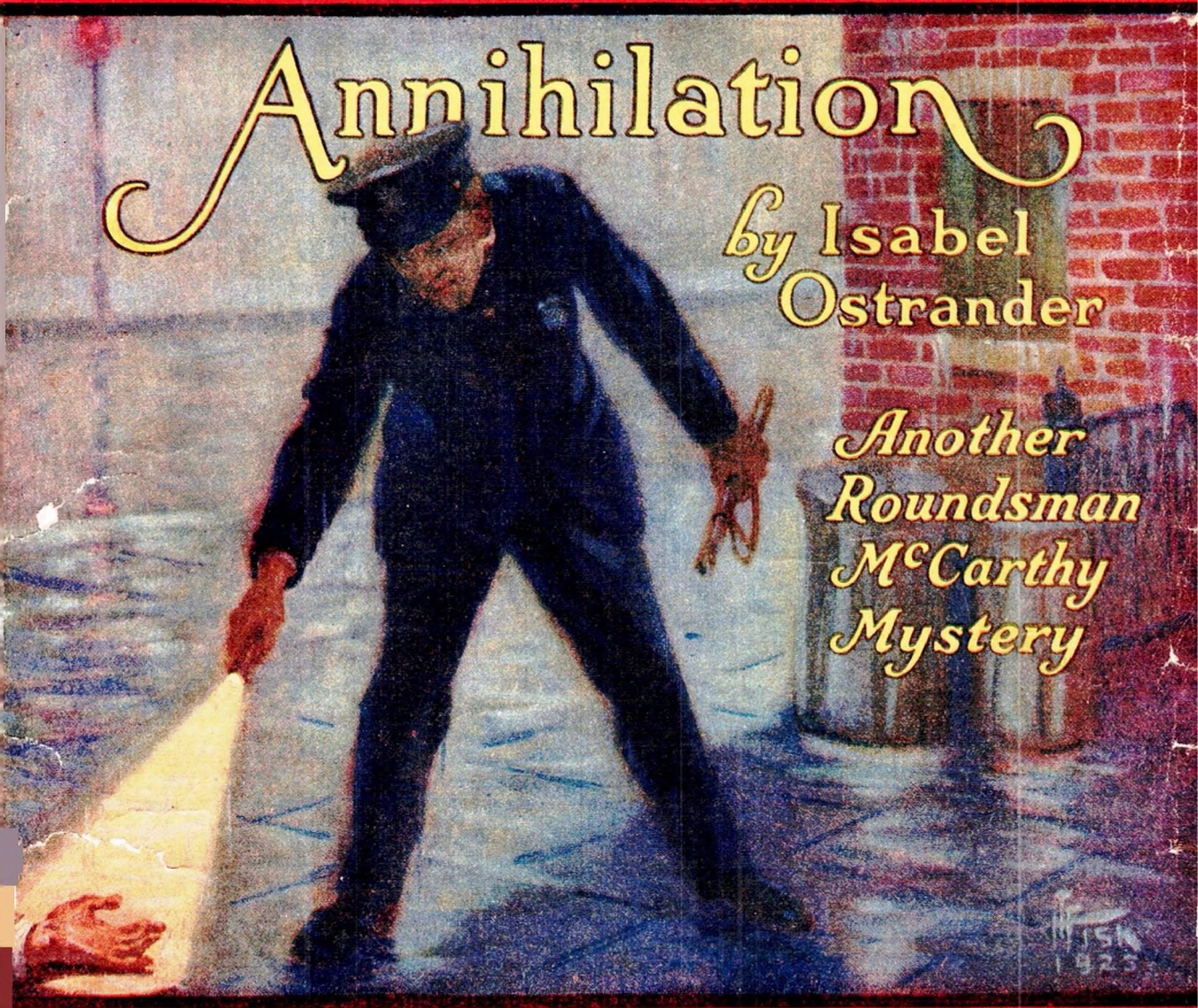
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



10¢ PER COPY NOVEMBER 17 BY THE YEAR $4.00

She Found A Pleasant Way To Reduce Her Fat

She did not have to go to the trouble of diet or exercise. She found a better way, which aids the digestive organs to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

She used *Marmola Prescription Tablets* which are made from the famous Marmola prescription. They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They will allow you to eat many kinds of food without the necessity of dieting or exercising.

Thousands have found that the *Marmola Prescription Tablets* give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them, or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

MARMOLA COMPANY

711 Garfield Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

Ten dollars worth of reading for 20c!

Think of it! Five Complete boiled down novels in one magazine! That's "NOVELETS," a Magazine of Action, Adventure, Detective, Western, Sea and Northern—all in one magazine, with smashing illustrations. $10.00 worth of novels for 20 cents. The first number of "NOVELETS" on the newsstands, November 15th, or direct from the publishers, for 20 cents in coin or stamps.

GlenKel Publishing Co., 461 8th Ave., New York

Novelets

A MAGAZINE OF ACTION

All Newsstands—November 15th—20 cts.

Give Diamonds for Xmas
$1.00 Brings Your Choice

XA8—Perfectly cut, blue white diamond set in 14K. gold tooth ring for men. $95

XA9—Seven perfect cut, matched diamonds, platinum set in white gold top. 14K. shank. $67.50

SWEET STANDS FOR SERVICE

XA10—Engagement ring set with a fine perfect cut diamond in 6 white gold prongs. 14K. shank. $75.00

XA11 — Perfectly cut, blue white diamond set in engraved 18K. white gold ring. $67.50

XA12—Blue white diamond, perfect cut, set in engraved platinum ring. $65.00

XA13—7 diamond cluster, platinum, set in white gold top. Engraved gold shank. $57.50

XA14 — Sparkling, blue white diamond set in Sweet's engagement ring. $50

XA15 — Perfectly cut diamond in 18 K. engraved, white gold ring. 4 sapphires. $100

10 MONTHS TO PAY

Nothing could be more appropriate as an Xmas Gift to "Her" than a Diamond or article of Jewelry. Just Think!—only $1.00 brings any article you select for your examination. Our terms enable you to buy a worth while gift that will be a constant reminder of you. $1.00 at SWEET'S does the work of $5.00 elsewhere.

SEND ONLY $1.00

and anything you select will be immediately sent you. When you have convinced yourself that it is exceptional value, keep it and pay only 1/5th of the price. 10 MONTHS NEXT YEAR TO PAY THE BALANCE.

