."

To the positive horror of Charlotte, Bidwell Wright laughed, closed the window again and walked toward her. She shrank from him. A monument was tottering on its high pedestal.

"Not a crook?" she repeated dully. "Not a crook? Then what—what is he?"

"Just a common, ordinary, low-down lawyer — like me," answered Marshall Blackstone.

Charlotte covered her face with her hands and stood swaying.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE HONEST MAN.

AFTER a full minute of ominous silence, Charlotte suddenly looked up. Her lips were sternly set, her cheeks red with humiliation and indignation. Her eyes were only for the unmasked impostor. To her, he seemed to have changed in a twinkling. No longer that fascinating master and supreme exemplar of the art of evil-doing, Bidwell Wright was common clay.

"This is true?" she demanded, her voice under complete command.

"True," he replied, with a bow and a smile. "I regret to confess that I am an honest man."

"This is despicable!" exclaimed Charlotte.

She turned suddenly upon Marshall Blackstone and viewed him with a wrath that was undisguised.

"How could you have done such a thing, Marshall? How dared you deceive me so?"

"Oh, I don't know, Charlotte," he answered lightly. "It just came to me of a sudden. You wanted crooks and I thought I'd arrange to give you good measure. Ever since you were a kid you've had the faculty of inspiring me to devilment. You know, you always started about nine-tenths of it."

"You had no right—neither of you—deliberately to keep me in ignorance," she declared coldly. "It was an outrageous imposition."

"Well, I'll say this for him," said Blackstone, with a wink at his friend, "he made a kick, at first, about being identified as a crook."

"And then yielded weakly," confessed Wright.

"That justifies nothing," Charlotte answered. "By putting yourself in a false position, you also placed me in one. It was unworthy of both of you."

The former master crook, now merely an honest man, seemed actually contrite.

"I apologize," he said humbly. "I'm sorry I'm not a crook. If there is any way I can redeem myself, Miss Browning—perhaps by being one—"

She stopped him with an indignant glance.

"You will oblige me by not making a jest of this," she observed sharply. "And, besides, how am I to be satisfied that you really are not? Your conduct, your willingness to perpetuate a fraud, your familiarity with these people—oh, how can I tell?"

"It's awfully good of you to try to rescue my character, Miss Browning," said Wright with a poorly hidden smile.

Charlotte stamped her foot.

"I know," he added, "that it is but a poor thing to be a lawyer. I feel myself that I have fallen from high estate. But as to knowledge of these people and their ways, perhaps you will let me explain. At one time, soon after I left law school, I served as an assistant district attorney. It brought me into contact with the other half of the world. I admit that I was never of much use to my chief, but I am glad now that my apprenticeship has been of service to somebody. For, you see, when Marshall wanted to recruit a few guests for your most interesting house-party, I happened to know the very man who could supply them. Some time, if you will permit, I will tell you much about the Senator. He is a most curious and remarkable gentleman."

If mollified, Charlotte concealed the fact.

"My purposes would have been equally served if you had told me all this in the beginning," she commented with severity.

"I'm not so sure. As a lawyer, I feel that you would have lacked confidence in me. But as a crook—ah!"

Charlotte flushed. It was true that she had reposed singular confidence in Bidwell Wright, but not until this moment had it occurred to her that she might be ashamed of the fact.

There was a heavy tramping of feet on the porch and a sharp ringing of the bell. The trio in the library exchanged glances. They had forgotten the impending disaster. It was Charlotte who rallied first.

"Inasmuch as both of you are lawyers," she said, "perhaps you will take charge of this affair. I wash my hands of it."

"I don't know a single soul at headquarters, Charlotte," confessed Blackstone nervously.

"And most of my own acquaintances have lapsed," admitted Bidwell Wright. "But we've got to frame up something. Let's see, now."

The bell rang still more sharply; somebody was holding a finger against the button.

"Honest men should have nothing to fear," observed Charlotte.

They heard deliberate footsteps in the hall and then the opening of the front door. There was a confusion of voices, and then there was one that rose clear above the rest:

"Why, hello, lieutenant! Come in. Glad to see you."

It was the hearty and cheerful voice of Erastus P. Browning. Charlotte, Blackstone, and Wright looked at each other in astonishment. And then the library was invaded by a group of strangers, led by the old one in person.

"Well, well," said Mr. Browning with a genial smile. "This is a surprise, lieutenant. Mighty glad to see you again. Let's see—it must be at least three years, isn't it? Remember the last time? That—ah—Gleason affair, down at the bank?"

The person whom Mr. Browning addressed as the lieutenant nodded and grinned reminiscently. The three strangers who accompanied him looked about them with a puzzled air, their glances finally resting upon Charlotte and her companions, and remaining fixed.

"Oh, by the way, I forgot," said Mr. Browning. "Lieutenant McCaffrey, this is my daughter. And this is Mr. Blackstone, one of our friends, and Mr. Wright, also a friend."

The trio, in bewilderment that was plain, acknowledged the introductions. Their amazement was occasioned, not by the strangers, but by Erastus P. Browning, who

was never more jovial or care-free in his whole life.

"And these gentlemen, McCaffrey?" he added interrogatively.

Lieutenant McCaffrey cleared his throat.

"This is Inspector Glass of the post-office," he said, indicating the nearest of the strangers. "And this is Mr. Ellison of the secret service. And this one is Mr. Cameron of the Blue Star Detective Agency."

Mr. Browning went down the line and shook hands vigorously.

"Gentlemen, I'm delighted," he said. "Any friends of Mac's are friends of mine."

Charlotte could scarcely believe either eyes or ears. As for Bidwell Wright, he was speechless with curiosity and admiration. The old one was a revelation.

"And now what can I do for you and your friends, Mac?" asked Mr. Browning, when the amenities had been scrupulously observed.

McCaffrey from headquarters looked about him and scratched his head. He was suffering from embarrassment and perplexity. The old one made haste to relieve it. He crossed the room and touched a button, and an instant later the butler appeared.

"Thomas, bring up a few bottles of the '76," said Mr. Browning. "Fetch in some rye and Scotch, too. And some cigars; you know the box."

Thomas bowed and departed.

"Well, Mac?" said the old one suggestively.

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Browning, we didn't expect to find you here," said McCaffrey. "We were looking for somebody else."

"Indeed, now! Well, well; that's funny. And who were you looking for, Mac?"

McCaffrey glanced at his companions and the post-office inspector nodded.

"Well, sir, it was like this," said the lieutenant. "We were figuring to round up a gang of pretty nifty workers that were said to be using this house for a hang-out. Of course, we thought it must be in the absence of the family. We expected to get the whole bunch to-night."

Erastus P. Browning's eyes were round with surprise.

"My house? A hang-out?" he repeated.

Suddenly his head went back and he roared with laughter.

"Oh, Lord, Mac! Where did you ever get such a notion as that? My house!"

Lieutenant McCaffrey shifted his balance to the other foot and fumbled nervously at his scarf-pin.

"You're sure, sir, there are no—er—strangers about here?" he asked doubtfully.

"Strangers? In my house? Certainly not."

"There were some people left in an automobile a little while ago," observed Inspector Glass hesitantly.

"Servants, I dare say," observed Mr. Browning. "I let them use one of the cars occasionally."

"Kind of a funny way they have of using it," remarked Mr. Ellison of the secret service. "They went across the lawn into somebody else's grounds."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the old one mildly. "I'll have to speak about that. I imagine the chauffeur has been drinking again."

Bidwell Wright and Charlotte had withdrawn a little distance into the background, and now the ex-master crook sought her hand and gave it sudden pressure.

"Your father," he whispered, "is magnificent—superb! I am lost in admiration."

Charlotte herself was so overwhelmed at the spectacle that she quite forgot to resent the fact that her fingers were entwined with those of this despicably honest man.

"Of course, Mac," the old one was saying, "if you think it's necessary to take a look around the house, the whole place is yours. I'll have the servants show you about."

Lieutenant McCaffrey was suffering from acute embarrassment.

"Why, Mr. Browning," he said, "your word goes with me—any time. And it goes with the chief, or anybody at headquarters. After what you say—why—why, there's been some kind of a mistake."

He glanced at his companions and they nodded uneasily. There was a welcome diversion when Thomas, the butler, entered with a full tray and Mr. Browning motioned for immediate service.

"Oh, that's all right, Mac," said the old one. "We all make mistakes. I make 'em. But oh, my! I'm going to laugh again, Mac. You gentlemen will all have to excuse me; I can't help it. My house a hang-out!"

And Mr. Browning once more shook with merriment.

"Of course, I guess it's a mistake, sir," added McCaffrey apologetically. "I can't understand it. We had some good men working on it, too. In fact, sir, all of us have men outside now, Mr. Browning."

"Dear me! It's a shame you've had so much trouble, Mac. Well, gentlemen, my regards!"

The old one lifted his glass and bowed to his new guests.

"Come," whispered Bidwell Wright. "We are superfluous here. A field marshal of diplomacy is in command. I salute him!"

Charlotte allowed herself to be led from the room.

In the den up-stairs the one-time master of crooks was endeavoring, by summoning all adroitness, to parry a difficult question.

"But I insist on an answer," said Charlotte. "What do you really think of my play?"

"Remarkable!" said Wright.

She smiled wisely and shook her head.

"Not responsive, Mr. Wright. You must be honest—if possible."

"Extraordinary!"

"You are still sailing the uncharted seas," Charlotte mocked. "For the last time—is it good or bad?"

"Magnificent!"

Charlotte, who had completely recovered her poise after an interview in which she and the hero of her drama exchanged commentaries and explanations, again shook her head. Bidwell Wright had lost his magic; he would never be able to deceive her again.

"Liar!" she observed quite pleasantly.

"I know it," he answered.

"At last we're on common ground," she said smiling. "It is very, *very* bad."

"Very!"

"Thank you, Mr. Wright."

"But, of course, it might easily be rewritten," he added hastily.

She shook her head decisively.

"No; never. And even if it was good, it couldn't be produced, you see."

"That part of it I don't quite understand," said Wright. "And inasmuch as I still have twenty-five per cent interest in the gross—"

"Which you tried to sell."

"How did you know?"

"Oh, dad told me." Charlotte laughed at him. "No; after what has happened to-night, how could any such play be produced? Why, the instant the curtain went up they would all know it was true—Lieutenant McCaffrey and everybody."

"That's so," admitted Wright.

"So, you see, it's out of the question."

Wright studied her for an instant with frankly admiring gaze.

"I know an even better reason than that," he said.

"Yes?"

"There isn't any play—good or bad."

"No play!"

"I saw the manuscript sticking out of the pocket of your father's overcoat as the Walrus left the house."

Charlotte, after a swift gasp of surprise, laughed.

"It would have hurt my pride to burn it," she said. "The Walrus has put me in his debt. But I didn't know dad's overcoat was gone, too. I can reconcile myself to the other things; but dad was awfully fond of that coat. Still, I suppose they were entitled to something, after all their trouble."

"Undoubtedly."

Having arrived at an interval in the conversation, Bidwell Wright fell to pacing the room. For the first time, Charlotte observed in him symptoms of nervousness. He was preoccupied, too; his thoughts, she guessed, were dwelling upon something very far away. But in that she was wholly wrong. Suddenly he moved out of his beaten track, advanced upon her and seized her by the shoulders.

"Do you love me?" he demanded.

Charlotte was speechless. She could only stare.

"But you must, of course," he added.

"How absurd!"

Wright shook her impatiently.

"Absurd? Nonsense! Why shouldn't you love me? I love you."

For an instant she was frightened. Then she broke away from him and placed the table between them.

"You love me?" she echoed with scorn. "And yet, in this very room, you told another woman—"

She paused in confusion. Wright laughed.

"Certainly I did. You were listening at the door—that's why."

Charlotte's cheeks were crimson.

"I—I couldn't help it," she faltered. "I didn't mean—"

"Ha!" he exclaimed triumphantly as by a quick maneuver he captured one of her hands. "Then you will marry me?"

"Mr. Wright! Are you utterly mad?"

"Utterly!"

His grasp this time was very firm, so that it was impossible for Charlotte to escape. Wise people never attempt the impossible, and Charlotte—in some things—was wise. So she did not struggle, for resistance often makes a madman dangerous. His arms were about her and her head was pressed close against his left shoulder. It was a situation in which other people have found themselves, at one time or another; not in the least original; in fact, a sort of plagiarism on the rest of the world. Yet, if the expression on Bidwell Wright's face could be accurately read, he apparently regarded himself as the inventor of it. Charlotte's face was not possible to see.

"Will you let me go?" she asked faintly.

"Certainly not!"

A sigh.

"That's nice," said Charlotte.

Some time after that they agreed that Erastus P. Browning was entitled to know the facts in the case. So they went out into the hall and slowly descended to the lower floor, Bidwell Wright pausing in the middle of the staircase to kiss Charlotte Browning, and Charlotte Browning pausing long enough to kiss Bidwell Wright, in order that he might not be misled into thinking he had stolen something, and thereby become embarked upon a new and greater career of crime.

From the library came sounds of much laughter and clinking glasses.

"Say, Mac, do you remember—"

It was no time to interrupt Erastus P. Browning, the man of the hour, so Charlotte and the collaborator, who owned twenty-five per cent interest in the gross receipts of a play that they would never see again, moved on into the dining-room. There they came upon a furtive figure, hatted and palpably equipped for a journey, yet still undecided what to do.

"Lady," said Percy, "I wanta hit th' road. I got to go, lady."

"And you shall go!" exclaimed Charlotte generously. "It has been sweet of you to be patient so long."

The eyes of the Bum brightened, but still he lingered.

"Could I have a dollar, lady?" he ventured. "I had a quarter, but the guy who paints th' pictures—"

"Here's ten," said Wright. "And now for the broad highway!"

"Huh?" mused the Bum. "No, mister, I'm gonna hit th' road—on th' level. Well, so long, lady."

"And bless you," said Charlotte, as Percy drifted out of the dining-room on his way to the rear door.

The ex-master of all crooks smiled down at the retired playwright.

"I believe he was our luck, Charlotte, dear," he said.

"And I think so, too, Mr. Wright—dear."

He shook her gently, by way of chiding.

"Charlotte, it's about time you stopped calling me 'Mr. Wright.'"

"But don't you understand?" she said desperately. "I just *can't* call you 'Bidwell.' It's so ridiculous."

"But you're not to call me either one, my dear."

"No?"

"'Bidwell Wright' was merely my alias."

She was startled.

"Then—what—what is your name?"

He whispered.

"Oh!" exclaimed Charlotte. "Oh! What a load you have taken off my mind, dearest—and what a perfectly lovely monniker!"

(The end.)

Hand of the Lord

by Will Thomas Withrow

THE location of heaven is any place where the essential ingredients are all in one place at the same time. These essential ingredients are man, woman, youth and love.

Other things may be added by way of embellishment, but they are merely powder on the face of happiness. The other things are its *basic elements*.

So far as young Henry Burdick and his pretty young wife, Ethel, were concerned, the geographical location of heaven was a little farm one mile west of Paulson, Oklahoma.