SPECIAL XMAS SERVICE

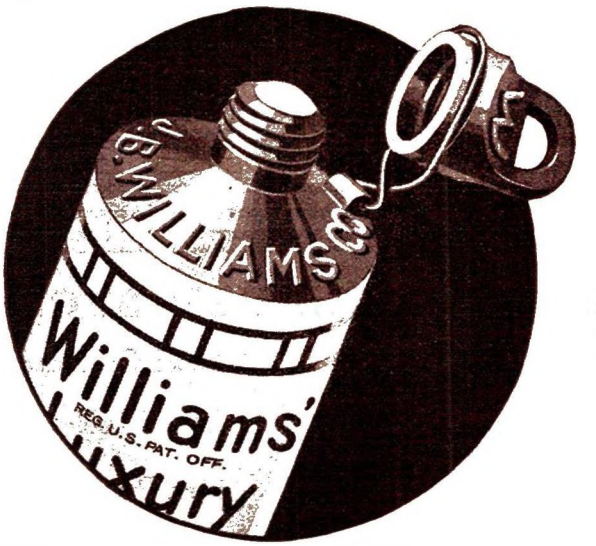
Orders shipped promptly. NO RED TAPE—NO DELAY. Transactions strictly confidential. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money refunded. Guarantee Value Bond with every diamond. FREE: A postal brings you The Sweet Diamond Book containing over 3,000 appropriate Xmas gifts. Easy terms on everything. Send for it TODAY to Dept. 823-S.

"THE HOUSE OF QUALITY"

CAPITAL $1,000,000.

L·W·SWEET INC.

1650-1660 BROADWAY, NEW YORK



Hurrying Fingers Can't Drop *This* Cap

1. The new hinged cap is "on even when it's off." It can't slip from your fingers down the drain pipe or hide under the bath tub.

2. This patented cap is easier to screw on, too. The threads engage perfectly the first time—none of those annoying false starts.

3. There is a ring in the cap. It enables you to hang the tube up out of the way. A screw hook comes in every package.

MORNING minutes are precious. The patented Williams' cap—the only shaving cream with this feature—saves time and patience. The cap is always on—*hinged* on—it can't get lost.

But fine as the cap is, most men would insist on Williams' even if it had a cap that fell off and got lost the way other caps do.

Williams' Shaving Cream will surprise the man who has not used it. White, entirely free from any coloring matter whatsoever, absolutely pure, it bulks into lather that is uncommonly quick, uncommonly thick—*lather*, not just foam.

There's nothing like it for a smooth and easy shave—nothing like it to keep your skin in perfect condition. Williams' contains a certain ingredient that helps keep your skin soothed *while* you shave and glove-smooth *after* you shave.

THE J. B. WILLIAMS COMPANY
Glastonbury, Conn. Montreal, Canada

For men who prefer the stick, Williams' Doublecap (absolutely new) and Williams' Holder Top Stick (the original holder tick) give genuine Williams' in the most convenient stick forms. There are Re-Loads for both.

Williams' Shaving Cream

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLV CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER 17, 1923 NUMBER 6

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

ANOTHER WOMAN'S LIFE

HIS love was not his to bestow—for he was a prince. And she, drawn into a web of intrigue through the willfulness of a girl of a royal house, was bound in honor to a thankless duty. Nevertheless, out of it all came happiness.

Necessarily anonymous is this story of love and duplicity in high places, which

BEGINS NEXT WEEK IN THE ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

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

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1923

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

"How I Became Popular Overnight!"

"They used to avoid me when I asked for a dance. Some said they were tired, others had previous engagements. Even the poorest dancers preferred to sit against the wall rather than dance with me. But I didn't 'wake up' until a partner left me standing alone in the middle of the floor.

"That night I went home feeling pretty lonesome and mighty blue. As a social success I was a first-class failure. Then I saw your advertisement in a well-known magazine. At first I wouldn't believe that you could teach by mail because I always had the idea that one must go to a dancing class to learn. But I figured I could risk 10c—especially since you guaranteed to teach me.

How Dancing Made Me Popular

"Being a good dancer has made me popular and sought after. I am invited everywhere. No more dull evenings—no bitter disappointments! My whole life is brighter and happier. And I owe it all to Arthur Murray!

"I was astonished to see how quickly one learns all the latest steps through your diagrams and simple instructions. I mastered your course in a few evenings and, believe me, I surely did give the folks around here a big surprise when I got on the floor with the best dancer and went through the dance letter perfect. Now that I have the Murray foundation to my dancing I can lead and follow perfectly, and can master any new dance after I have seen a few of the steps.

"My sister's family have all learned to dance from the course I bought from you, and it would do your heart good to see how fine her little kiddies dance together after quickly learning from your new method of teaching dancing at home without music or partner."

Learn Any Dance in a Few Hours

Whether you want to learn the Fox Trot, One Step, Waltz, or any of the new dances, you won't have any trouble in doing it through Arthur Murray's new Method. More than 90,000 people have learned to dance by mail and you can learn just as easily.

Arthur Murray is America's foremost authority on social dancing. Through his new improved method of teaching dancing by mail, he will give you the same high-class instruction in your own home that he would give you if you took private lessons in his studio and paid his regular fee of $10 per lesson.

Posed by Ann Forest, famous movie star, and Arthur Murray, America's foremost dancing instructor.

Five Dancing Lessons Free

So sure is Arthur Murray that you will be delighted with his amazingly simple methods of teaching that he has consented, for a limited time only to send FIVE FREE LESSONS to all who sign and return the coupon.

These five free lessons are yours to keep—you need not return them. They are merely to prove that you can learn to dance without music or partner in your own home.

Write for the five lessons today—they are free. Just enclose 10c (stamps or coin) to pay cost of postage, printing, etc., and the lessons will be sent to you. You will receive: (1) The Secret of Leading. (2) How to Follow Successfully. (3) How to Gain Confidence. (4) A Fascinating Fox Trot step. (5) A Lesson in Waltzing. Don't hesitate. You do not place yourself under any obligation by sending for the free lessons. Write today.

ARTHUR MURRAY
Studio 938, 290 Broadway, New York

Arthur Murray, Studio 938
290 Broadway, New York City

To prove that I can learn to dance at home in one evening you may send the FIVE FREE LESSONS. I enclose 10c (stamps or coin) to pay for the postage, printing, etc.

Name.....

Address.....

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

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 2 per cent cash discount.
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50	

Minimum space four lines.