Paulson is a " half-and-half " town; that is, it is half above ground, and half below. It is built in that fashion because it is in what is known as the " cyclone-belt," a section of several thousand square miles which is frequently visited by that peculiar variety of wind-storm colloquially described as a "twister."

A twister is a funnel-shaped cloud which moves forward in a straight line, at tremendous speed, and with an unthinkably violent rotary or cork-screw motion before which nothing ever made by human hands can stand. A twister frequently destroys an entire town within the space of a few seconds.

The natives are prepared for the twister, however, and have little fear of it. When one is seen approaching, they simply take to their " cyclone-cellars " till it passes. In these solid masonry or cement caves beneath their houses, caves that are roofed over at the ground-level with masonry or cement, they are quite safe, and if their houses are destroyed, they simply rebuild them and wait philosophically for the next twister.

Henry Burdick and his wife, safe in heaven, on their little farm, were not worried about twisters, or indeed about anything else. They had each other, and youth and love, and that combination meant heaven to them.

But heaven without music, is as unimaginable as summer without sunshine, and they did want a piano—at least Ethel did, and Henry wanted whatever Ethel wanted.

As a matter of scientific economics, they could not afford a piano, but as a matter of very unscientific love, they could! Two people who are as much in love as these two were, can afford anything.

So they decided, after talking it over, that they would buy one on " easy payments," paying twenty dollars down, and the rest in monthly instalments. The fact that neither of them could play a piano or any other instrument made no difference, for love is a stranger to logic.

They climbed into the side-bar buggy

and drove into town, and to the Metropolitan Music Emporium,"—so proclaimed by the gaudy sign over the door—where Jeremiah Hardacre, the meanest old skinflint that ever foreclosed a mortgage on a widow's farm, or sold cheap, inferior pianos, at prices averaging three or four times their value.

Jeremiah met them at the door, rubbing his lean, predatory hands together—hands that somehow suggested talons—with the same purring satisfaction that a cat probably feels as it contemplates a fat, sleek mouse upon which it intends presently to dine.

He smiled behind the mask of his scraggly beard, in what he no doubt intended to be an ingratiating manner, as he held the door open for them and bowed them in. They would be easy victims, he thought; and so it proved.

He led them directly to the rear of the store, where he skilfully directed their attention to a cheap, gaudy instrument, of imposing exterior aspect, which had cost him ninety dollars, second-hand, but which he had converted into a " new " piano by the expenditure of thirty cents for two coats of cheap furniture-polish.

This instrument, he told them, had just been received from the factory, and was the best piano in the store. He had shown it to them first, he explained, because he knew that they would not wish to purchase anything cheap and shoddy, but would want the best.

He was anxious to sell them this particular instrument, because the price he would receive from them would represent just so much clear profit. He had already received for it one hundred and twenty-five dollars from farmer Hendricks, six miles north of town. Hendricks had paid twenty-five dollars down, and ten dollars a month for ten months, and still owed two hundred dollars. Then he had failed for three months to meet his payments, and Hardacre had " pulled " the piano and brought it back to the store, where another coat of polish had once more transformed it into a new one.

" Pulling " instruments on which the purchasers had failed to meet their payments according to contract, was part of the regular daily business of the store. Nearly all the pianos in the place had been pulled, some of them several times, from different purchasers. When they were again sold, however, they were always sold as new instruments, and the top price exacted. Furniture polish, when properly manipulated, is an exceedingly profitable article of merchandise, and Hardacre's method of using it had brought him a fortune.

His subtle flattery of the unsophisticated young farmer and his wife accomplished the desired result. They signed a contract to pay three hundred dollars, and left the store in a daze of happiness after making an advance payment of twenty dollars, which represented their entire supply of cash on hand.

Next day, the " old box," as Hardacre contemptuously called it to the young scoundrel who was his one clerk, was delivered at the Burdick farm, and it is certain that the heavenly choir never produced grander music than filled the little cottage in the evenings as the young wife laboriously picked out the notes of " Nearer My God to Thee," " The Sweet By and By," "Suwanee River," and " My Country 'tis of Thee," while the adoring young husband listened with all his soul in his eyes, and gave to her efforts such hearty and sincere applause as never greeted the ears of the great Paderewski.

The " easy payments " were met, month by month, as they fell due, but they were *not easy!* The love with which they were sweetened was the only thing that kept them from being bitterly hard. It meant doing without other things that they wanted, and sometimes things that were sorely needed. But Henry, the dear splendid fellow, never complained, and Ethel, stoutly denied that she had ever wanted the things that had to be gone without, and they laughed gaily together over their enforced economies and mendaciously declared that they had always meant to practise just those economies anyway, and so, despite hardship and rigid self-denial, heaven still maintained general headquarters at the Burdick farm.

Twenty-eight sacrificial months went by, during every one of which by some miracle

of financiering, Henry and Ethel managed to have the monthly instalment of ten dollars ready when the hard-faced clerk from Hardacre's called for it.

Each monthly receipt was treasured as a precious thing, and after it was read and duly discussed, and the balance due carefully calculated, was put away with its predecessors, in a drawer of Henry's ramshackle old desk which had been his father's desk thirty years before Henry was born.

And now, the last instalment was paid. At last, the precious piano was their very own. They could play it now without feeling that it belonged to some one else and was only rented. The pride of actual ownership after the long months of sacrifice, made them feel suddenly rich. Somehow even the little house seemed bigger, and there was about it an expansive atmosphere of freedom and luxury that it had never had before. Henry had often spoken of this little house as a " royal palace " and had laughingly—but half seriously referred to himself as " the king," and to her, as " her royal majesty, the queen." And this childish sort of make-believe had often lightened the dark hours and eased the burden when it had seemed heaviest. And now, it had suddenly become a real palace.

They celebrated, that evening. When supper was over, Henry helped Ethel with the dishes, and afterward they put on their best clothes, as if they were expecting company. Then they got out all the receipts and counted them carefully, to make sure that they had really wiped out Hardacre's claim against them.

Twice more they counted them, lest they might have made a mistake, but the last count verified the first and second. The receipts were all there—twenty-nine of them, including the first receipt for twenty dollars—three hundred dollars in all. Very solemnly, Henry placed them all together, bound them in a flat package with a piece of string, and placed them in the back part of the drawer, along with the deed to the farm and his insurance policy in the Woodmen of the World. Then they sat in the little front room, which had been called " the parlor," ever since the piano had been in it, and Hanna sang and played the dear old songs, concluding her repertoire with " Just a Song at Twilight."

While she sang and played, Henry smoked a five-cent cigar in honor of the occasion. It had been many a day since he had indulged in such an extravagance, but he felt that the occasion justified it. As Ethel sang in her sweet but uncertain voice, " Love's old sweet song," Henry dabbed furtively at his eyes with his handkerchief, and when Ethel looked around and caught him at it, he explained that the smoke had gotten in his eyes, but she knew it was not the smoke, and she closed the piano and came and kissed him, and stood for a long time at his side, with one arm around his neck, while he held her hand, and neither of them spoke.

One day, Hendricks, the former temporary owner of the piano, which now stood like a throne in the Burdick parlor, stormed into Hardacre's Metropolitan Music Emporium, and shaking a huge roll of yellow-backed bills under Hardacre's nose, demanded his piano.

Hardacre wanted those bills, or as many of them as it might be possible to separate Hendricks from without sandbagging him. He was a thief, was Hardacre, but he was a wise thief, and always took care to keep his dishonest operations within the law. He loved money, but he also loved liberty, and made it a point to keep himself well provided with both.

He was very sorry, he told Hendricks, but the piano had been sold. However, he had just received a new lot from the factory (they had come from a second-hand dealer in Oklahoma City, and had been made new, with two coats of shiny furniture-polish), and he would be glad to sell Mr. Hendricks one of those.

But Hendricks could not be wheedled or fooled into accepting one of the others. When he had first bought the piano, he had been told by Hardacre that it was the best piano that had ever been brought into Western Oklahoma, and he believed it. Furthermore, he would recognize it—" by its rich, mellow tone," he said—among ten thousand others, and he must and would

have that identical instrument back at any cost. He had just received a large sum of money from the estate of a wealthy bachelor brother, who had recently died in Kansas City, and could afford to follow the example of other wealthy people in indulging a whim. As he had suddenly become one of the richest men in Western Oklahoma, it was only proper and fitting that "the best piano that ever came to Western Oklahoma," should again grace his parlor.

Hardacre was glad that he insisted. It would mean another nice fat profit for him, if he could succeed in getting the piano away from Burdick and his wife, and he thought he saw a way to manage it."

"Of course, Mr. Hendricks," he suavely explained, "it is possible that I could buy that piano back from Burdick, and sell him another in its place, but he's pretty certain to want a stiff advance over what he paid me, for he and his wife appreciate the high quality of the instrument just as keenly as you do. I'm not at all sure that they'd be willing to sell at any price, but if they're willing to sell at all, they're pretty certain to want at least a hundred more than they paid, and maybe as much as two hundred. You know how it is when people get attached to anything that way; they won't part with it unless they get twice its value."

"Damn the price," roared the irate Hendricks, "I want that piano, and I don't care a hoot what it costs. I expect you to deliver it at my house within three days, and you can name your price; I've got the money"—slapping his bulging pocket—and he walked out.

Ethel Burdick was a lovable—and loving—little peewee of a woman, who flitted about from one inconsequential thing to another, and whose mind never dwelt for longer than five consecutive minutes on any one thing. She apparently had no memory, but—as Henry often laughingly assured her—she had the best "forgettery" in the State of Oklahoma. She could never recall to-day, what she did yesterday, and the plans that she made to-day for to-morrow would be forgotten long ere to-morrow's dawn.

Sometimes she would even forget that it was time to prepare supper, and when Henry arrived with a ravenous appetite, clamoring for hot biscuits and fresh eggs and fried ham and blackberry pie, he would find the table as bare as old Mother Hubbard's famous cupboard. But he never scolded her. He merely made a fire in the stove and then flew in and helped her get supper and these were always festive occasions in their lives, from which it will appear that Henry was a model husband.

But he loved his wife, and that fact blinded him to any domestic defects she might have. To other eyes, she might—and no doubt did—appear to be a very ordinary specimen of the female species, but to the blessedly myopic vision of Henry, she seemed the most wonderful, most perfect of all womankind.

One day she cleaned out the drawers of Henry's old desk, and while thus engaged, found the package of precious receipts which proved their title to the piano.

There had been a recent series of bold burglaries in the neighborhood, several houses in town, and two or three farmhouses in the township having been burglarized, and the mysterious author of these "atrocious crimes," as the local paper characterized them, was still at large.

Ethel had not thought of the possibility of her own home becoming the scene of a burglarious raid, but now, with the precious package of receipts in her hands, she was filled with a fear that chilled her.

"What if the burglar should rob their house and take the precious receipts?" It never occurred to her that they would be of no value to the potential burglar. She only thought of their value to her.

It would never, never do to leave them in the one place where the burglar, if he should come, would be sure to look first of all. No, she must hide them. She must hide them in a place where no burglar would ever think of looking. But where? The answer came in a flash of sudden inspiration. In all the house, no other place would be so secure from burglarious investigation.

She had seen the piano-tuner remove the front section of the case of the piano, and it now occurred to her that behind that

section of beautifully carved wood was the most secure hiding-place for the precious receipts. Securing a long envelope from the desk, she placed the package of receipts in it and walked over to the piano. Removing the section as she had seen the piano-tuner do, she moistened the flap of the envelope with her tongue, and pasted it securely to the back side of the board. She then replaced the section in position, and breathed a deep sigh of relief as she did so.

"After all," she thought, with a flash of pride in her own cunning, "it takes a woman to outwit a burglar!"

Half an hour after Hendricks left the Metropolitan Emporium of Music, Hardacre, was in his buckboard, behind his fat, lazy old mare, jogging along toward the Burdick farm. As he drove, his mind was at work. Hardacre's mind was always at work. Some people said it worked when he was asleep. Usually it worked in ways that were evil. It was working evilly now. He was trying to think of some way in which he could take the piano from the Burdicks without giving them value received.

He was already sure of a very large profit from Hendricks, provided he could recover the piano, but he was not satisfied with that. He wanted another profit from the Burdicks. The idea of buying the piano outright, from Burdick and his wife, for cash, never occurred to him. Such a transaction would have been preposterous. Hardacre's one inviolable rule of life was never to part with money when it could possibly be avoided.

The plan he formulated as he approached the farm was to pretend that his visit was merely a neighborly call, inquire about the crops, perhaps discuss State politics in a mildly noncommittal way with Henry, and thus work gradually around to the subject of pianos. He would then pretend to examine the action of the instrument, find it in very bad condition, and magnificently offer to "do the right thing" by taking it off their hands and replacing it with a new instrument "just from the factory," thus securing possession of the coveted piano without cost, and at the same time earning the good will and gratitude of the young couple.

He would then send them an old "rattle-box," which he had recently "pulled," which had cost him only fifty dollars originally, and on which he had already collected nearly two hundred dollars before the payments had been defaulted. A little of his famous furniture-polish would give it the external appearance of a new instrument, and they would never know the difference. Hendricks had told him to set his own price, and he would take care that the price should be high enough to give him a profit which would be very satisfactory indeed.

But even this plan did not entirely satisfy him. It did not appeal to him as being exactly good business. It smacked too much of philanthropy. What he really wanted to do, if it were possible, was to take the piano without giving the Burdicks anything at all in return. Nothing short of that could fully satisfy the cravings of his predatory soul. He could think of no way of accomplishing it, but the thought was so pleasant that he allowed his mind to dwell upon it with the fondness of a young lover contemplating the pictured face of his ladylove.

Then came to him an inspiration. It was possible, even probable that Mrs. Burdick had lost some of the receipts. He knew her reputation for misplacing things and forgetting where she had placed them. That peculiarity of hers was the joke of the community. If that had happened, and the lost receipts should be the last ones, it would give him legal grounds upon which to take the piano without compensation of any kind, as the last payments, if they had not been made, would now have been four months past due.

It was a chance. A slender chance, he admitted, but well worth trying. He would ask to see the receipts for the three final payments, offering as an excuse that he wished to check up the dates of the payments. If the last receipts were missing, that would give him the opportunity he sought.

When he was seated a few minutes later in the Burdick parlor, and had inquired as

to the health of the young couple, and commented on the state of the weather as the social amenities required, he suavely explained that he desired to check up the dates of their last three payments, and asked Mrs. Burdick if he might see the receipts for that purpose.

She assured him that he could, and smilingly went to the desk to get them. They were not there. Frantically she snatched the drawer from the desk and dumped its contents in a heap on the table. With sinking heart and fingers that trembled as if they were palsied, she rummaged through the little heap of papers and other accumulated odds and ends of housekeeping. There was the deed to the farm—safe, thank God—and Henry's insurance certificate, but no receipts.

She knew that was where Henry kept all his valuable papers. She remembered perfectly that that was where he had put them after the last payment had been made, but she had no recollection of having removed them or of having hidden them so carefully. While Hardacre waited with a growing expression of cynical unbelief on his crafty face, she searched in every place she could think of where the missing receipts might have been mislaid, but was compelled to admit at last that they were apparently lost.