Dec. 22nd Argosy-Allstory Forms Close Nov. 24th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AGENTS: $60 a week selling guaranteed hosiery for men, women and children. Must wear 12 months or replaced free. All styles and colors, including finest line of silk hose. Mrs. McClure makes over $2000 a year. Mrs. Schurman averages $60 a month working spare time. Geo. Noble made $35 in one day. Write for sample outfit. THOMAS MFG. CO., Class 507, Dayton, Ohio.

Agents—You can earn $30 cash extra every week during your spare time and get your own clothes FREE BESIDES, taking tailoring orders. We are the only house that pays you DOUBLE. No experience necessary. Real cloth samples will be sent free. Write today before you forget. Est. 1896. A. E. STERN, Sales Mgr., 161 W. Harrison St., Department Y-832, Chicago.

DISTRICT SALESMEN WANTED, all or spare time. Earn $1,500 to $5,000 yearly. We train the inexperienced. NOVELTY CUTLERY CO., 77 Bar St., Canton, Ohio.

AGENTS—$15 A DAY—EASY. QUICK SALES—FREE AUTO—BIG WEEKLY BONUS—$1.50 premium Free to every customer. Simply show our Beautiful, 7 piece, Solid Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Appeals instantly. We deliver and collect. Pay daily. NEW ERA MFG. CO., 803 Madison St., Dept. 20-BN, Chicago.

LIVE AGENTS MAKE $10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. D. Seed Filter Company, 73 Franklin, New York.

AGENTS—CLEAN UP $100 WEEKLY WITH "NIFTY NINE", weekly average 100 sales—dollar profit each. 30—40 sales daily frequently made; demonstrating outfit cinches order. 30 other coin-coaxers, all daily necessities. Postal brings our unique plans. DAVIS PRODUCTS COMPANY, Dept. 58, Chicago.

AGENTS. NEW WONDERFUL SELLER. Over 100% profit on every sale of Harper's Ten-use Set. Needed in every home. Washes and dries windows, sweeps, scrubs, mops, etc. Year 'round seller. Write HARPER BRUSH WORKS, 101C St., Fairfield, Iowa.

Agents: C. T. A. prices lower than ever. Suits $18.00 made to order, any size or style. Orders easy to get. Big profits. Agents outfit free. Sample suit at cost. Write CHICAGO TAILORS ASS'N, Dept. 447, Sta. C, Chicago.

AGENTS. Men or women. $240 a month. Steady employment. Take orders for Jennings New Guaranteed Hosiery for men, women, children. Written guarantee with each pair. All styles. Finest silk hose. Low priced. Write for samples. Big money for spare time. Jennings Mfg. Co., Dept. 209, Dayton, O.

$5 TO $15 DAILY EASY introducing New Style Guaranteed Hosiery. Must wear or replaced free. No capital or experience required. Just show samples, write orders. Your pay in advance. We deliver and collect. Elegant outfit furnished. All colors, grades, including silks—wool—heathers. MAC-O-CHEE MILLS CO., Desk 27021, Cincinnati, O.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN to sell your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the 3,000,000 readers of the Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 B'way, N. Y.

HIGH GRADE SALESMEN WANTED

COAL! BUY DIRECT. BANK THE REST. COAL! Everywhere big saving, earn $15 to $25 a day, experience unnecessary, carload quantities. International Fuel Co., 29 Broadway, New York City.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC. ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write LITERARY BUREAU, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

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

AUTOMOBILES

Automobile Owners, garagemen, mechanics, send for free copy America's popular motor magazine. Contains helpful, money-saving articles on repairing, overhauling, ignition, carburetors, batteries, etc. Automobile Digest, 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

START AND OPERATE YOUR OWN BUSINESS. OUR system proprietary specialty manufacturing offers wonderful opportunity to make $100 to $500 weekly. Openings everywhere. Either men or women. We furnish everything and show you how. Big explanatory book, "The Open Door to Fortune" Free. Write for it now. NAT'L SCIENTIFIC LABORATORIES, 204 Monroe, Richmond, Va.

WONDERFUL INVENTION—Eliminates all needles for phonographs. Saves time and annoyance. Preserves records. Lasts for years. 12,000,000 prospects. $15.00 daily. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Desk 1112, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

WANTED. Soap agents to sell our 150 products. No money required. Write LINRO COMPANY, Dept. 225, St. Louis, Mo.

LARGE CORPORATION WANTS a Service Man in every town to paste up its signs on store-keepers windows. Excellent opportunity for reliable party. Steady work. No experience necessary. We also have attractive proposition for agents and salesmen. GUARANTEE SIGN SERVICE, 365 W. Superior St., Chicago.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—$60—$200 A WEEK. Guaranteed Genuine Gold Letters for store windows. Anyone can put them on. Free samples. Liberal offer to general agents. METALLIC LETTER CO., 427A N. Clark St., Chicago.

AGENTS—Make big money taking orders for Insyde Tyres. Positively prevent punctures and blowouts. Double tire mileage, any tire, old or new. Old worn out casings give 3 to 5 thousand miles more service. Use over and over again. Low priced. Big demand. One customer brings four others. Big money saver. Write for terms. AMERICAN ACCESSORIES CO., B-601, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE OFFER. HO-RO-CO, 118 LOCUST, ST. LOUIS, MO.

AGENTS. Make $10 to $20 daily, selling small kitchen necessity. Over 200% profit. Sells rapidly everywhere to nine out of ten women. New plan make sales easy. PREMIER MFG. COMPANY, Dept. 811, Detroit, Mich.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

HOW TO ENTERTAIN

Plays, musical comedies and revues, minstrel music, blackface skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 43, Chicago.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

GOOD FARM LANDS! Near hustling city in lower Mich.; 20, 40, 80 ac. tracts; only $10 to $50 down; bal. long time. Write today for free illustrated booklet. SWIGART LAND CO., Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR $$—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Advice free. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 209 Security Bldg., Santa Monica and Western Ave., Hollywood, California.