It was the moment for which Hardacre had waited.

" Mighty good reason, I guess, Mrs. Burdick," he said—" why you can't find them receipts. The reason is that them last three payments never was made. That good-for-nothing clerk o' mine said you never paid the last three times he called for the money when it was due, an' I never more'n half believed him. Thought maybe he needed the money an' kep' it, and told that yarn about you not payin' him, so's I wouldn't suspicion him, but I reckon he was tellin' the truth about the matter after all."

" No, no, Mr. Hardacre," wailed the now distracted Ethel, you are mistaken! Oh, I paid every cent; I know I did, and I had the receipts. They must be somewhere about the house, and I'm sure to find them in a day or two at most! Oh, Mr. Hardacre, you must give me time to find them," she pleaded tragically, as she stood leaning against the piano, with the receipts in less than six inches of her hand.

" I'm right sorry, Mrs. Burdick," he said with his self-righteous smile, but business is business. I'll give you till to-morrow to find the receipts. I'll call at two o'clock, an' if you can show me the receipts by that time, well an' good. If not, I'll have to take the piano, according to the terms of the contract you an' Mr. Burdick both signed in my office. You see, I'm strictly within my rights, Mrs. Burdick, and actin' accordin' to law. You say you made the last three payments, Mrs. Burdick, an' I'd like to believe you, but you can't prove you made 'em, an' all I know is, I never got the money. I'll be here this time to-morrow. Good day."

After Hardacre had gone, Henry turned to his wife and spoke his first " cross word " to her. She did not hear it, but she saw it, for it was one of those curses which is uttered with the eye only, in bitter, blighting words that bite deep into the tender flesh of the soul, and tear and lacerate it, often beyond the possibility of ever being healed.

She cried all that night, and awoke next morning with red, swollen eyes and a raging headache, and Henry went about the house, grim and silent, making no attempt to comfort her. The headquarters of heaven had suddenly been transferred to some unknown point.

Hardacre came according to promise, bringing his wagon with him, and as the missing receipts had not yet been discovered, took the piano away. Ethel did not weep as it went, for she had already exhausted her power of weeping, and stood dry-eyed and white with a ghostly whiteness, as their home was desecrated by the removal of its most cherished possession. As for Henry, he went down to the barn as soon as Hardacre hove in sight, and remained there till he had disappeared down the road in the direction of town.

And here the story would have ended, had not providence taken a hand. As Hardacre and his driver neared the town, a sudden apprehensive hush descended over the

face of nature, as if the universe were holding its breath. It is thus that the deadly "twister" invariably heralds its approach. As Hardacre and the driver looked up, they saw a huge, black funnel-shaped cloud, with a pale yellow heart, rushing toward them at fearful velocity. They recognized it instantly for what it was, and leaping from the wagon, sought such safety as was possible by throwing themselves flat on the ground, face downward, as is the habit of natives of the cyclone-belt when overtaken by a twister in the open.

In a moment the funnel-shaped demon, shrieking and howling like ten thousand million devils let loose, was upon them, tearing and rending till it seemed to the terror-stricken men that their very vitals would be torn from them. In another moment it was over, and they pulled themselves from the drift of sand in which the twister, according to the playful custom of its species, had half buried them, and saw the black terror tearing away toward the west. The wagon—what was left of it—was a mass of splinters and twisted iron. The horses lay dead in the ditch by the roadside, with every bone in their bodies broken. But nowhere was there any sign of the piano. It was the next day before Hardacre knew what became of it, but it was a matter of a few seconds till Burdick and his wife knew.

They had observed the approach of the yellow-hearted, funnel-shaped black cloud at about the same moment as had Hardacre and his driver, but had not been alarmed by it, as it was steering a course that apparently would take it by, a little to the south of the location of their property.

They stood in their front door, watching its approach, when to their surprise and alarm it seemed to veer slightly to the north of its former course, just after it had passed over the town, which it completely destroyed, and bear down upon them as if bent on their destruction.

They seized each other by the hands, and started to run for the cellar, but they were too late. Before they had more than taken the first step a huge black object came spinning through the air straight toward them and dropped in the yard, a few feet from where they stood, and before they could more than draw a breath of astonishment, the storm had passed on and was tearing down a valley a mile away.

But there in the yard—they looked at it with a foolish, uncomprehending stare, and then looked at each other; then rubbed their eyes and looked again, for surely this thing which they seemed to see, could not be real. Surely they must be asleep, and this was all a fantastic dream! But no, the thing was actually there. It was substantial, and not a dream or a figment of an overwrought imagination. It was—their piano, which Hardacre had hauled away in his wagon scarcely more than half an hour before!

Having returned the instrument to its rightful owners, the cyclone took toll for the service, by tearing three shingles from the roof of the Burdick palace, and kicking a small corner off the barn as it passed on its way.

The piano had escaped without even a scratch! It had landed with a slight jar when the twister dropped it in the Burdick yard after snatching it from Hardacre's wagon and carrying it nearly a mile through the air, and the jar had displaced the front section of the case, which had fallen to one side, revealing the envelope containing the missing receipts.

"It is the hand of the Lord!" exclaimed Ethel devoutly, as she saw the documents, and recalled having hidden them there several months previously, to protect them from burglars, and Henry agreed with her that it was.

What Hardacre thought on that point will probably never be known, and if it were known it would probably be unprintable. What he thought is of no importance anyway. What is important is that the headquarters of heaven, promptly returned to the Burdick farm, and have remained there ever since. Also—and this, too, is important—the population has increased considerably, as was to be expected, for the events of this story occurred a good fifteen years ago, and seven other members now regularly answer roll-call in the Burdick family!

Royalty

by

Samuel G. Camp

IT was the winter Alice Maynard, my sister-in-law, was stayin' with I and the missis. I tell the wife it was a lucky thing for her I didn't see Alice first. Of course, the missis knows I'm only just tryin' to get a rise out of her; but, just the same, she gets sore every time I pull that on her. I guess the reason is because Alice is so pretty it looks kind o' reasonable. Anyways, I always get the rise.

Alice had some pretty regular money in her own right, an' she had just graduated from one of them finishin' schools, and so—well, most any guy would of stopped, looked, and listened till he was told to move along an' quit blockin' the traffic. This was the time I was playin' with the Pinks, an' when we took our last Western trip the wife and Alice went along. Well, Alice had the boys pilin' over theirselves to grab the rail in this here Alice Handicap, and pullin' stuff which if it had been a regular race, they would all of been barred off the track. And we was trimmed in every series.

But before we got back I see where Pete Wilson had the rest of the bunch faded, an' was just breezin' along to the finish, an' it looked like Pete would win out under wraps—if anybody did. In this here kind of race a ten-length lead is no sign you win, because a fresh hawss has a right to horn into the race at any stage of it; an' just when you have beat off the original starters, and are figurin' on buyin' the ring, they may spring a new candidate on you in the last quarter, an' which beats you to the jewelry.

An' that ain't the only chance you take. Some of the officials, or something, may take it into their head that you ain't no fit person to win this race, not even if you are leadin' by a mile, which should ought to be some indication, an' they're liable to go to work an' gum the game for you—like the missis done for Pete.

As for me, I was strong for Pete Wilson. Pete was a regular guy any way you took him; he had one of them diploma things himself, like Alice, but he needed the money a few years of baseball would bring him, an' which wouldn't be no small sum, because you couldn't name but one or two better southpaws than Pete; an' in time, leave it to me, Pete would go far. But Pete didn't get no backin' from the missis, let me tell you!

"Nix," says the wife; "one ball-player in the fam'ly is sufficient."

Well, I thought of a number of things I could say to that, but I knowed if I started comin' back at her we would probably wind up in a row, an' this matchmakin' wasn't none of my business, an' way out of my line, anyhow, an' so I just let it go at that, an' I guess she was disappointed. I could see she was lookin' for trouble.

An' so then, leave it to the wife, she fixed things so Pete an' Alice didn't never reach the final clinch an' fadeout; an' after that trip was over Pete didn't get a chance to see nothing more of Alice; but after Alice come to stay with us, I see where she was gettin' letters right along which I would of swore was in Pete's handwriting.

Of course, Pete wasn't no clairvoyant; but they was two things Pete knowed without having to be told: I was for him, an'

the missis was ag'in' him. An' so the last thing Pete says to me, when we split up in the fall, was to ast me if maybe I couldn't work the missis some way so he could come an' stay a couple of weeks with me durin' the winter.

"Well, Pete," I says, "believe me, I appreciate your friendship, an' all this an' that, even if it is so sudden, but I guess maybe you know yourself that the wife thinks you're a corruptin' influence, an' maybe your society wouldn't do me no good, but I'm willin' to do the best I can. An' if a miracle or somethin' happens along, maybe I can swing it for you. But don't go bankin' on it, because the missis is some influential person, let me tell you; an' when it comes to bein' set in their ways, you could move the Brooklyn Bridge just as easy. I suppose you didn't know Alice was goin' to be with us this winter?"

"No!" says Pete. "Is that so?"

I guess he was almost as surprised as when you wake up in the mornin' an' find yourself in bed.

Well, after we got settled for the winter, I kind of hinted round a couple of times about how I would like to have Pete Wilson come an' stay with us for a while, because after a month or six weeks this winter league stuff begins to get pretty slow, an' I an' Pete could entertain each other, and I could take Pete round to the shows an' things, an' so on; and Alice says she thinks that would be fine, an' she can see that I'm gettin' bored stiff stickin' round with nothing but a couple of women, an' why doesn't the wife invite Pete to visit us?

But, you might know, the missis is wise an' won't listen to it not for one little minute. An' that ain't the worst of it. After a little it gets plain as day that the missis has went bugs on the subject of makin' one of these grand marriages for sister, an' she is bound that Alice sha'n't marry nothing less than a Pittsburgh millionaire, or else somebody which is way up in society, or some guy which is famous for writin' a book, or maybe a famous artist or somethin', an' so the wife won't stand for havin' none o' my friends round the house a-tall. An' when one of the boys drops in to see me, she treats them like they was the dirt under her feet, an' hustles Alice out o' the room like she was afraid somebody was goin' to kidnap her—an' believe me, if somebody had of kidnaped the missis about then I wouldn't never of missed her! Anyhow, I would of thought it over a long time before I offered any reward to the finder.

As for Alice, she didn't take no more stock in this here dream o' the missis' than I—I'll say that for her. She was a regular girl. But, of course, when it come to a show-down one way or the other, they wasn't nothin' Alice could do about it. The wife has her buffaloed. But I see where Alice keeps gettin' them letters right along, an' I guess they're from Pete, all right enough. But, with the wife gettin' crazier every minute about landin' Alice up there in the first division o' the good old Society League, no knowin' how long it will be before she begins censorin' the mail, an' a wonder she hasn't done it already.

One day I called the missis for slammin' my friends like she was doin'.

"I know, Jim," says the wife. "But with all the advantages Alice has had, an' the money spent on her, an' everythin', there's no reason in the world why Alice shouldn't make a fine marriage. You know how impressionable young girls are; an' the fewer an' the less o' your friends Alice sees, the better for her!"

"Well, I like that!" I says. "I guess my friends don't need no defense from me; they're as good as yours any time. But barrin' all that, who's said anythin' about marriage? I guess you got marriage on the brain."

"Maybe I have," says the missis. "Anyhow, I'm able to think about somethin' besides boxin' an' horse-racin' an' Kelly pool an' all them other educational pursuits o' yours!"

Believe me, it looked like it was goin' to be a hard winter!

Well, we had it back an' forth for some time till finally I says to the missis: "All right, go the limit, an' I guess my friends won't bother you no more, seein' they are all murderers an' convicts, an' thieves an' burglars, an' not fit for a fine lady like you an' your sister to associate with. But

just you get this: Alice ain't in on this nonsense not no more than I, an' you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink the stuff, an' you can take my word for it you're playin' a losin' game."

"An' that ain't all," I says. "I'm goin' to watch this game, an' I'll lay you sixty to one right now that the break goes against you, an' when it does I'm goin' to take a hand myself—provided, of course, you don't have no objections, an' I guess you won't have, not then."

Y'understand, o' course, this wasn't only just to save my face, an' nothin' but a bluff; but I only hope that the next time I make it a couple more seeds to draw cards, an' me with nothin' but a pair of deuces—I only hope I fill like I done the time I pulled that bluff on the missis!

"What d'you mean?" asts the wife.

"I mean," I says, "when the time comes, I'm gonna write a letter to Pete Wilson."

"Pete Wilson! Huh!" says the missis.

"Yes, Pete," I says. "Of course Pete ain't no millionaire nor society butterfly, nor nothing, but take it from me Alice could go a lot further an' fare worse—even if he is a friend o' mine."

Well, of course they was more of it, because the missis had to have the last word, but I guess you understand now how things was. Anyways, you can see—same as I did—where they wouldn't be no peace in the fam'ly not till sister was married off one way or another, for better or for worse.

Leave it to me, I knowed right along where the missis had somethin' up her sleeve, an' finally it come out.

"Jim," she says, "I got a grand surprise for you!"

"That's nice," I says. "Put it on, an' let's see how it looks on you. The last time you surprised me, it wasn't near as becomin' to you as some o' the things I've seen you wear."

"Nothin' like that," says the missis. "Jim, we're goin' to receive a visit from royalty!"

"My Gawd! Royalty!" I gasps.

"There you go!" says the missis. "Can't you never take nothin' seriously?"

"What d'you mean — royalty?" I asts her.

Now I couldn't never remember this guy's name, not even whilst he was with us, an' so I'll just have to shut my eyes an' swing at it.

"Paul Anton Moritz, Prince of"—oh, well, let it go—"is comin' to make us a visit!" says the wife.

"Prince of where?" I asts her. She says it again. "You better take a couple o' quinin pills," I tell her. "You're catchin' cold."

It was one of them names like this here P-r-z-e-m-y-s-l you've heard about, an' which it is a breach of etiquette to pronounce without usin' your handkerchief.

"Where is it?" I asts her.

"Somewhere in Hungary," says the missis.

"Anywhere in the hay-fever belt would be more like it," I says.

"But for the last few hundred years," says the missis, "the prince's fam'ly has been livin' in Budapest; an' the prince himself owns an elegant mansion on the Robe de Nuit, in Paris. He's a cosmopolitan."

"From what I know of these foreign princes," I says, "I wouldn't pick him for no *Youth's Companion.*"

"Maybe you think princes is like cigars," says the missis—"two kinds, foreign an' domestic. Prince Paul's fam'ly is one of the greatest in Hungary, an' their palace in Budapest is one of the sights o' the city."

"I don't doubt it," I says. "An' more than that, I bet you Hung'ry is right an' pest is right. Where did you run across this prince thing?"

"We met him in Chicago whilst we were on that trip," says the missis.

"We?" I says.

"Alice an' me," the wife says.

An' so then the thing couldn't of been no clearer if she had wrote it out for me. It was meetin' this prince guy which had unhinged the wife's mind, an' ever since then she had been layin' her ropes to grab him off for Alice.

"H-m," I says. "Did he like her?"

"Now you're talkin' sense!" says the missis. "He was crazy about her!"

"What kind of a lookin' thing is he?" I asts her.

"He's the most perfectly good-lookin' thing you ever saw!" says the wife. "An' such an aristocratic air! An' he wears the dandiest clothes! An'—"

"You needn't tell me no more," I says. "That settles it. What more could a person ask for?"

"If you mean to hint that the prince's character ain't all that it should be," says the wife, "let me tell you that he has the entree to all the best houses in every capital of the world!"

"So has any good second-story worker," I says. "An', besides, who told you?"

"Well," says the missis, "he did."

Can you beat it?

"An' Alice," I asts her—"did she fall for him?"

"Somehow," says the wife, "Alice didn't seem to take to him very much. But you know how it is, these first impressions—"

"Oh, sure," I says. "What's a mere first impression between you an' marryin' sister to a prince — or a last impression, either, for that matter?"

"Jim Lawson," says the missis, "don't you dast to suggest that I would force Alice into a marriage against her will!"

"I ain't," I says. "I'm only suggestin' how nice it would sound if you was able to say, 'Thank you so much, but I an' Jim is spendin' the winter in Budapest with my royal sister, the Princess Alice of Szgodnoswaria, you know.' Say, I wonder is there any boxin' in dear old Budapest?"

Well, the wife goes on to say that Prince Paul is due to report in only just a couple of days; an' Jim, for the love of Mike, try to remember that you are in the presence of royalty an' act like a gentleman, even if it hurts you; an' for once in your life, Jim, be serious, an' stop actin' like a bum comedian or something, because my ideas of humor isn't fit for cultivated society, an' if I get to shootin' my face off, it's a cinch I'll queer the whole bunch. Between I an' you, they ain't nothin' like a visit from royalty to show a man just where you stand with your wife an' other cultivated people.

But the missis needn't of worried: I wasn't never more serious in my life. An', amongst other things, I'm a long ways from proposin' to accept this here Hungarian Rhapsody at face value on only just his own say-so an' without no letters of recommendation from his former employers.

An' so then I remember old Bill McGeehan, which used to be with the Red Sox, an' is now battin' right up next to W. J. Burns, in the Hawkshaw League. They didn't no grass grow under my feet whilst I was gettin' to the dump where Bill stables his bloodhounds an' sleuths an' things.

Well, Bill is glad to see me, an' glad to help me out, an' glad I didn't wait until it was too late before turnin' the case over to him, an' glad—

"Gee, Bill," I says, "Pollyanna, the glad girl, ain't got nothing on you! How much is all this happiness gonna cost me?"

But Bill says they ain't no regular rates for showin' up imitation princes, an' maybe, after all, friend Paul is the real thing; an' if he is, why, it will be an easy matter to find out; but if it turns out that this prince guy is a fake, then we'll have to get the goods on him, and then, well, it may run into money.

So I ain't quite sure whether I'm pullin' for Paul to be the real royal goods or not. Still an' all, I guess I'm willin' to go the limit, more especially, as you might say, to put one over on the missis, an' not forgettin' Alice an' Pete Wilson. An' so then I tell Bill to go ahead an' turn his wolf loose on Paul Anton Moritz, of Hungary, Budapest, Paree, an' way-stations. An' I suggest to Bill that he take the matter up with headquarters in Chicago, where the wife an' Alice first met his royal highness.

But Bill says no, no use monkeyin' with Chi, because, if this guy had made any kind of a break there, leave it to Bill—includin' fifty bucks to cover expenses—he would of knowed about it; an' the best thing to do is go right at the heart of the matter an' cable the authorities in Budapest.

So I says: "All right, Bill, you know your own business," an' I leave it — an' them fifty bucks—that way.

Well, maybe the line was busy or some-

thing; because, anyways, the prince beat out the dope from Budapest.

"A nice way to talk to a prince," says the missis, when Alice had tooken him out to show him the city. "A nice way to talk to a prince! 'Well, prince, how's things?'"

"Well," I says, "what was I expected to do—get down on my hands and knees an' kiss the hem of his shoes?"

"No," says the missis; "but you needn't of been so familiar, like as if you were talking to a bartender or something instead of royalty. An' that break you made about the prince's travelin' incognito, I was so ashamed I felt just like sinkin' right through the floor!"

I hadn't been talkin' with the prince more than a minute before he tells me to can the prince stuff, or words to that effect, because, for various reasons, he's travelin' incog.

"Yeh," I says; "I noticed you didn't bring much baggage. I travel the same way," I says. "It's a heap easier to throw away your dirty collars an' things, an' buy new ones, than to be bothered all the time about gettin' 'em laundered an' everything. Believe me, incognito is the only way to travel!"

Well, I see where the prince didn't seem to make me; but just then the missis passed the ball to herself an' went through between I an' the prince for a first down, an' so I let it go at that.

"Well," asts the missis, "what d'you think of him?"

"Between I an' you," I says, "I never see a nicer lookin' waiter in my life."

And so then the telephone rang, an' here was the getaway I was lookin' for, an' I took it on the run. It was Bill McGeehan, an' he says to come over right away.

"Who is it?" asts the missis, of course.

"It's the President," I says, "an' he wants me to meet him at the Waldorf at wunst for a conference on the Mexican situation." An' so I left her.

"News from Budapest," says Bill. "They's a Prince Paul which answers to all that dope you give me, an' at present he's engaged in travelin' round the world."

"What d'you know about that?" I says. "I guess that settles it!"

"Sure," says Bill. "The case is now as clear as mud. I suppose it hasn't entered your bush-league intellect that this guy which is visitin' you might of picked this Prince Paul for his next imitation for the simple reason that Prince Paul is travelin', an' that makes it all the harder to get the goods on him!"

Well, of course I knowed where Bill was lookin' for business; but, at that, they was somethin' in it. It looked like this idea of Bill's was worth spendin' money on. So I says: "Marvelous, Holmes! Simply marvelous!" And I left it—an' another half century—to Bill to do what he could.

But they didn't seem to be much hope.

And so now it's a good three weeks that the prince has been with us, an' not no new developments except Maggie Murphy's handin' in her resignation, an' the suspicion which attaches to Maggie's successor—an' which I am comin' to in just a minute.

As for the prince, though Bill McGeehan ain't been able to get nothin' on him, the more I see of the prince, which is as little as possible, the surer I am that if Prince Paul is a Hungarian, then I'm a Chinaman; an' I'm willin' to bet you any amount, an' you can name your own odds, that he hasn't never been nearer to Budapest than the Little Hungary. Understand, this ain't nothin' but a hunch; because, believe me, if the prince ain't the real goods, he's surely some small actor an' a smooth worker, an' nobody couldn't get away with the prince stuff any better than him.

Just the same, as John McGraw, the Shakespearian scholar, once remarked, they's somethin' rotten in Denmark, if you ask me.

But I can't lay my finger on it, an' neither can Bill McGeehan, an' so, after all, maybe it's only just because I'm prejudiced. Anyways, I an' the prince don't hit it off not for a cent, an' I can't stir hand or foot round the house without fallin' over him, an' it looks like he had settled down to live up with the country, an', well, yes, them was the happy days!

An' Alice, she's mighty nice to friend

Paul, an' all this an' that, but I can see easy enough where she ain't fallin' for him not for a minute, an' so, for a fact, it looks like the prince is good for all winter, because, leave it to the missis, while there's high life there's hope, an' she won't give up till she has to. All in all, take it from me, it was a sweet outlook!

"Well," I says to the missis, when the front door had slammed behind Maggie Murphy, "thanks to you, there goes the best hired girl we ever had."

"Jim," says the wife, "how many times have I told you to say maid, an' not hired girl? Nowadays they ain't no such thing as a hired girl, not in the best families."

"Then it's a cinch we're one o' the best," I says.

At that, I didn't blame Maggie for leavin' us. No self-respectin' girl would of stood for bein' punched up an' bawled out, "An' for Heaven's sake, Maggie, put a little more pep into your work; An', Maggie, run right up to your room this instant, an' comb your hair, an' wash the smut off your face, an' put on somethin' besides that rag you're wearin'!" an' all this an' that—no self-respectin' girl would of stood for what the missis handed Maggie after royalty dropped in on us, not for one instant longer than Maggie, an' which was some three days.

An' so then the missis hires this Marie which, the wife says, is recommended as very neat an' competent, an' she's all that an' then some because I never saw a person with a crookeder look in their eye than this same Marie; an' if she ain't workin' with a gang of robbers, pullin' the inside stuff for them, then I don't lose nothin' but my guess.

Still an' all, the missis an' Alice is both careless with their things, an' so, when all them little things begin' to turn up missin', I wasn't no ways sure that they was crooked work goin' on. But when the missis comes to me with her face like a sheet an' says a diamond ring which set me back one hundred an' eighty-five dollars is missin', an' she has looked high an' low for it, an' can't find it nowhere, an' "Oh, Jim, what under the sun shall we do?"—then I knowed it wasn't no carelessness, an' we was harborin' a thief in the bosom of our happy family, an', believe me, I would show them where they had picked the wrong harbor.

The missis is all for havin' Marie pinched on suspicion, an' right off the bat; but I says: "No; the way things is, we ain't got nothing on her, an' if we go off half-cocked we won't never get that ring back, an' I'll tell you what: I got a friend, Bill McGeehan, which is in the detective business, an' I'll have Bill put one of his men on the case, an' he can pretend that he is a friend of mine an' come here an' stay for a day or so, an' work this thing up right. What d'you say? So the missis says, "All right; maybe that would be best."

"But," she says, "be sure an' tell this detective that they ain't nobody under suspicion but Marie so's he won't go annoyin' the prince. I wouldn't have that happen for anythin'!"

"No," I says, "he might up an' leave us, an' that would be 'most too much to bear!

"At that, if his royal shyness hadn't of touched me off for a hundred bucks the other day, whilst he's waitin' for 'funds to arrive from Budapest,' an' which, at the rate he spends his own money, will last him for a couple of years, I wouldn't put it above him to lift that ring hisself. An' besides, I told you all the while this Marie was a crook, an' now I guess you wish you had been decent to Maggie, because, believe me, if this is a sample, hired girls is a lot cheaper than maids!"

Anyways, I take this new case to Bill McGeehan, and Bill is glad some more, and, believe me, what with all this an' that, an' the way the missis is blowin' herself entertainin' this, now, nobleman, I'm spendin' money like mineral water at a dry banquet, an' a good thing for me I was in on that world series dough, or else I would of had to go into the hands of a receiver.

Well, I an' Bill an' the missis and a guy by the name of Carey, which Bill has assigned to the case, we get together an' frame this thing up so as to give Marie what looks like the chance of a lifetime at the family jewels, only this time Carey will be on hand an' get the goods on her.

An' everythin' is workin' accordin' to schedule that night till, at the very last minute, you might know, it looks like the prince, which ain't in on the deal, is goin' to gum the game. Carey is planted in a closet in the wife's bedroom, with the wife's jewel-case lyin' handy an' careless on the dresser; an' the wife an' Alice is goin' to take the prince to the opera with them, an' I am all set to go to a boxin' match, when all of a suddent the prince has to go an' remember some letters which he should ought to of wrote, an' if the ladies will kindly excuse him, an' so forth an' so on, an'—well, there we are.

I got an hour or so to put in yet before I go to the fight, because I don't care nothing about seein' the prelims; an' now that the women has went, the prince seems to of forgot all about them important letters, an' so, just to kill time, I try to talk to this bird; an', believe me, it's hard goin'. Him an' I hasn't no more in common than two people which is deaf, dumb, an' blind.

An' just when it seems like I can't stand it no longer, the prince says: Well, if I will excuse him, he'll go to his room an' get some papers.

By now it must be pretty near time for me to start, an' so I felt for my watch—an' then I remembered. When I changed into the soup an' fish before dinner I had left it on the wife's dresser.

What happened next I couldn't of helped to save my life. When this thing shaped itself up to me — win, lose, or draw — I knew I had to try it. Of course, what Carey might do wasn't only nothing but a gamble—except that Bill had wised Carey to how we were tryin' to get the straight dope on this guy who claims to be Prince Paul.

So, of course, naturally Carey ain't prejudiced a whole lot in favor of the prince. All in all, I guess they's maybe seventeen ways in which this little affair can turn out, provided Carey sees fit to start anything; but I ain't goin' to stop to figure them out now no more than I did then.

"Prince," I says, "be a good fella, an' step into the wife's room an' bring me down my watch off the dresser."

"Only too happy," says the prince.

Well, that's some different from the way I'll be feelin' when this night's work is revealed to the missis. An' if Carey grabs this royal four-flush when he lamps him liftin' that watch— Well, there goes this lovely little plant to get Marie, an' probably the last chance of gettin' back that diamond ring. But you can take my word for it, after three weeks of this here tuft-huntin' of the missis's, one hundred an' eight-five bucks wasn't thirty cents between I an' my revenge.

An' I wonder has it occurred to you what position the prince would be in provided I don't back him up in his alibi that I ast him to get the watch? Well, that would be kind o' rubbin' it in. Still—

The stairway leads up from what we call the livin'-room, an' where I an' the prince has been enjoyin' each other's society.

Well, I see the royal underpinnin' fade from view. Pretty soon I hear his majesty come out of his own room, an' pass along the hall an' into the wife's room. Then it seems like they ain't even a leaf stirrin' for as long as ten minutes; but I guess that's only because I'm kind o' nervous.

An' then come a crash which would of woke the dead.

At the same time in walks the missus an' Alice. One look at Alice an' I knowed what was the matter: she had been took with another of them headaches of hers. An' it was round about then, too, that I had a vision o' green fields far away. Believe me, the wife's declarin' herself in on this thing wasn't no part nor parcel o' the program!

An' in the mean time you can take it from me it's movin' day up-stairs, an' it sounds like a good eight or nine large fam'lies all breakin' up housekeepin' simultaneous an' thorough.

An' for once in her life the missis is at a loss for words.

For a fact, I have to holler to make myself heard. "Well, he's got her!" I says.

"What—who?" screams the missis.

"Marie!" I says. "An' believe me she's puttin' up some fight!"

Well, I wouldn't of thought it of him, but it does seem like friend prince is givin'

Carey the time of his life. They're havin' it all over the wife's room, an' every little while you can hear somethin' else go to smash or fall over with a thud which shakes the house, an' — I dunno, but it seems like maybe I should ought to take a hand in this little set-to. Still an' all, considerin' the missis, I guess maybe I better not.

"Where's the prince?" the missis asts at the top of her voice.

"Search me!" I says.

Alice is collapsed into a chair an' holdin' her hands over her ears; but, judgin' from her expression, she don't need more than one more guess as to what's goin' on, though, of course, when it comes to the why of it, she has to pass. A smart girl, believe me! But not none too good for Pete Wilson.

But at this point the room begins to fill rapidly. First off, here comes Marie scairt within an inch of her life an' tryin' to yell police an' murder at the same time, the result bein' what you might call incoherent; an' then Carey an' the prince puts in their appearance by way of rollin' down the stairs, after havin' fit all the way down the hall till they toppled over. An' so here we all are—an' God bless us every one!

I wisht things had been just a little bit different, so I could of enjoyed that look on the missis's face! But, anyways, I was glad to see that Carey was on top.