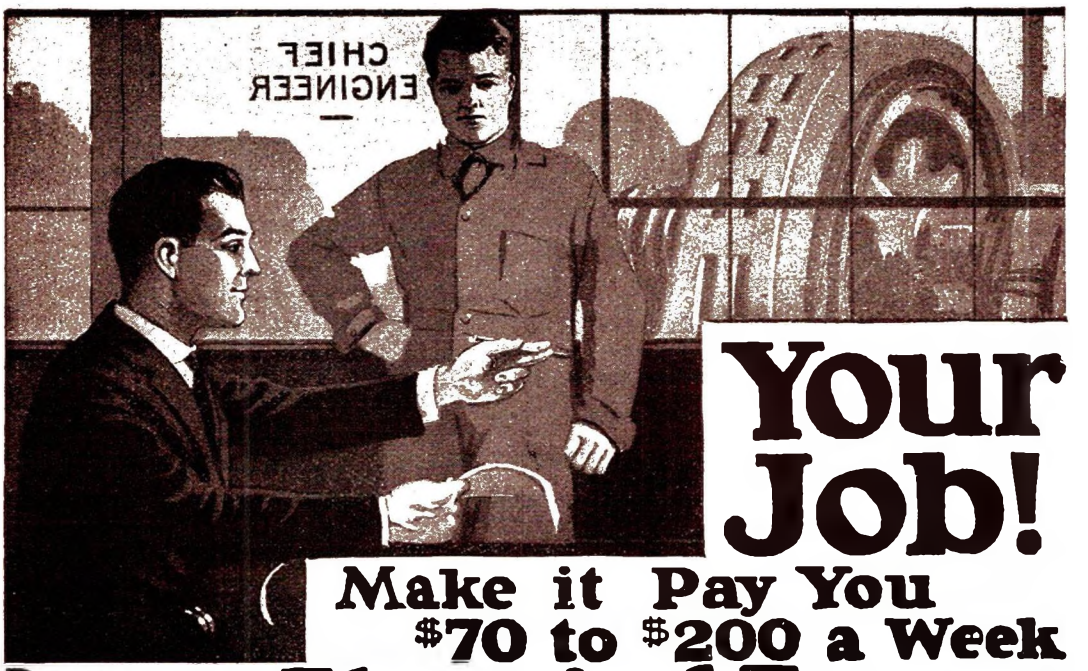
SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 403-F Romax Building, New York.

TRADE SCHOOLS

EARN $10 TO $15 PER DAY. Learn Sign and Pictorial Painting, Showcard Writing, Auto Painting, Decorating, Paperhanging, Graining and Marbling. Catalogue Free. Chicago Painting School, 152 West Austin Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



Your Job!

Make it Pay You $70 to $200 a Week

Be a Certificated Electrical Expert

It's a shame for you to work for small pay when Trained "Electrical Experts" are in great demand at such high salaries, and the opportunities for advancement and a big success in this line are the greatest ever known. "Electrical Experts" earn $70 to $200 a week. Fit yourself for one of these big paying positions.

Learn at Home to Earn $12.00 to $30.00 a Day

Today even the ordinary Electrician—the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the "Electrical Expert"—who is picked out to "boss" ordinary Electricians—to boss Big Jobs—the jobs that pay. You, too, can learn to fill one of these jobs—spare-time only is needed. BE AN "ELECTRICAL EXPERT"—Earn $70 to $200 a week.

Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a Collage Man; you don't have to be a High School graduate. If you can read and write English, my course will make you a big success. It is the most simple, thorough, and successful Electrical Course in existence, and offers every man, regardless of age, education, or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from $70 to $200 a week.

I Give You a Real Training

As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training a man needs to get the best positions at the highest salaries. Hundreds of my students are now earning $3,500 to $10,000 a year. Many are successful ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS.

Your Satisfaction Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you too, can get into the "big money" class in electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition if, when you have finished my course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made.

FREE—Electrical working Outfit, Radio Course and Employment Service

I give each student a splendid Outfit of Electrical Tools, Materials and Measuring Instruments absolutely FREE. You do PRACTICAL work—AT HOME with this Outfit. You start right in after the first few lessons to WORK AT YOUR PROFESSION in a practical way. I also give free a complete Radio course and a special course for men going into business for themselves.

Get Started Now—MAIL COUPON

I want to send you the "Vital Facts" of the Electrical Industry including my Electrical Book, Proof Lessons, and a sample of my guarantee bond all FREE. These cost you nothing and you'll enjoy them. Make the start today for a bright future in Electricity. Send in the coupon—NOW.

L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer

Chicago Engineering Works

Dept. A-178 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Use This "FREE OUTFIT" Coupon

L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer
Chicago Engineering Works. Dept. A-178
2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir:—Send at once the "Vital Facts" containing Sample Lessons, your Big Book, and full particulars of your Free Outfit and Home Study Course—all fully prepaid, without obligation on my part.

Name.....

Address.....

City and State.....

Occupation..... Age.....

The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T, payment after securing position. C. J. O., 1710 Market St., Philadelphia.

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply work. WILSON METHODS, LTD., Dept. 50-L, Toronto, Canada.

BE A DETECTIVE—Earn Big Money. Great demand everywhere. Travel. Fascinating work. Make secret investigations. Experience unnecessary. Write, GEORGE A. WAGNER, former Government Detective, 1968 Broadway, N. Y.

HELP WANTED—MALE

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY; good pay; travel. Write C. T. LUDWIG, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

EARN $110 TO $250 MONTHLY, expenses paid as Railway Traffic Inspector. Position guaranteed after completion of 3 months' home study course or money refunded. Excellent opportunities. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

All men, women, boys, girls, 17 to 65, willing to accept Government Positions, $117—$250, traveling or stationary. Write Mr. OZMENT, 198, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

EARN MONEY AT HOME during spare time painting lamp shades, pillow tops for us. No canvassing. Easy and interesting work. Experience unnecessary. NILEART COMPANY, 2235, Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

LADIES EARN $6—$18 A DOZEN decorating Pillow Tops at Home; Experience unnecessary; particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 128, LaGrange, Ind.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND OPINION AS TO PATENTABILITY. WATSON E. COLEMAN, 624 F ST., WASHINGTON, D. C.

PATENTS. Write for FREE Guide Books, List of Patent Buyers and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description for our free opinion of its patentable nature. Reasonable terms. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

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

PATENTS PROCURED; TRADE MARKS REGISTERED—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. RICHARD B. OWEN, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 2278-J Woolworth Bldg., New York.

PATENTS AND INVENTIONS

INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED on cash or royalty basis. Patented or unpatented. In business 24 years. Complete facilities. References. Write ADAM FISHER MFG. CO., 249, St. Louis, Mo.

"Wouldn't you like to earn $100 a week, too?"