"How about it?" asts Carey. "You got enough?"

"Yeh," says the prince.

"You gonna be good if I let you up?" Carey asts.

"Yeh," the prince says. "An' believe me you're gettin' off easy I didn't have a gun!"

"Stand up!" Carey tells him. An' the prince gets up a piece at a time. "Stick 'em up!" says Carey, an' so the prince done it.

So then Carey frisks him, an' the first thing he brings to light is not the watch I'm lookin' for, but the missis's jewel-case!

Right then I begin to get easy in my mind.

An' when Carey's search reveals not only the watch, but the wife's diamond ring an' most of them other things which we have missed, well, it looks like the case is complete. At that, I'm still wonderin' would the prince of held out that watch on me. He could easy of reported it missin'; an' he knowed I wouldn't of taken the time to look for it then. An' him with his getaway all timed for the minute, I left the house!

Well, they ain't nothin' like publicity for drivin' home a lesson, an' the missis needs one, an' Carey is all for havin' this guy sent up; but I says, "No; they hasn't no great harm been did, except maybe to somebody's social ambitions, an' maybe, after all, everythin' is for the best, an' so—" Well, the prince went away from there. Only of course you know now, as well as us, that this guy wasn't no prince, but a — well, not exactly a cheap crook. Anyways, he has a list of aliases as long as a small-town votin'-list. An' a wonder we wasn't all murdered in our beds.

"An' so now," I says to the missis, "I hope you are satisfied; an' no knowin' what would of happened if it hadn't of been for me."

"What d'you mean?" asts the wife.

"Well," I says, "if it hadn't of been for my puttin' Carey on the job, wouldn't that guy of made his getaway an' left you with not even a single diamond to your back, to say nothin' of all that other junk?"

"Jim Lawson," says the missis, "you know as well as I do that you thought all the while it was Marie!"

"Oh, you think so, do you?" I says—an' got away with it! But I didn't never dare tell her the truth. Even the way things turned out, she wouldn't never of forgave me.

"Anyhow," I says, "now that royalty has left us flat, I guess maybe I'll drop a line to one of the common herd, a friend o' mine—Pete Wilson."

"Have it your own way," says the missis.

An' after the missis had shook her grouch, Pete an' Alice an' I an' the wife had some good times that winter.

An' so now—yes, they're livin' happily ever after. But give 'em time.

The Undeserted Island

by Louis Gorham

A SATIRE

CHAPTER I.

FATE'S PLAYTHINGS.

IT was in the year 1911.

Matthew O'Leary, restlessly pacing the deck of the Keltic, rounded a corner and came suddenly upon the one person in the world he least expected to encounter—certainly the one he would have done anything to avoid.

It was a woman—pretty, smartly dressed, the toast of more than one city—Miss Rose McCormick. She did not see the man, who quickly stepped out of her range of vision.

Without grasping the full significance of the situation, why she was there, or how, O'Leary still realized instantly the impossibility of the prospective long voyage if she were to be a passenger.

He rushed to the side of the boat, with anxious gray eyes, measuring the rapidly increasing distance that separated the slowly moving ship from the pier on which was massed the usual throng of calling, waving, weeping relatives and friends of the departing voyagers.

His only avenue of escape lay across this strip of blackish, swirling water. To leap would have been folly. He contented himself with clutching the rail in his big, strong hands and gazing helplessly at dear old Ireland as the vessel swung out into the harbor.

Sadly he looked at the land of his birth from which he was fleeing. The land which had cast him out, despite his wealth, his (until these last few days) irreproachable good name, and many busy years as a dilettante and serviceable society man.

He would himself have spoken in some such flippant way of his present predicament, for, although his misfortunes were very real, he was an Irishman of the Irish; he did not believe in pulling a wry face at fate; self-pity was unknown to him.

He was the kind of man who, sure of his own courage, would first apologize to one who bumped him, then, if the thing were repeated, would again apologize, laughing for being so much in the way; but the third time he would be dangerous.

He would make a jest with death itself. Even now his sense of humor got the better of him and he laughed outright.

Yet he had just been treated in a dastardly manner by the friend for whom he had done one of the biggest things that one man can do for another.

As a result, O'Leary decided to get out of the country until the affair had blown over, and here on the boat was the woman in the case.

"My fellow passenger!" he muttered. "But fate must have her little joke," he added as he turned and walked quietly to where he could get another look at Miss McCormick.

The young woman stood impatiently

waiting to be assigned her steamer-chair. She held a novel under her arm, and frequently looked unconcernedly out at the water.

There seemed something pathetic about this woman, the man thought, despite the fact that she held her head erect and seemed frigidly self-possessed.

Perhaps it was her size. She was so small and delicate. The ungloved hand clasping the book seemed white and unfit for any work. About her hovered an air of determination almost hostile.

After a time the steward tagged her chair and the young woman took her seat. She was about to open her book, but did not; instead, she leaned over and idly inspected the tag on the chair at her right.

Evidently the name on it meant nothing to her. She turned away with indifference and looked at the one on the left.

Suddenly her fingers tightened. She gave a half stifled cry, dropped her book, ignored the mishap, and bent still closer over the tag.

After a breathless minute she glanced hastily about to note who was watching her. O'Leary was sure that he could not be seen, but he nevertheless stepped back. When he again looked, a deep flush dyed her face. Surprise, anger, and some other emotion struggled for mastery.

She let go the tag and put her hands to her face. Then, as though disbelieving what she had seen, leaned over and again studied the label.

"Steward!" she called in a voice which she strove vainly to keep steady.

No answer came. The man had gone to the other side of the ship. When she realized this, without a moment's hesitation, forgetting her book, gloves, and hand-satchel, she hurried in search of him.

When the way was clear Mr. O'Leary darted from his hiding-place, ran to the chair, and inspected the tag. It bore his own name!

So Miss McCormick had been ignorant until the moment before of his presence on board! He turned away, much annoyed, and went directly to his stateroom. He wanted to be alone. He needed time to think.

He scarcely knew what to do, but one fact stood out above everything else—he did not want an encounter with Miss McCormick, and for the present his cabin seemed the only safe place. With that woman roaming about on board, of course it would only be a little time before he would be forced to speak with her.

In the cool white recesses of his paint-smelling room, he threw himself on the couch and gave way to reflection.

The strong breeze blew in through the port-hole over his head, and the swish of the water rang in his ears.

He closed his eyes and quietly, systematically lived over the last few days.

Less than a month before, he and Wilson had been the best of friends. Wilson had been about to marry Rose McCormick, and he, O'Leary, was their guardian angel. The match seemed ideal. Rose was wealthy; so was Wilson. They were in love. Everybody was delighted.

Rose had no people whatever. Since her father's death some years before, she had lived alone in the big house that had for several generations been the home of the McCormicks.

Three nights ago the engaged couple and O'Leary had been invited to the house of a common friend, a Miss Warren. After dinner the usual game of cards had been suggested, and the four were soon deep in the excitement of the game. As all of the party were wealthy, the stakes ran high.

Every one was in holiday spirits, and the hours passed delightfully until O'Leary had seen a thing which at first he refused to believe. Miss McCormick was cheating!

He watched her closely, and saw that beyond a doubt this was the truth. And how cleverly she was doing it! How excited she had become, and how beautifully unconscious of her danger!

He wondered what he should do. It was all so sudden and unexpected. His brain had refused to act.

Unless you can imagine yourself in the situation of one who suddenly becomes aware of the fact that a woman at table with him, and whom he likes and respects, and who is about to marry his best friend, is cheating at cards, you cannot grasp the

emotions that possessed Matthew O'Leary at that moment.

In his terror lest the woman be discovered, he had become absent-minded, played badly, stammered, and grown confused when addressed.

He didn't know how to handle the situation, and all the time he was sure disaster was approaching. If he did not stop her soon she must inevitably be found out.

Why was she doing it? And why, in the name of Heaven, if she intended to cheat, was she not more careful? She was absolutely reckless, and winning right and left.

As her gains increased O'Leary's alarm mounted until he was almost in a panic. He wanted to cry out and stop the game. His only thought had been to protect his friend from the knowledge of his *fiancée's* dishonorable course.

Why the others did not see what was taking place he could not understand. Before long he was sure they must realize.

Meanwhile Miss McCormick, her face flushed, her bright talk and laughter ringing out, leaned over and, almost under the gaze of the others, took a card from the pack to be used in the next hand and inserted the stolen bit of pasteboard among her own cards. Yet no one except O'Leary noticed.

He now dared not encounter the cheater's eyes, dreading lest she see that he knew.

Miss McCormick won again.

The game seemed endless. O'Leary begged that they stop. Every one eyed him.

"What's the matter?" cried Wilson. "You are losing; is that the reason you cry 'quits'?"

"No—no," the miserable man remonstrated. "I'll double the stakes if you wish."

He scarcely knew what he said.

The effect of his remark on Rose McCormick was electric; she became doubly animated.

"Do! Do!" she cried.

Under cover of the table, her *fiancé* caught and pressed her hand. O'Leary saw this spontaneous movement of affection.

The play went on.

Then, after about three rounds, the bolt fell. It descended into that brightly illuminated chamber like a thunder-clap from the blue.

Miss Warren tapped the card table with her finger-tip, and said in a rather strained voice: "The ace of clubs has been played once before this game, Mr. O'Leary."

He caught his breath and stared with unseeing eyes at the highly polished nail of the middle finger with which Miss Warren continued to tap the table.

"My Heavens!" he ejaculated. "What —what did you say?"

His tone voiced the agony he had been suffering.

All faces turned toward him. Miss Warren looked him squarely in the eye, and then he knew that she knew.

His sympathy for those concerned caused him to feel all the coming shame in anticipation, and he blushed a deep crimson.

He could not move his lips. He clutched the table-edge with nervous hands and kept repeating: "What? What?"

"Rose played that ace two rounds back," Miss Warren began, her face hardening as she spoke. She turned over the tricks and displayed the other card.

Like a flash, it came upon O'Leary what had happened. Miss McCormick had been slipping cards from one pack to another, and this time had got two aces of clubs in the same pack.

He dared not lift his eyes to the face of the woman who was being unmasked. At that moment he would have done anything to save his friend from the impending humiliation.

A strained silence fell on the little group. When it had grown unbearable, O'Leary looked up and caught Wilson's anxious glance, and before it his own eyes fell. Then Wilson burst forth: "Man alive, Matt, it isn't true? Say it isn't true!"

There was no sound.

Stupidly O'Leary stared at the little group, for all, even Miss McCormick, were looking at him expectantly, suspiciously.

Then the truth flashed into his comprehension. They suspected ***him!***

His manner confirmed their doubts. In their estimation, he was caught red-handed.

For several moments he felt the cheater about to reveal herself. But she did not.

"Deny it, Matt!" Wilson cried. "It's some mistake."

"Yes, it is—" O'Leary began, then stopped short.

Wilson snatched up the cards and went through the two packs. They were hopelessly confused.

"How long has this been going on?" he demanded of Miss Warren.

She spoke quietly: "For more than a half-hour I have been watching Mr. O'Leary, and he has been playing strangely. I did not know that he was actually cheating until just now."

She rose from the table. "Come, Rose."

Miss McCormick got to her feet. O'Leary looked after her, sure that she would speak, and wondering what he should do. But she said nothing.

The two women left the room.

Even in memory, Matt O'Leary shuddered to recall what followed. It had taken all his nerve, all his devotion to his friend, to do what was almost forced upon him.

He could not betray a woman. Least of all could he blast the happiness of his friend. Perhaps if he had had time to consider, he would have acted less quixotically, but time was denied him.

Besides, he was sure it would soon all be over. Wilson was too old a friend to cast him off entirely; so without a word of defense, looking the picture of guilt, he bore all the obliquy and reproaches heaped upon him.

When he could stand no more he left the house and went home, but not to sleep. He walked the floor most of the night.

Late that next evening, worn out with a hard day of many duties, he sought his club, only to discover that Wilson had been there already, and told the tale of his disgrace in such fashion that a committee had been called together and his name stricken from the books. He was turned out!

Later in the week he was asked to leave the hotel where he made his home. For two days he had been hounded from place to place. No one spoke to him.

He saw it was best to quit the country for a time. He was wealthy and had no ties. To ship to Australia, or some other out-of-the-way place, seemed the very thing. He would knock about somewhere. He found the Keltic about to sail, and embarked without a word to any one; and now that it was too late to go back, he discovered that, as a fellow voyager, he had the woman he had shielded.

He lay thinking. The refreshing breeze filled the little cabin. He tossed about in a fever of restless indecision. Then he attempted to turn his mind to other things, but could not. He tried to go to sleep, but that was quite out of the question.

Fired by a sudden idea, he leaped to his feet and hurried from the stateroom.

CHAPTER II.

SHIPMATES.

O'LEARY realized that Miss McCormick might not be alone. Wilson possibly was with her. They might have been married hurriedly, and were off on their wedding journey. He must find out.

He went to the purser and asked to see the passenger-list. He ran hurriedly down the columns and soon read: "Miss Rose McCormick," but, although he went over the sheets twice he could find no other name that was known to him.

Where, why, for what, was she going? He leaned on the purser's desk and pondered.

The call for luncheon interrupted his musings. He pulled himself together and started toward the door; then, as a suspicion came to him, he whirled on the officer, demanding: "Who is next me at meals? My place is 5—captain's table."

The purser inspected a large sheet. "There is no one on your left, but Miss Rose McCormick is on your right."

O'Leary gasped.

The purser continued: "I remember now that she came only a few minutes ago and had her place changed to your table. She is a friend of yours, she said."

O'Leary left the room abruptly. Why had she desired to be near him? Espe-

cially after her alarm at the sight of his name on the deck-chair beside her.

She must have determined that an encounter was inevitable, and instead of striving to avoid it, meant to precipitate a meeting.

O'Leary made up his mind that he would not go to the table. He didn't know what he would do, but he would not do anything that would bring him in contact with that woman.

He betook himself to the smoking-room on the upper deck. All afternoon he dared not venture forth, but made frequent trips to the lunch counter and consumed innumerable bits of food. Still, caviar sandwiches and crackers are weak sustenance for a hungry man, and even the supplement of an occasional glass of beer did not tend to keep him in good humor.

He attempted to form some plan or scheme, but always the situation seemed impossible. As dinner-time approached he pretended to become deeply engrossed in a last year's Continental time-table.

He dared not descend to his own cabin for a book, or even make a trip to the ship's library, for at some unexpected corner he was liable to encounter Miss McCormick.

In spite of his evident absorption in the time-table, one of the smoke-room stewards dared to interrupt him by stating that dinner was on. O'Leary looked up, growled, and with a voice which his hunger rendered unnecessarily gruff, remarked: "I know."

He then returned with interest to the perusal of the time-table.

"Aren't you going down, sir?" persisted the steward.

"No."

"Are you ill, sir?"

"Of course not. In this weather—" O'Leary looked out with disgust where the last rays of the sun still glinted on a sea smooth, bright, and undented as a new dish-pan.

"Oh, I beg pardon!" said the fellow, and left the man to his hungry solitude.