"I KNOW you would, Bob—think what it would mean to both of us! It worries me to see you wasting precious months and years when you could make them count for so much.

"Can't you see it, Bob? Don't you see that the reason men get ahead is because they train themselves to do some one thing just a little better than others?

"It isn't that you haven't natural ability—for you have! I know you have. The trouble is, you've never learned how to use it.

"Here's that I. C. S. coupon you've seen so often in the magazines—the same coupon that has brought success and happiness to so many men we know. Won't you send it in for me, Bob?

"If the International Correspondence Schools can raise the salaries of other men, they can raise yours. If they can help other men to win advancement and more money, they can help you, too. I am sure of it.

"Don't let another year slip by and leave you right where you are to-day.

"Let's at least find out how the I. C. S. can help you. Let's send this coupon in right now!"

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2220-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Personnel Organization
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Banking and Banking Law
- ☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Spanish ☐ French
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Better Letters
- ☐ Show Card Lettering
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineer
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ Civil Engineer
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Metallurgy
- ☐ Steam Engineering
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Architect
- ☐ Blue Print Reading
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Automobile Work
- ☐ Airplane Engines
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Agriculture and Poultry
- ☐ Mathematics

Name .....

Street Address .....

8-3-23

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

Occupation .....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Latest Jacquette Style—

SILK Embroidered

PLEATED Serge Dress

Trimmed With EGYPTIAN PAISLEY

Greatest Bargain of the Year
$15 Value

Money Back Guaranteed

$3.79 C.O.D.

Lowest price ever made for such style and quality. **See this dress—try it on.** Sent on approval. You take no risk. Money back guaranteed. The very newest, most charming style for Fall and Winter. Copied for us exclusively from latest Paris Creation. All the rage in style centers this season. Hurry your order! Don't miss this sensational bargain.

Send No Money

Fashioned from fine quality and double warp, Longwear blue serge to grace any figure. Rich all-over embroidered Jacquette. Egyptian Paisley Silk finish Satin Vestee. New wide flare sleeves. Full cut skirt with pleats, loose hanging streamers with bows of soft Egyptian Paisley on two sides, giving panel effect—the select style of Fashionable women. A dress that you'll be proud to wear. Just Send Name, address and size. No Money Now. On arrival pay postman $3.79 and postage. Try it on in your home—then if you are not delighted, we will gladly refund every cent of your money. Be sure to state size. ORDER NOW SIZES—Misses 14, 16, 18, 20. Women's 34 to 46 Bust.

© 1923 R. M. O. H.

Color Navy Blue

REMINGTON MAIL ORDER HOUSE
Dept. A-6611 6646 S. Halsted St., Chicago

$5.75

HIGH GRADE UNION MADE RAINCOATS AT THIS SMASHING PRICE

Outfits FREE

Write or wire for our $25.00 daily selling plan. Your success is guaranteed. We deliver and collect.

Our Manufacturing Capacity 7,500 Coats Per Week

EASTERN RAINCOAT COMPANY
Manufacturer
913 W. Roosevelt Road, Dept. E, Chicago, Ill.

YOU SHOULD READ—

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

192 Pages of the Finest Fiction
Available at any price.

On sale at all news-stands. 25c a copy.

"I WANT YOU"

-Uncle Sam

Courtesy of Leslie's Copyrighted.

$1200 to $2600 Year

MEN, WOMEN, 18 up
U. S. Government Jobs

Common education sufficient. Send coupon immediately.

STEADY WORK

MAIL COUPON
Franklin Institute
Dept. D269, Rochester, N. Y.

This coupon, filled out as directed, entitles the sender to (1) free specimen examination questions; (2) a free copy of our book, "Government Positions and How to Get Them"; (3) free list of positions now obtainable.

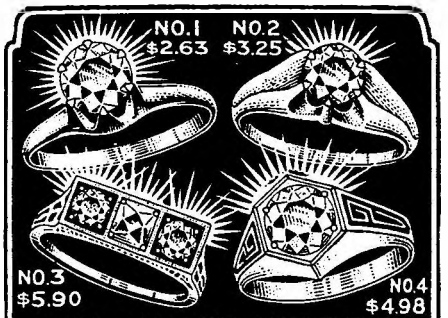
COUPON

.....Railway Postal Clerk	($1600 to $2300)	.....City Mail Carrier	($1400 to $1800)
.....Bookkeeper	($1400 to $1800)	.....Rural Mail Carrier	($1800 to $2600)
.....Post Office Clerk	($1400 to $1800)	.....Customs Positions	($1100 to $2000)

Name.....

Address.....D269

Use it before you lose it. Write plainly.



OUR MARVELOUS MEXICAN DIAMONDS

have delighted thousands of customers for 18 years. They positively **match genuine diamonds.** Same **perfect cut,** same **dazzling play of rainbow fire.** Stand intense acid test of side **by side comparison with genuine. Noted experts** positively need their experience to detect **any difference whatever.** Perhaps the gems you admire on your closest friends are **MEXICAN DIAMONDS** and you never knew it. **Test a MEXICAN DIAMOND FREE: you risk nothing.** Wear it seven days **side by side with a genuine diamond.** If you **see any difference, send it back; it won't cost you a cent.**

HALF PRICE TO INTRODUCE

To introduce to new customers, we quote these prices which are **all you pay** and just **half our catalog prices.**

No. 1—Ladies 1 ct. Solitaire, fine 14k gold f $2.63
No. 2—Gents Heavy Tooth Belcher, 1 ct. gem, 14k gold f 3.25
No. 3—Ladies 3 stone Duchess ring, fine platino finish, two 6/8 ct. first water Mex. diamonds, one blue sapphire 5.90
No. 4—Gents Ex. Heavy Gypsy ring, platino finish, black inlay on sides; 1 7/8 ct. first water Mex. Diamond 4.98

SEND NO MONEY Just send name, address and slip of paper that meets around ring finger to show size. Say which ring you want. We ship promptly. On arrival, deposit price with postman. If you decide not to keep it, return in 7 days and **we'll refund your money. Write TODAY.** Agents wanted.

MEXICAN DIAMOND IMPORTING CO.
Dept. SS LAS CRUCES, N. MEX.
Exclusive Controllers of Mexican Diamonds for 18 years.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLV SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1923 NUMBER 6

Annihilation

By ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "McCarty, Incog," "Dust to Dust," etc.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE RAIN.