O'Leary continued to sit and drink beer during the evening. The fact that her deck-chair was just outside O'Leary's door made the danger of an encounter too great to risk until after ten.

The room grew hot and stuffy. He was sure that never again would he be able to endure the sight of caviar.

At last he sought his cabin.

The way was clear. He whistled a gay tune as he hurried along. He opened the door that led into the passageway, and soon was safe inside his own stateroom, with the door locked.

Then he sat down and laughed. It was all so foolish, in one way; yet, in another, so terribly serious.

The next morning he had breakfast served in bed and ate ravenously. He had hoped and prayed for bad weather, for then either he would have an excuse for keeping to his room or the woman might be ill.

No such luck was in store for him. The sun shone brightly. It was warm, but not disagreeably so, and the sea lay like an oiled mirror.

Later in the day, by peeping through his port-hole, he ascertained that Miss McCormick was not in her chair. Hastily he emerged from his prison and made his way rapidly toward the smoke-room, but he had not gone many paces before a voice called after him imperiously: "Mr. O'Leary!"

He turned in alarm. It was a man's voice, and proved to be one of the stewards, who came rapidly toward him.

"Mr. O'Leary, a lady wants to see you. She is waiting in the lounge."

"Who is she?" Matt asked, although he knew.

The fellow shook his head and slightly raised his shoulders.

"Thank you. I'll go at once."

With much misgiving, O'Leary proceeded to the interview.

He might have known it. All his avoidance—his starvation — had gone for nothing. Why did she want to talk with him? Was she going to attempt to explain? Could there be any extenuation for a wealthy woman stealing?

He walked slowly, pondering and wishing himself anywhere in the world rather than in the position in which he found himself. He had all of a strong man's horror of an hysterical woman, and he was sure Miss McCormick was going to be hysterical.

So quakingly he entered the lounge, and he saw, not Miss McCormick, but an elderly woman — gray-haired, overdressed, puffy, fat. Beside her sat a young girl of perhaps eighteen or twenty—pretty, blushing, demure.

The elderly woman motioned to him. "You are Mr. Matthew O'Leary, are you not?"

"Yes," he responded, raising his brows in surprise, for he had never seen the woman before.

Suddenly he felt his face burn. She had heard of the card scandal, and was relying upon her age to give her the right to administer him a well-meant lecture.

"Wasn't your father Tristam O'Leary?"

"Yes," he admitted.

Without taking breath, his inquisitor announced: "I am the Duchess of Wardle. Now don't ask if I said 'Wardle' or 'Waddle.' Even if I am fat, I can still walk evenly, and that old pun has been worked before you were born. You should be original. Your father always was."

She paused and chuckled good-naturedly.

"I used to know your mother, too," she went on. "That was in the days when I was Mary Manners—before I had my various husbands and three sets of children. The husbands are all dead now, and the daughters married. (I only had daughters —I am such a creature of habit.) Oh, I almost forgot. I still have Constance. She's not married—yet."

She turned to the young woman beside her: "Come here, Con. Mr. O'Leary, this is my daughter, Constance. Lady Constance Laden—Mr. Matthew O'Leary."

The man bowed. The girl flushed and smiled. Meanwhile the duchess did not pause for one moment, but continued with the even flow of a coffee-mill and the persistency of an alarm-clock:

"Come here, Mr. O'Leary, and sit beside me. I'm no dragon. No matter how I look. I know you are wondering what under the sun I want with you, and I'll soon tell you, for I am not a success at subterfuge, so I pretend to admire frankness and cultivate it."

The man sat down beside her.

"We need you at our table," the duchess hastened on. "Con—Lady Constance is only a child—a blind man could see that—we are by ourselves on board, and she, poor thing, is lonely. Aren't you, Con?"

"Yes, mama." She spoke with that acquired simplicity which is considered the necessary equipment of a certain class of English girl.

"I looked over the list of passengers," the duchess continued, "and yours was the only man's name I recognized. Now don't say 'No,' or raise your eyebrows or objections, either. There is a seat vacant at our table. It can easily be arranged; that is, if you are alone—are you?"

"Yes."

"Good. So that's settled. Now to come to other things. There is to be a dance tonight. Is this not true, Con?"

"Yes, mama."

"And she, poor dear, wants to go. Don't you, my child?"

"Yes, mama."

"I think dancing so good for the young; don't you, Mr. O'Leary?"

But before he could reply the old lady was rushing on again:

"I could not let the child attend without an escort—some man I could trust. She is so susceptible. Aren't you, Connie?"

"I don't know, mama."

"That's just as it should be. I have no sympathy with this modern school of self-analysis. It leaves nothing to be discovered by one when the throes of emotion really come. Anyway, you will look out for the child this evening. She is an adorable dancer. Aren't you, my dear?"

"People tell me so, mama."

"Mr. O'Leary, she talks like an idiot when I am by; but, like all girls of her kind, she flirts outrageously when my back is turned. This 'Yes, mama,' and 'No, mama,' is very pretty, but let me warn you it is all assumed. She'll ensnare you unless you are wary. She'll play fast and loose with your heart, and leave you in the lurch when you think surely you have got her. It is best to warn you—"

Lady Constance interrupted this rather embarrassing confidence.

"Mama, don't you think we might go with Mr. O'Leary and see to changing his

seat at table." Her tone was meekness itself, but the remark effectually checked her mother's audacities.

"Yes, come; we'll all go together."

And so they did. The change was made without difficulty, and O'Leary was delighted with the prospect of three meals daily without the danger of a *tête-à-tête* with Miss McCormick.

CHAPTER III.

"IN DUTCH."

THEY had a charming lunch. The afternoon O'Leary spent assisting Lady Constance in directing the preparations for the dance which, owing to the mildness of the weather, was to take place on deck.

Once the girl was separated from the duchess, she proved to be charmingly natural, vivacious, and full of life and enthusiasm. She was a born leader, making all the available men work like ants.

There was much to be done. The hours slipped by, and the dressing bugle went before O'Leary realized it.

Lady Constance fully realized her mother's claims for her. She was a remarkable dancer. Far from hanging heavily upon her partner's hands, he found difficulty in securing any dances with her.

Every one spoke to every one else. For, different from the usual custom on transatlantic liners, where people take four or five days to get acquainted, secretly hoping that, as the trip is short, they can endure their own society to the end and preserve their unapproachable isolation, on these long voyages the passengers realize at the start that four or five weeks of one's own company would be hopelessly dull, and so plunge in and meet everybody and get the thing over with as soon as possible.

Lady Constance consented later in the evening to do an Egyptian dance. She proved very clever at this, seeming to weave about her the charm of the old Nile land, and enchanted her audience.

O'Leary was sitting beside the duchess.

"She is wonderful," he whispered; "simply wonderful. Where did she learn?"

"Oh, we spent a season in Egypt," the duchess replied. "It was after the death of my last husband. He left us some property there—a mosque or a pyramid, or was it a crocodile orchard, or farm, or something? Anyway, it proved awfully hard to dispose of. He always was doing impulsive things. I forget who gave him the property, but it was some personage to whom he had been serviceable—a pasha or a houri (that doesn't sound quite right); anyway, I had to sell the place.

"He never did consider me. I couldn't think of eating crocodiles—he knew that—although I do like terrapin; and I suppose the things are not so different, although the thought of munching those dear, tearful little crocodiles is too much for me. We had to sell the place; and while I was jaunting about interviewing real-estate agents, or their Egyptian equivalent, Con remained in Cairo and, unknown to me, took lessons from some old woman—so she told me, but I believe it was a young man—anyway—"

The duchess broke off abruptly.

"See that young woman over there." She indicated the outskirts of the crowd. "I asked her to come to the dance tonight."

The tone of the duchess showed irascibility.

"I was sorry for her. She appeared to be so alone. But what do you think she said? That she would come and look on, but as for participating—no, indeed; that would mean to dress, and she could not bother. Perfect frump, she looks, too."

O'Leary looked over and saw Miss McCormick. She was taking in the festivities with a slightly bored expression, and there was a strange aloofness about her; but "frumpy" was an adjective that could not be applied to the figure severely attired in a perfectly tailored gown.

"That is Miss—" he began and hesitated.

"You know her?" flashed the duchess.

He saw it was too late to retract:

"Yes; she is Miss Rose McCormick. I know her slightly."

The duchess was about to question further when she was drowned by the applause

that signaled the finish of her daughter's performance.

The girl stood flushed and bowing to the enthusiastic spectators, but refused an encore.

The evening wore on. O'Leary and his partner were among the last to leave the deck. He saw her safely to her door and then started toward his own cabin.

Long since he had seen Miss McCormick slip quietly away. He had supposed that she had retired, and was startled to see her just outside his stateroom—a solitary figure leaning on the rail, her head resting lightly against the awning stanchion.

Her back was toward him, but he was sure it was she. Her eyes were turned toward the line of white foam that marked the wake of the vessel.

He wondered of what she was thinking, for there was a pathos about her. He determined to speak. She had treated him basely, but he was a man—an Irishman—and she was young, beautiful, and a woman. The *fiancée,* too, of his sometime best friend.

He moved slowly forward so as not to startle her, all the chivalry in him uppermost. In his feeling of pity and a desire to protect and comfort the lonely and unhappy woman, all personal animosity melted away.

He drew near, but she did not turn. She was evidently too deep in her wretched musings to hear.

Then he discovered that Miss McCormick was eating an apple!

She was not wretched, as he had assumed. Could anything be less romantic? Could anything more definitely declare the quality of her soul?

O'Leary decided that nothing could. Quietly, without distracting her attention from the apple, he slipped into his cabin.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN THE FOG FELL.

THE days following passed uneventfully except that the duchess became more and more entertaining and original. Lady Constance grew more and more of a human being, and a most adorable human being at that.

O'Leary spent most of his time with these two. Lady Con was not one of the kind that is satisfied to remain by herself with only one man. She dragged O'Leary into all the excitements that the boat afforded.

With a crowd they visited the smelly engine-rooms. They explored the ship from end to end. They played shuffle-board, they danced and sang and chased each other about in mad, childish games.

The man gave little thought to Miss McCormick, who kept herself severely separate from the others. He fancied more than once that she made some slight attempt to corner him, but he always managed to elude her. They had not spoken. He always bowed as he passed, but was not sure whether she returned his salutation.

However, a steamship is a small place after all, and it is more difficult than one would imagine to avoid a meeting with some woman aboard, even if her efforts are more or less tentative. So it was only a matter of time before Mr. O'Leary and Miss McCormick would come face to face, and in some such fashion that there would be no way of escape.

It happened just after dinner one evening. O'Leary had left the table and was hastening to secure a cribbage board for the duchess. He rushed up the main companionway and almost ran into the arms of Miss McCormick.

She started back. The man did not look up, but apologized, and was about to rush by, but inadvertently he raised his eyes. Their gaze met.

The woman was frightened and showed it. Her bosom heaved, but she seemed determined. There was an unlooked for wistfulness in her eyes and a catch in her voice as she said: "Mr. O'Leary—"

"Yes, Rose." It had slipped from him before he realized what he was saying, for in the old days they had called each other by their first names—Wilson had wished it.

She trembled slightly. She did not speak. For a moment she seemed to be contemplating flight, then the determination revived.

She raised her chin imperiously. "Mr. O'Leary, I want to speak with you."

Her voice broke nervously.

Matt foresaw the much-dreaded scene—a tearful outbreak. Also he heard the throng of diners beginning to ascend the stairs.

He had all of a man's fear of being laughed at, and in some way he was certain that this woman was about to say and do things which would make people laugh.

Besides, he had already done too much for her. What was she to him, or he to her? He would stand no more. Why should he? He would be free of this, at least until a fitter season.

The remembrance of his errand came to his rescue. "I'm sorry," he began, "but just at the moment I am in a great hurry. I am on an errand for—"

He did not finish, for there was no one to hear it. Miss McCormick had inclined her head ever so slightly, and after his first words, and murmuring something, had walked away, quickly, firmly, and yet with such a manner that O'Leary felt that he had acted abominably.

This made him angry. He turned on his heel, kicked viciously at the nearest object, which happened to be the leg of a chair, and cracked his shin, gave an exclamation of the kind that it is well not to print, and went after the duchess's cribbage-board.

All the evening O'Leary was more or less uncomfortable, and in the morning he determined to seek the woman and have it out with her.

For the next three days he attempted to obtain an interview with Miss McCormick, but something always interfered; besides, he was very much occupied in having a delightful time with Lady Constance. She flirted with him outrageously, and he was not slow in following her lead.

The duchess looked on out of the corner of her faded blue eyes and smiled serenely. She was bothering little about the two just now, for she had come across a woman with whom she could discuss all her most recent physical ailments, and in exchange was being treated to glowing accounts of her friend's symptoms and experiences during an unusually checkered career of more than thirty-five years of invalidism.

O'Leary was not in love with Constance, no more was she with him, but both were enjoying themselves. If it was all a little freer than the young lady would have countenanced ordinarily, it must be remembered that they were at sea. There was small chance of their ever meeting again. Besides, O'Leary was quite old enough to take care of himself, and had her mother not warned him?

However, he did entirely forget the other woman who seemed to hover in the background—a constant menace to the joy of the ship's company. Few persons ever spoke to her, she was always alone, reading or looking out over the waters.

She never addressed a remark to any one, and after the first experience no one ever addressed one to her, for although she was courteous, she was so frigidly polite as to make it evident at once that she wished to be ignored. And so Rose McCormick was left to herself.

One morning O'Leary came to her. She was in her accustomed place, reading, but when she saw that he meant to stop she looked up expectantly, not, however, before she had taken care to ascertain at what page she had left off.

"You wanted to talk with me?" he began, feeling uncomfortable beneath her quiet gaze.

Her poise was disconcerting. She seemed another person than the little, frightened woman who had accosted him at the head of the stairs. He thought he saw traces of insomnia in the dark rings that outlined her eyes and the rather harsh expression of the mouth.

"To speak to you?" she echoed sweetly, but without seeming to be able to recall what it was that she had desired to talk to him about. "Oh, yes, I have the cabin that opens into the same corridor as yours," she began, and paused as if to be assured that he also was aware of the fact.

O'Leary wondered what was coming next and thought it best to wait and see, so merely inclined his head. This answer did not seem sufficiently determinate for her and she persisted: "Did you know that the door opposite yours was mine?"

"No," he truthfully admitted.

"I thought not," she commented. "For the past few nights you have waked me on your way to your room by noisily closing that outside door."

He grew red and stammered something, but she was absolute mistress of the situation and smiled distantly.

"I want to ask you to please be more careful," she told him.

He began to speak, but when he saw that she was not listening, but was already deep in her novel, and seemed entirely to have forgotten his presence, the words died on his lips.

He stood some seconds looking down upon her. If the woman were acting, then she was a past mistress of her art, for never did she move even so much as an eyelash, and the color remained perfectly normal in her face.

O'Leary shifted his feet, but this did not attract her attention. He departed, but the reader gave no sign of any consciousness of that fact.

The incident gave him food for thought. Indeed it was in his mind for almost five minutes following his joining Lady Constance at shuffleboard, but after that he forgot it.