A SEVEN FIFTY derby, new only that afternoon and destined already to be reblocked! Ex-roundsman Timothy McCarty, whose complete transition to civilian attire was still of such recent years as to be a source of secret satisfaction to himself and of despair to his tailor and haberdasher, shrugged his broad shoulders beneath the nobby fall topcoat and trudged sturdily along in the teeming downpour. A walk he had come out for, to clear his head of all that psycho junk he'd been reading, and a walk he would have, but he could think of a place the devil could take this rain to, where it would be better appreciated!

The overflow from the brim of the bemourned headgear dripped down upon a sodden wisp of tobacco depending dejectedly from beneath his square clipped, sandy mustache, and muddy streams spurted up almost to his knees with every step. It was a mean district, a neighborhood of broken, narrow sidewalks, dilapidated tenements and squalid wooden shacks which became more squalid as McCarty neared the river, although here great warehouses loomed against the lesser darkness of the night sky.

It was barely nine o'clock, but scarcely a

light showed except from the irregularly spaced street lamps. Their blurred glimmer emphasized rather than dispelled the murky gloom, yet McCarty strode on with the unconcern of one treading a once familiar precinct.

He was not the only pedestrian abroad in the late September storm, for under the glow of a lamp ahead he presently descried a dark figure proceeding also in the direction of the water front, and insensibly he quickened his own steps. It was not the desire for company which impelled him to draw nearer to the figure ahead, but a certain peculiarity in the latter's gait which aroused that latent, alert instinct, more than mere curiosity, that had served him so well in the old days on the force.

The man was lurching along at an unsteady pace, breaking into a shambling trot for a few steps, then pulling up short, only to dive forward once more, reeling through the driving sheets of rain. The ex-roundsman had rapidly decreased the distance between them and would have overtaken him under the next lamp ahead when a tall, burly bluecoat stepped suddenly from the shelter of a dark doorway and barred his progress.

"None of that, my lad! For what are you following that feller there? Glory be, it's Mac!"

"True for you, Terry!" McCarty responded as their hands met in a mighty grip. "A fine, conscientious bull you are, I'll say that for you, pinching the old hasbeen that got you on the force just because he's taking a bit of a stroll on a grand night like this!"

Officer Terence Keenan grinned sheepishly in the darkness.

"It's a grand night, all right—for ducks!" he amended. "You're no hasbeen, Mac, from what the boys tell me of the different cases you've taken a hand in on the quiet since you resigned from the department, but you needn't give me the laugh for looking you over just now! You know this neighborhood as well as me, and when I see a guy trailing a prosperous looking drunk toward the river front and the wharves it's up to me—"

"'Drunk,' is it?" McCarty demanded in fine scorn. Then he checked himself and added with a sweeping gesture toward the greenish glow from twin lights across the street: "I was minded to take a stroll through my own old beat and drop in at the house over there for a word or two with you and the lieutenant at the desk when I saw the guy ahead—but where is he? He couldn't have got in one of the warehouses at this time of the evening and there's nothing else between here and the corner."

"Aw, let him go!" Officer Keenan interrupted good-naturedly. "Honest, Mac, I ain't got the heart to run them in these days, when the stuff is so hard to get—"

But McCarty was not listening. Forgotten alike were the bedraggled derby and the affluent private life of which it had so lately been sign and symbol; he was back on his old beat with something doing, and he grabbed his brother officer by the arm.

"What's that there beyond the lamppost, half in and half out of the gutter? It's him, Terry, he's down. Come on!"

Terry needed no second bidding now and they dashed off together, splashing through puddles and over the loose, tilting fragments of sidewalk to where the man lay. He had pitched forward, his face hanging over the curb's edge down into the filthy, swirling gutter, and the back of his head showed a small, gleaming bald spot in the misty rays from the lamp.

"There's some heft to him!" Terry grunted. "Now I'll have to run him in for safekeeping. What's that he's jabbering, Mac?"

Between them they had turned the prostrate man, who was breathing stertorously and muttering to himself in broken gasps, and the young policeman's flashlight revealed a heavy, smooth-shaven face, distorted and pasty gray beneath the rivulets of muddy water that coursed down it, with small, close-set eyes darting about in a wild, distended gaze.

McCarty bent lower in the effort to distinguish the hoarse accents, and his companion commented disgustedly:

"He's worse than I thought he was! Look at the rolling eyes of him! It 'll be Bellevue, I'm thinking—"

"Hush!" McCarty commanded in a low, tense tone as he lifted the man's heavy head higher on his knee. The stertorous breathing had become mere heaving gasps now and all at once with a rumbling snort they ceased altogether, the flabby jaw sagging as the lids drooped.

"Not Bellevue, Terry: the morgue, more likely." McCarty spoke solemnly. "He's gone."

"Croaked!" Terry started up. "It sure looks like it! I'll run across to the house and tip off the lieut and put in the ambulance call. You'll wait here?"

Without pause for a reply he turned and splashed heavily but with surprising speed across the street to the station house, while McCarty looked down at the figure still propped against his knee. Its outlines were indistinct now that only the light from the street lamp remained, but it appeared to be muffled to the neck in a loose, dark ulster of some thin material which clung to a form that was portly though not actually stout. The upturned face, washed clean of the mud from the gutter by the rain beating down upon it, showed like a grayish blur, its hideous distortion of feature relaxed, leaving it a mere flaccid mass. Some involuntary movement of the supporting knee caused the head to slump forward on the dead man's breast and once more that small, round bald spot gleamed whitely from the scant, dark hair surrounding it.

"Mike Taggart—he's lieutenant now, as you may know—says it 'll be all right to bring the body over there without waiting out on such a night for the ambulance." Terry had waded back through the reeking mire. "He'd be glad of a word with you, too, Mac, so will you give me a hand with the old boy here? It's only a step."

With a slight shrug and a smile that was lost upon his companion McCarty assumed his share of their limp burden, and together they bore it across the street and in at the door of the station house. He blinked in the sudden glare of light as the sodden figure was deposited on the floor and then turned to greet the homely, spruce young giant who had come forward from behind the desk.

"So it's Lieutenant Taggart now, that was a rookie when I left the force!" he exclaimed with a laugh. "I'd thought to drop in on you one of these days, but not as part of the escort for our friend here!"

He motioned over his shoulder toward the body and the lieutenant shook hands with obvious respect before advancing to examine it.