Several days passed uneventfully, and then they ran into a fog. It was not the ordinary fog that chills and penetrates to the bones, seeming to freeze the very marrow; it was a hot fog—a dense, brownish fog, so dense that one could not see objects ten feet away.

Since it had come so unexpectedly, it was thought by the passengers that it would depart in the same fashion. They did not know that the captain shook his head when he first saw it, and since then had not left the bridge even to eat.

The fog-horn sounded frequently, striking as it always does, dread to the hearts of many. However, all attempted to fight against the dismal influence, and every manner of amusement was indulged in, a perfect gale of hilarity animated them—too vehement to be quite sincere.

The fog persisted. The awnings dripped steadily. The sickeningly warm vapor spread its brownish pall over everything.

After twenty-four hours of the harrowing whistle-blasts the spirits of the passengers began to flag. They gathered in groups and conversed in quiet tones. A feeling of imminent disaster could not be shaken off.

Among those who did most to exorcise the demon of dread that gripped at every throat were O'Leary and Lady Constance.

They arranged for another dance on deck and carried it forward despite adverse conditions.

The night following the dance O'Leary did not undress. He did not know just why, but he felt more nervous than usual. He went to his cabin, flung himself into his bunk, and read until the small hours. Constantly the horn sounded and the engines thumped dismally.

When O'Leary did fall asleep it was only for what seemed to him a few minutes. He was awakened by a something—something violent, but just what he could not say. He lay there wondering; in that half-conscious way one does when suddenly startled from the land of dreams.

Then as he was dozing off again he heard a cry—a cry of abject terror. The voice was that of the duchess, and the sound came only faintly to his ears. He raised himself on his elbow, tensely listening, but no other cry reached him.

He decided he must have been dreaming and was about to turn back to sleep when he realized that the fog-horn had ceased sounding.

The strange silence arrested his attention. The ship seemed absolutely noiseless. No vibrations came from the engines. They had stopped. Something had happened.

He put out his hand to turn on the light. He fumbled, found the switch and pushed it, but the room remained in blackness. He threw the switch the other way—same result. He grew alarmed and frantically moved it back and forth. But his efforts to make a light proved futile.

The deathlike quiet continued. O'Leary got up from his bed, groped for the door, found the knob, and was soon on deck.

His first sensation was bewilderment. He could see nothing—no lights. He could hear nothing. He could not imagine what

had occurred. Of only one thing he was positive, the ship had stopped. He must find somebody and discover why.

He called. There was no response. He called again and yet again, with all his might, but his voice was sucked up by the heavy blackness.

He found the railing, and guiding himself by it began to move forward.

Every few steps he stopped, expecting to see some sign of life. But he encountered no one. There were still no lights to be seen.

Arriving well forward, he decided to risk the anger of the officers and ascend to the forbidding precincts of the bridge.

He found the steps and saw that there was a light in the pilot-house.

He turned the knob and opened the door.

A small oil lamp dimly lit up the place, which was deserted. No one was at the wheel. The ship was without a master!

O'Leary staggered back, scarcely believing his eyes. He caught at his hands and clutched them fiercely, attempting to ascertain if he were not asleep and dreaming. But the strange smell of the fog that assailed his nostrils told him only too clearly that he was wide awake.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE DARK.

O'LEARY turned up the lamp in the pilot-house, but almost at once it dimmed, and he gave an exclamation of dismay as he realized that the oil was exhausted.

He looked about for some other lamp. There was none. Then he recalled a pocket electric-torch that was in his suit-case.

He snatched up the dying lamp, shielded it with his hands, and hurried back to his cabin.

What about the woman opposite? What had happened to her?

He knocked imperiously on her door. There was no response. He put his hand to the knob, turned it, flung open the door.

The room was empty. There was no confusion. The bed had not been slept in, and the woman was gone!

Where had she gone? Why had she gone? Why had everybody gone? Something terrible had occurred, but what? Why had no warning been given him?

The lamp gave one last flicker, flamed up and went out. O'Leary dropped it and rushed into his own room. He must find that electric torch and investigate.

He unearthed the suit-case and groped among the miscellaneous contents. In the dark things felt strange. Even the most familiar articles were difficult to recognize by the sense of touch.

He could not find what he sought.

He flung things around. He swore. He rummaged wildly, but no flash-lamp met his exploring fingers.

He felt in his pockets and found his match-box. Then he hurried out on deck. He must see if he could discover any meaning for this ship of silence and mystery. The vessel could not be on fire, for he smelt nothing. There was no heat — no sound.

What had happened?

Perhaps some deadly contagion had developed among the passengers and every one had fled, leaving the stricken person to die alone. The air smelt polluted!

Or possibly the ship had sprung a leak and was sinking.

Suddenly, in his wanderings, he ran against something in the darkness. Something alive.

He recoiled in a sort of terror. What was it?

"Who are you?" he cried.

"Thank Heaven!" came a voice instinct with gratitude, the voice of Rose McCormick.

"What has happened?" demanded O'Leary breathlessly.

"I don't know. I fear something terrible. I heard you calling and came out to see what was the matter. I had not been to bed, but must have fallen asleep. The ship seems to have been abandoned and we two are left behind."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Where have you been?"

"Everywhere, I think. I saw no one, heard nothing."

"Why have I not bumped into you before? I have been up to the pilot-house and back."

"So have I. But don't waste time talking. We must get away."

"Why?"

"Why? Everybody else has gone. Do you think they would go unless there was a reason?"

"Perhaps you are right. But I doubt if there are any boats left."

"We must see," she cried. "Be quick; there is no time to lose," and hurried off.

Her voice died out as though some one had quickly put his hand over her mouth. The feeling of foul play was so strong in O'Leary's mind that he called after her, but he got no response.

He ran in the direction she had taken. There was no one there.

He called again and again. No reply.

He ran hither and thither, calling, even yelling; but only that unnatural silence answered him.

Perhaps she had fallen into some hole, or gone overboard. Could it be possible that the ill-fated ship was invaded by evil spirits?

His mind was given over to all sorts of wild fancies for no one is normal in the dark, confronted by the unknown.

He became panic-stricken. He ran, almost in terror of his own rapid breathing.

How long this went on he could not say. It seemed an eternity, then all at once, right beside him a voice cried: "Mr. O'Leary!"

The tones were full of dread and agony.

"Yes! What is it? What has happened? Where have you been?"

"I don't know. I tried to find the boats. Then I tried to find you. You had gone! Where? I ran hunting, calling, in every direction."

The man had caught the woman by the arm. She was trembling.

"I lost you also," he explained. "I, too, have been running hither and yon. Stay by me. We must not be separated again."

Hand in hand they began a hurried search for lifeboats. Neither spoke except when it was necessary.

Finally he was obliged to tell her: "All the boats have been taken."

The woman made some slight movement but said nothing.

He continued: "I suppose we shall have to remain where we are until daylight, when we can find out what has happened."

His words broke off. The vessel had suddenly taken on a strange motion. It seemed to heave forward, shake, settle again lower in the water, and then came a jar as though the hull had run against some more compact object.

O'Leary instinctively put his arm about his companion but she moved away.

"We have struck!" she said.

"No," O'Leary began in an attempt to comfort.

"Don't lie!" she almost snapped at him.

"I mean," he went on, "that we must have struck some time ago, but that jar was only our rubbing against something. It came from the other side. Come, we'll see what it was. Maybe there is yet some means of escape."

He took the woman's hand, and was surprised to find that it was steady, and that her voice, when she spoke, was calm and determined.

"Well, at least we know now what we have to fear," she said in a tone of relief. "The ship is sinking. We must get away somehow—or—"

"Or?" he questioned.

"Well, there is no need to talk about the 'ors.'" She actually had the nerve to laugh.

"Come," and O'Leary's admiration showed in his voice. In a crisis it was evident that Miss McCormick was going to prove a true sport.

They walked over to the other side of the vessel.

O'Leary struck a match and the two peered out into the quavery glow of light made by the diminutive torch.

Nothing was to be seen. Nothing was to be heard.

Then, in the flare of the next match, the man gave a cry of surprise.

"There is a rope," he said. "See!" He pointed to where a ladder dangled downward.

"Where does it lead?"

"I don't know, but I will soon find out."

He climbed hastily to the rail, swung one leg over and was about to descend when the woman attempted to hold him back.

"Don't do that," she cried. "What is to be gained? You will only climb a few feet nearer the water — that ladder was most probably used by the escaping passengers—I suppose—"

The man ignored her words so far as to continue his descent while she was still speaking.

He had given his match-box into her keeping, but by the light of the match he carried she saw him look up, smile, and then he disappeared into the blackness. His match had gone out.

The woman waited impatiently. What seemed hours elapsed. The boat gave several strange lurches.

Any moment she felt the end might come.

Death is a bad thing to await, even in broad daylight, and when one knows what is impending. But alone—in the dark—unseeing—it is another story.

Miss McCormick called wildly to the man who had left her, and after a harrowing silence, she struck one of the precious matches.

The light flared bravely in the dripping fog. She peered about. There was nothing to be seen!

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT THE DAY REVEALED.

THEN out of the vague distance below appeared the head of the missing man.

O'Leary's eyes were triumphant and his lips smiling. For some seconds the features seemed frozen in that diabolical smile.

Then his voice rang out.

"Come," O'Leary cried, "I don't know just what it is I am on, but our own boat is done for. It is stove in, and the water is fast filling her. Come."

"Isn't it better to face the death we know than fly to one we know nothing about?" she asked.

"Come!"

The woman did not reply, but struck another match and looked about her. She seemed to be considering, weighing matters. Her eyes rested on a big sack near where she stood. It was tied at the neck and looked as though it had been left by some one of the earlier fugitives.

She caught it up. It was quite heavy. She leaned down and felt its contents. There were potatoes and possibly apples, and there was a big box, doubtless of more precious viands.

The fates seemed at last to be kind.

She breathed a prayer of thankfulness, shouldered the sack and climbed unsteadily to the rail.

The boat gave a lurch to the other side and she was almost thrown from her perch.

The man below in the dark gave a cry. "Hurry!" he shouted.

She laughed.

"It seems like a wild-goose chase," she called down.

"It is a gamble," he replied.

The moment the words had passed his lips he wished them unsaid, fearing that the word "gamble" would recall unpleasant memories, but if she noticed she gave no sign.

"All life is a gamble!" she replied, then with a little bitter laugh she, too, climbed down the ladder to join him in the darkness.

"Wait a moment," he called to her. "I'll pull the rope in close and you can then easily step aboard."

After a moment she was drawn through the air. Then she began again to descend. The sound of the water was alarming, and the darkness was full of all sorts of terrors. A slight nausea came upon her, but soon she felt a deck beneath her feet.

"I think," O'Leary remarked, "it will be well for us to stay here and not attempt to move about until daylight. All sorts of dangers may be lurking—half a yard away."

They sat down on what appeared to be a lumber pile.

"Are you all right?" asked O'Leary after a minute.

There was no reply.

"Are you asleep?" he demanded incredulously.

"No," came the short answer.

After this rebuff he held his peace and sat silent, waiting and watching eagerly for what daylight should reveal.

The fog gradually penetrated his clothes and chilled him, entering his bones like a fever; but he made no complaint, even to himself; indeed he scarcely moved. She was also mute.

The hours seemed endless. O'Leary thought and thought, but at last wearied out, he dozed and did not awake until the grayness of the coming day was about him.

He opened his eyes with a start. He looked around, in the half-light his mind bewildered by the strange surroundings. Then he slowly understood.

The fog still enveloped things, yet seemed to have lifted somewhat. It was cooler than during the night. He was both thirsty and hungry. He rubbed his eyes. He looked over and saw that the woman was still sleeping, or at least her eyes were closed, and she made no sign of consciousness.

They were both sitting on rough, weather-beaten lumber. Miss McCormick had so placed herself as to have a beam to rest against. She looked to be fairly comfortable and not in the least disconsolate.

The fog was still too thick for distant objects to be revealed except in the most hazy manner.

The man got to his feet; stretched; found his legs cramped and his back aching, almost rheumatic. Silently he wished himself younger. He yawned, smoothed his hair, wondering if it covered his bald spots.

He looked again at the sleeper, but she had not moved.

Suddenly a breeze sprang up. The fog melted away in irregular streaks and drifted apart like shreds of smoke-colored gauze.

The light was fairly clear now, although the sun was not up. O'Leary saw what he had expected.

They were on a derelict.

It had once been a four-masted schooner—a lumber boat, and now was sunk low in the water, heavily loaded with rough timber.

Gales had swept the deck clean of everything except a few heavy timbers. The masts had been snapped off, but two stumps remained standing some six feet high, the others had been broken off flush.

For all his watching the sun came up out of the water, unexpectedly. It looked heavy, red, metallic, and the sea became like a pot of molten brass.

The man was surprised to see that the Keltic still lay alongside. She had not sunk.

His surmises of the night before had been more or less correct. The steamer's side was stove in. She had evidently collided in the fog with the derelict and had at once taken water at a great rate. The crew presumably became alarmed and abandoned ship.

For some unknown reason he and Miss McCormick had been overlooked.

At a later time, owing to some shifting, the ship had listed and in such a way as to haul the leaky side higher in the water, allowing only a small stream to pour in through the long rent.

The vessel might go to the bottom now at any minute or it might float for a considerable time.

O'Leary was gazing at the Keltic when, hearing a sound beside him, he looked around and saw that Miss McCormick had joined him. She did not speak nor greet him in any way.

He said: "Good morning."

She only inclined her head.

"Hadn't we better get back on board?" she asked coldly.

"No." The man's tone was positive. "This old hulk is sunk as much as she can sink—a derelict cannot founder, you know. We are comparatively safe here, and the Keltic will go down sooner or later."

"What are we to eat?" she asked, looking about.

"I'll go below and see what has been left." O'Leary turned on his heel, and climbing over the disordered heaps of débris, reached the companionway and let himself down into the water-flooded cabin.

He was gone some time, but when he returned, was obliged to announce that nothing was to be had.

"The place is pretty bad," he said. "The men seem to have cleared out about all there was. Everything is water-soaked. We only need mosquitoes to make our woes complete," he added acidly. "From the looks of things I believe this vessel has been abandoned for a long time."

She listened with attention, but showed no great concern. When he paused she asked: "What are we to do?"

"There is only one thing to do," he replied, and as he spoke he left her abruptly and disappeared down the hatch.

He soon came back and she saw that he carried a coil of rope.

"I'll have to make a trip to the Keltic before she sinks and get what we need."

"Don't!" she cried in alarm. "Don't go—" She stopped short.

O'Leary turned upon her.

"We must have food," he laughed.

She said no more except to remark that the two vessels had drifted some distance apart during the night.

"Yes," he began, "that's what I got the rope for. I'll tie an end to one of the posts of the upper deck, throw the other end to you and get a basket or bucket and slide things down more or less as they do packages in the stores.

The woman looked incredulous.

"First, how are you going to get the far end of the rope to the other boat?" she asked.