"Glad to see you, McCarty, though you do come in strange company!" He smiled and then turned to Officer Keenan who had knelt and was running his hands over the inanimate form in a practiced manner. "Humph! Looks like a pretty prosperous sort of a bird to be hanging around the water front on a night like this, don't he? What do you find on him, Terry? I don't believe I ever saw that face in this precinct before."

As the policeman turned over to his superior the contents of the dead man's pockets McCarty stood gazing thoughtfully down upon him. He was apparently in the late forties and in life the beefy, extremely close-shaven face might have been florid; the nose was short but highly arched, and the lids which had opened now revealed the small, pale eyes set in a dull, glazing stare. His raincoat of superlative texture and make had been opened to admit of Terry's search and disclosed a dark brown sack suit and tie of the same grade of conservative excellence as the outer garment, but the low brown shoes that covered the large, rather flat feet were as incongruously inferior as they were blatantly new. The man's hands were outstretched limply, palms upward with the thick though well-kept fingers curling slightly. McCarty's keen eyes narrowed a little as they rested on them. Then he turned.

"Lieutenant, I think I saw his hat go sailing off down the gutter as we carried him across. Shall I get it while you and my friend Terry, here, go over his effects?"

"Wish you would, McCarty." The lieutenant glanced up absently from the desk where he and Keenan were sorting out a collection of small articles. "You must take a flash at these when you come back."

McCarty nodded and departed upon his self-elected errand, appropriating the flashlight which the policeman had laid on a

chair. He proceeded to the opposite side of the street, and measuring off with his eye the distance from the lamp-post to where the fallen man's head had rested over the curb, he followed the racing gutter for several yards down past the farther warehouse to where the turbid flow was separated by a pile of refuse. There, impaled on a barrel stave he found the sodden, shapeless brown mass that had once been a soft felt hat and retrieving it, he carefully examined the inner side of the crown with the aid of the flashlight. The gilt lettering denoting the maker on the sweatband was so soaked as to be illegible, but two initials showed plainly in the tiny, gleaming ray: "B. P."

With his trophy McCarty returned to the station house to find Keenan and his superior with their heads together over a key-ring.

"There's the hat, or what's left of it." He deposited the drenched, pulpy article beside the body on the floor as he spoke. "Terry, here, was watching the guy pass him and he says he was hooched up for fair, so likely there'll be nothing further come of this after his folks haul him away from the morgue, but if I'm wanted to swear that 'twas bootleg lightning and not the regular kind hit him, Inspector Druet or any of the old crowd at headquarters will know where to find me. I'll be getting on home, for I'm soaked to the skin—"

"Take a look at these first, McCarty." The lieutenant invited. "Hooch or no hooch, I'm going to find out what this bird was doing in my precinct. If that jewelry's phoney it don't go with the rest of his outfit and if it's real, what was he doing down this way with it on? Don't make any crack about his relying on us to protect him, for you walked your beat here yourself in the old days and the district hasn't changed much! What do you make of it?"

McCarty turned over the articles presented for his inspection with a carelessly critical air.

"Handkerchief, kid gloves, Wareham gold filled watch, pigskin cigar case with two broken cigars in it, sixty—seventy dollars and eighty cents in change," McCarty enumerated rapidly. "Nothing here marked and no letters nor papers, eh? That scarf pin and those cuff buttons, fakes or not, are what they call cat's-eyes, I'm thinking. Is that all except the key-ring?"

"It is, but if this bird purposely intended to leave everything off that would give him away to whoever he was going to meet he slipped up! Look at here!" Lieutenant Taggart spoke with an air of triumph as he separated the keys of all shapes and sizes on the ring to disclose a small, thin, much-worn disk of some dull metal, one side of which bore the single numeral "4," and the reverse three letters in old English script: "N. Q. M."

McCarty's stubby mustache moved slightly as his lips tightened, but he shook his head.

"What is it?" he asked in bland wonderment. "I'd say it looked like one of those identification tags in case he lost his keys, but if 'N. Q. M.' are his initials, what is the '4'?"

The young lieutenant regarded him almost pityingly.

"It was not meant for an identification tag exactly, McCarty; at least, not for any stranger that might happen to pick up these keys, but it 'll tell me more than just who this bird is and where he lived before I'm through!"

"I hope so, lad!" But McCarty still shook his head. "Happen, though, when the body is claimed you'll find he was Neil Quinn Malone, walking delegate for Stevedores' Union Number Four, and down here late for a date because of meeting up with some bootlegger's first cousins!"

"There's the ambulance!" Terry spoke suddenly as a bell clanged up the street. His honest face had reddened and his tone was a mixture of forbearance and chagrin.

"Well, I'll take the air, boys—and the rain!" McCarty sternly repressed the twinkle in his eyes. "I'm chilled to the marrow of me, which does no good to the touch of rheumatism I've had lately, and I need no young sawbones in a white coat to tell me that guy is dead, even though there's never a mark on him! Good luck to the two of you!"

They responded with forced cordiality and he made his way out into the storm, bend-

ing his head before the pelting downpour and chuckling as he turned the coat collar up about his strong, muscular throat. The good lads back there would think that a few years of soft living had done for old Mac, and he was through!

Yet he was not chuckling when he turned into a dingy little lunchroom a few blocks away and in the look which he bent upon his coffee cup, there was more of uneasy indecision than its steaming but doubtful contents warranted. He *was* through, though not in the way Terry and Taggart might be thinking. Never again would he horn in on a case that belonged to the department he had quitted! The methods had changed too much since his day, when a plainclothes bull went out and got his man or was hauled up on the carpet to explain why not; it was bad enough when headquarters began to be cluttered up with all that scientific crime detecting junk from the foreign police centers, but now they were opening up a school to teach this black art called "criminal psychoanalysis" to a bunch of fine lads in the detective bureau who needed nothing but the quick minds and strong arms that the Lord had given them already! It was his own secret and shamefaced perusal of what books he had been able to gather, surreptitiously and unadvised, upon this same subject which had driven him forth with a case of mental blind staggers earlier that very evening, and now let them psychoanalyze that man who carried the queer tag on his key-ring! And yet—

It was a rare case! McCarty's eyes glistened and his nostrils fairly quivered with the old eagerness as he considered its possibilities. His coffee cooled and he finished it at a gulp, and then took the nearest subway that led to his modest rooms over the antique shop where he maintained a solitary bachelor establishment in great disorder and content.