He did not answer her in words, but stripped off his outer garments. Then he picked up the rope. He found that he had two pieces, and selected the longer. This he tied about his waist, and after a look around him, plunged into the sea.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

THE CALL OF THE JACKIE

BY ERMON MILAND PECK

Down where the sands greet the waves of old ocean,
Enlisted **B**y the tho**U**sands at **W**ar's ringing call,
Freemen, **E**nthused, i**N** an undy**I**ng devotion,
Impatiently are mus**T**ering, kne**L**ling auto**C**racy's fall.
All hail **T**o those b**O**ys whose **L**ove for f**R**ee country
No bawdy **H**ell's Kaiser can turn from b**O**ld deeds;
Contemptu**O**us of har**D**ship and **G**ross stre**W**n effrontery,
Even thro**U**gh tortur**E** they wa**I**t on her **N**eeds.
To whom would our j**A**ckies' bra**V**e hearts turn in danger?
Oh, God o**F** their fa**T**hers! wher**E** else sh**O**uld it be?
Adding pr**A**ise unto **H**im who was proud o**F** a manger;
Unerring, **I**n reverence, their **T**rust is in Thee.
To comba**T** the subm**A**rine, weat**H**er or she**L**l-burst,
Or fight **H**unnish mo**N**sters des**E**rting the**I**r God—
Could be **F**ound any **D**emons mor**E** damned i**F** cursed?—
Rise ye **U**p, brave jackies; pass them und**E**r the rod.
And so wi**L**l the nat**I**on cry pr**A**ise of your deeds.
Contemptuous of danger and Prussian effrontery,
Yes, e'en through hell's fire ye wait on her needs.

VIA DOLOROSA

BY CAROLYN WELLS

YOU women who think you sorrow,
As you send your men to fight,
Who must give up to-morrow
The ones you love to-night;

You sisters who weep o'er brothers,
Remembering childhood's joys;
And you, sad, stricken mothers,
Who mourn your worshiped boys;

You wives, despairingly weeping
Upon your husbands' breasts;
You plighted sweethearts, keeping
Memories as hallowed guests—

You think the grief you're knowing
Fulfils Fate's direst threat;
But my brave lad that's going
Has never told me yet.

I know how my smile can move him,
I know his wilful way,
And if he but dreamed I love him,
He'd tell me—and he'd stay!

So in gay mood, merrymaking,
"Good luck!" I laughed. "Farewell!"
And though my young heart was breaking,
I dared not let him tell!

Oh you women who weep and hover
O'er answering hearts regret,
I am giving up my lover
Who *hasn't told me yet!*

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

WHEN *Beatrice Corliss,* owner of the Corliss millions and vast ranch, and called the Young Queen because of her arrogance, declared war on *Bill Steele,* mining engineer and lord of the empty pocket, things began to happen out in the Thunder River country. Interests that commanded millions of dollars all unknowingly allied with one of the cleverest gamblers that ever owned a wheel; and these forces lined up against one strong man. Is this situation promising? It thrilled us from the first, and, what is more, it fulfils its promise.

Such is the intensely interesting theme of

THE JOYOUS TROUBLE MAKER

BY JACKSON GREGORY

Author of "Ladyfingers," "Wolf Breed," "The Short Cut," and others

a novel which will appear in six instalments, beginning with next week's issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

This is a story of the California Sierras, gripping in the beating of men's blood reechoing through its pages, in the altogether human romance of a strong man and a girl.

It is the modern West, but the newest is as old as the oldest when gold is found. It draws men like a mighty magnet, and it drew here, while passions hidden by half a century of civilized polish cropped suddenly to the surface when the *Queen* declared war on *Bill Steele!*

THINGS are happening so fast just now that an event of to-day is lost in the crowded pages of to-morrow. That is, most events are; but among the few things that have impressed themselves upon our consciousness since the beginning of the war is the Deutschland. We're not likely to forget her two appearances in this country, nor again the mystery surrounding her sudden disappearance. Conjecture was wild, but until the present moment we haven't seen a reasonable solution. ALL-STORY WEEKLY, however, will publish one next week in

THE SEA SNAKE

BY FRANK L. POLLOCK

Author of "Yellow Blood," "The Frozen Fortune," "The World Wreckers," and others

Long had placed the remnants of his fortune on one last throw in stocks, and sailed for a week's trip down to Curacao. Here he was to be cabled the result of the plunge. During the journey he met and came to love *Ruth Clayton,* who was traveling with her brother, *Jack. Long,* however, would not permit himself to mention his love for the girl until he learned the result of his venture. When the boat docked, he and a fellow passenger, one *Frederic Wulfe,* disembarked. At the American Consulate *Long* found every last shred had gone in one swift turn of the market. It was then that *Wulfe* mentioned a little project which would net *Long* ten thousand dollars. *Long* turned him down then, but when *Wulfe* suddenly took poison and died during the night, it seemed as though the venture had thrust himself upon him, and he accepted the responsibility.

WHEN we gave you "A Matrimonial Truce" last September by a new writer and a real humor-

ist, many of you wrote in demanding to know the further adventures of *Jeremiah Debbs* and his sharp-tongued but loving wife, *Lucindy*. In fact, some of you demanded that *Jeremiah* be allowed to have the little spree he had so set his heart on.

Well, he's had it. And the chucklesome history thereof will appear in next week's issue of this magazine. "JEREMIAH'S LITTLE SPREE," by Edwina Levin, is even better than its predecessor, and it's just crammed with laughs.

Go to it!

"OLD YIEM'S TIN-TIN," by Herman Howard Matteson, which will appear in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY, is not only one of the best tales Mr. Matteson has given us, but it is safe to say it is one of the best stories of the salmon industry ever written. It is not good taste to use slang, but here's a case where only good American slang fits the case—believe us, it's a peach! *Old Yiem*, the medicine man was descended from a distinguished line of ancestry, but of late he had fallen into disrepute. He was forced to catch the fish which were formerly brought to him as a tribute to his prowess. He was forced to go in search of his venison. Indeed, he was in actual want. Then came to his shack the *Tyee Wright*, who owned the salmon traps, canneries, and particularly the deserted cannery in the vicinity. *Wright* proved to be *Old Yiem's* savior, for he came bringing an offer of a job. Would *Yiem* watch the cannery? He would, and did for eight years, and all during that time nothing happened. Just like life, wasn't it? All quiet for eight years; and then when the things did begin to happen, they came like a landslide.

THE spirit of France has been no elusive thing in this great conflict. It has been as flaming and splendid as The Maid of Orleans! It has been as soul-stirring as the "Marseillaise"! Its sacrifice is without parallel! And yet how little of this great spirit do we, who have not seen with our own eyes, know. News accounts give us facts, but facts cannot deal with spirit. Fiction must and will be the vehicle—fiction in which the author can draw from deep within himself the reflection of the glory as it is. Such a story is "IMOGENE NOVRE," by Dixie Willson, which will appear in next week's issue of ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Little *Imogene's* father was a captain in the French army. Came one day the order for mobilization, and he left the child at the quiet little village inn. During all the long weeks before her father first returned so much happened—so much that was puzzling and yet not important in the eyes of the child. And when her father did return on the sudden rise of the battle's tide— But you must read it all for yourself. It is not simply a tale, but France seen from the eyes of a child, who, in heart and comprehension, was a woman of France. And through it runs a dramatic, throbbing narrative.

THERE are some stories that get over because of their amazing or complicated plot, others for their vivid color or remarkable characterization; but one and all of them, if they are really to live, must have that other subtle and all too rare quality—human interest. It is this quality in full measure that gives to "THE WITCH'S HOUR," by Clare Peeler, its most unusual appeal and charm. It is a simple little story of life in a quiet boarding-house in Camp Walton, at the foot of Pike's Peak; a simple little romance; a simple little character sketch of real human beings; but it is its very simplicity and truth that makes it—*grip*. In next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

FOUR HOURS OF RARE COMEDY

TO THE EDITOR:

Have read *The Argosy* since May, 1900, and the ALL-STORY WEEKLY since it came out, although I have missed a great many copies.

I would like very much to see more of E. J. Rath. He is my favorite, and "Too Much Efficiency" is the most delightful story I have ever read.

I keep the magazines until the serials end, and when I started reading *Hedge's* attempt to put the American home on a paying basis my tent-mate thought I had gone bug-house. It was a four hour's continuous performance of rare comedy.

Couldn't you be persuaded to give us sequels to the following: "The Argus Pheasant," "Through the Dragon Glass," "The Breath of the Dragon," "The Lad and the Lion," "Mr. Shen of Shensi," "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian," "The Shyster-at-Law," "The Sword Lover," "The Cosmic Courtship," and another *Tarzan?*

What's the matter with Footner? I do not like E. K. Means at all, nor Achmed Abdullah; but as I am not the only reader, let them come on. I could dispense with Williams, if "Trapped" was a fair sample; but "Three in a Thousand" was sure good.

Ever a well-wisher of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy*,

FRANK HAMMOND.

Woodstock, Alabama.

$1.50 NOVELS FOR 40c.

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for nine years, and have never missed a copy until I enlisted in the army. I had one subscription, but as my trade was a moving one, I found it more convenient to buy it at the news-stands, and did not renew my subscription.

I like George Allan England best of all your authors, and would like to see his new socialistic state, introduced in "Darkness and Dawn," carried out in another series.

By all means, induce Edgar Rice Burroughs to give us some more *Tarzan* tales.

I am proud and glad to tell my friends about your most splendid magazine, and brag about how many $1.50 copyright novels I have read for forty or fifty cents.

I remember one story very distinctly you printed about five years ago entitled "The Deluge." I could hardly wait to receive the next instalment of that story.

I believe there are very few poor authors on your list, but I rather got fed up on Fred Jackson's love stories a long time ago.

I enclose two dollars. Apply this on a year's subscription, and tell me what the balance is. Start my subscription with December 20, 1917, issue as December 22 was the last I received. Trusting to receive the magazine promptly, I remain,

EARL HILL.

Bat. A, 136th F. A.,
Camp Sheridan, Alabama.

NOTE: Mr. Hill probably refers to "The Second Deluge," by Garrett P. Serviss, published in the *Cavalier* magazine July, 1911, to January, 1912 (seven issues). This has also been published in book form by McBride, Nast & Co. (1912), New York City, at $1.35 net.

A WHALE OF A STORY

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY since 1910, and was much interested the other day to find in it a story by Edwin Baird called "Fists and Pacifists." Have been wondering what had happened to Baird, it's been so long since I've seen anything by him in my favorite magazine.

I remember his serial which ran several years ago, and thought it the best story you had printed up to that time. I forget the title, but it was sure some story. Maybe the reason I liked it so well was because it was laid in Chicago, the town I live in. Anyway, it was certainly a whale of a story. Why can't you make him give us another one like it, now that he has come back?

Yours truly,
HARRY A. PETERSON.

Chicago, Illinois.

NOTE: We have published two long stories by Edwin Baird—"Real Stuff," *All-Story* magazine, December, 1911 to May, 1912 (six issues), and "The Heart of Virginia Keep," *The Argosy*, April, 1915 (complete novel).

A GOOD FRIEND ALWAYS ON DECK

TO THE EDITOR:

I travel much, and have one good friend that meets me each week; no matter what town or city I am in, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY is there waiting for me, and I look forward with pleasure to our meeting.

Well, of course I look at the cover and admire the work of your artist, and I must say I wish Frank H. Desch would find me the original of his January 26, 1918, cover illustrating "A Perfect 46."

Next we turn to the Heart to Heart Talks to see what our friends think, and it is interesting to note how many people like the stories of Packard, Jackson, Burroughs, and England. Don't they make a grand quartette? And Sheehan, Guisy, and Means are just as good.

Give us some more Western stories like "The Sealed Valley," "Captain Fly-By-Night," "The Border Legion," "The Lone Star Ranger," and "Ladyfingers"; they were all A1.

I wish you would give me the names of the author of "The Golden Girl of Linkoping," as all my old copies have been sent to the soldiers, and I have forgotten the author's name.

Good-wishingly yours,
D. N. MCINTYRE.

Eugene, Oregon.

NOTE: "The Golden Girl of Linkoping" was by Ben Ames Williams, and was published complete in the May 26, 1917, issue.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

I am immensely pleased with the stories written by Edgar Rice Burroughs, E. J. Rath, and some others.

I wish you to send me the story "The Cave Man," written by E. R. Burroughs. Some other readers and I have only read one half of this story, and we tried to find the other half, but we could not, in spite of using an advertisement. Will you be good enough to give us the story?

Hoping to hear from you soon, I am,

DOMINICK PICCONE.

Durango, Colorado.

NOTE: "The Cave Girl," by Edgar Rice Burroughs, was published in the *All-Story* magazine, July to September, 1913 (three issues). Its sequel, "The Cave Man," in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, March 31 to April 21, 1917 (four issues).

Permit me to compliment you in the selection of "Hoodooed."

Pasquale and *Rosita* are cleverly made to depict the idiosyncrasies of a certain class of Italian peasants. The correct use of the Italian expressions is also worthy of mention.

I believe that the author can, in the same artful way, tell us something about the so-called "Camorra."

Yours very truly,
MICHAEL C. D'AGROSA.

261 Broadway, New York.

Cut Your Own Hair!

Of course! Why not?

Now that a wonderful but simple invention has made it as easy as combing. No more wasting time and money in the barber shop—no more letting your hair grow too long and interfering with your own advancement. Keep your hair at its most becoming length with a

UCAN Safety Hair Cutter

SAVES TIME AND MONEY—IT'S AS EASY AS COMBING

Only a few years ago few men shaved themselves. Then came the safety razor, and now every man shaves himself and uses the money he saves for pleasure and profit.

It had to come—a device for cutting your own hair.

This is no experiment. It is being used by thousands of red-blooded men who know a good thing when they see one.

We have testimonial letters from all over the United States.

How long are you going to wait before you begin cutting your own hair and having it the way you want it?

You don't need skill or practice. There is no trick about it. You simply comb your hair, and the keenly tempered blades honed specially for hair cutting, cuts your hair evenly and smoothly to exactly the length you want.

It cannot get out of order, and the six blades will last you fully a year and are easily renewed.

Mothers want a UCAN to cut their boy's hair at home.

You cannot lose. If you are not entirely satisfied, we will send your money back. That is our absolute guarantee. Send check, post office or express money order or cash today for your UCAN. You owe it to your personal appearance and your own self-interest. Send Now.

PRICE MUST GO UP SOON!

Send Coupon *Now!*

(Illustration is one-third actual size.)

FOR HOME USE

UCAN Safety Hair Cutter with six blades specially tested for hair cutting. Packed in handsome wood case, leatherette covered and plush lined. UCAN Khaki Kit Outfit—weight complete, 2 oz.—for soldiers, sailors, and outdoor men in serviceable Khaki Kit case with comb, cutter and six blades.

UCAN SALES CORPORATION
1010 Woolworth Building
New York City

$2.75

UCAN SALES CORPORATION
1010 Woolworth Bldg.
New York City.

I am enclosing ..... check ..... post office ..... express money order for $2.75 for which send me UCAN Safety Hair Cutter in ..... home kit ..... in Khaki case (check which one wanted). I understand that if this is not satisfactory you will return my money.

Name .....

Address .....

Missing Page

Inside back cover

Missing Page

Back cover