He had expected to find it empty as usual, but to his surprise he noted that a low light glowed from behind the shades at his two front windows. On opening the entrance door with his latchkey he was greeted by a particularly malodorous stench wafted down the narrow stairway on wreaths of smoke from the floor above. There wasn't another pipe in the world that smelled quite like that one, and as he bounded upward he called:

"Denny! If I hadn't thought you were on duty at the engine house—"

No reply came to him, however, and he rounded the stairs' head and then paused on the threshold of his shabby, comfortable living room in wordless amazement. Dennis Riordan, engine driver from the nearest fire house and his particular crony since they had landed from the old country, was for the first time totally oblivious to his presence. He sprawled in the low Morris chair with a book in his hand, and his long legs writhed while his leathery, lantern-jawed face was contorted in the agony of mental concentration.

"Denny! Snap out of it!" his unheeded host commanded. "What in the name of all that's—"

Denny "snapped." He dropped the book and sat up with a jerk.

"So you're back," he remarked dazedly. "'Tis small wonder I've seen little of you these days since you've taken to literature! Newspapers have been your limit up till now, but here I use the latchkey you gave me, thinking to get in out of the rain whilst I'm waiting for you and I find these books. Man, they're fair wonderful! But what do they mean?"

"I don't know yet and I misdoubt the guys who wrote them do!" McCarty's tone was almost savage as he deposited his dripping hat tenderly on the corner of the mantel and peeled off the sodden topcoat. "Which one had you there?"

"'The Diagnostics of Penology.'" Denny picked up the volume once more and read the title laboriously. "I thought a 'diagnostic' was an unbeliever and you'd taken to religion in your declining years, but 'tis all about the different kinds of criminals. I never knew there was but one—a crook!"

"No more did I." McCarty lighted a cigar reflectively. "There must be something in it, though, for that's the stuff the commissioner is going to get through the heads of the boys at headquarters in this new school of his."

"Is it, now?" Dennis's tone held a touch of awe. "Do you mean that all they'll have to do when a crime's committed will be to sit down and figure out whether the lad who pulled it off was a lunatic, maybe, or 'twas born in him, or a matter of habit or the only time he'd tried it, or else that he'd been brought up to it? And what would the crook be doing meanwhile? He'd still have to be caught."

"It would all help, even though we don't get the hang of it, or the commissioner would not be trying it on the boys," declared McCarty loyally. "Some of them that have not yet been promoted to headquarters would not be hurt by anything that would teach them to use their heads now and then, I'm thinking!"

There was that in his voice which made his companion straighten in his chair, the mild gray eyes sparkling with eager interest.

"Who's been blundering now?" he demanded. "I ought to have known you would not be trailing around in the storm till near ten o'clock for the sake of your health! What is it, Mac? For the love of God, are you on another case?"

"I am not!" responded McCarty with dignity. "I'm a real estate owner, as well you know, with no connection with the police department any more, and if an exhausted man in mortal terror or agony drops dead in his tracks and they ship him to the morgue as an acute alcoholic it's nothing to me!"

Dennis emptied the contents of his pipe into the tray and rose.

"Where do we start from?" he asked excitedly. "Thanks be, I've the next twenty-four hours off duty! Do we have a talk with his folks first or what?"

"First and last, we mind our own business this time!" McCarty waved toward the chair. "Sit down again and light up, Denny, and I'll give you the dope on it, though there's little enough according to Terry Keenan and Mike Taggart—"

"'Terry Keenan and Mike—'" Dennis obeyed tensely. "That 'll be down in the old precinct, then, along the water front! Who was the guy and what was he running from when he dropped?"

McCarty gave an account of the evening's occurrence concisely, yet omitting no significant detail, and when he had finished his visitor sat silent for a moment, turning the story over in his none too quick mind. Then he remarked:

"I don't get it at all, Mac. A prosperous, middle-aged, respectable looking fellow by what you say, with never a scrap of paper on him to show who he was, only that bit of a metal tag! He must have been running from somebody! Did you look behind you?"

"I did not, and neither did he." McCarty paused. "Mind you that, Denny! I didn't say he was trying to get away from anybody. The way he was running and stopping and then reeling along once more showed that if he was not half crazed with pain, 'twas only will power kept him going as far as he got. When Terry and I rushed to him after he fell and turned him over, the gray look of his face came from more than his slowing heart and it was sheer horror that stared out of his eyes. He was conscious, too, though the end came in less than a minute, and muttering with his last breath."

"Do you think he might have been going some place down among the wharves at that hour, and running till his heart burst to get there on time?" Dennis's pipe had gone out in his excitement and he laid it on the tray with a tremulous hand. "Was it blackmail? Did he think whoever was waiting would kill him if he didn't show up? Mac, what manner of man was he? Fine quality clothes and cheap shoes, elegant jewelry and a gold filled watch that could be bought on the installment plan. The cigar case was real pigskin, you tell me, but—what kind of cigars was in it?"

"Denny, you've rung the bell again, even though you don't know it!" McCarty gazed for a moment in affectionate but unflattering surprise at his old friend. "The cigars were Coronas, and there's no better nor more costly made. For all the clothes were of grand quality, they didn't fit him; they'd been carefully altered, but they'd been made in the beginning for a taller and thinner man—and they'd had good wear. Only the cheap shoes were new, and though the links and pin were as refined

and rich looking as any gentleman would sport they were fakes, even if I wouldn't give Taggart the satisfaction of telling him so. He'd too close a shave, remember, and his hands showed no signs of hard work; don't you make anything at all out of it?"

"He could wear the clothes, though not the shoes, of another man—smoke his cigars, copy his jewelry, keep his own hands soft— No, there's no sense to it, whatever." Dennis shook his head slowly. "You've something up your sleeve, but what makes you figure so much on the close shave of him? Why was that number 'four' on the other side of the tag with his initials on the key-ring? Did you look to see if the same letters was in his hat?"

"It had dropped down into the gutter when he fell." McCarty had refrained from mentioning for the time being his errand from the station house for the missing headgear. "Did I say that 'N. Q. M.' were the dead man's initials? I fitted a made-up name to them in joke when Taggart was so sure about it, but it might be an address as well. You've known this town as long and as well as me, Denny; did you ever hear of the New Queen's Mall?"

"Holy saints!" Denny started forward, gripping the arms of his chair. "You don't mean that one block running through from the park to the next avenue, with gates shutting it in at both ends as though the families living in the houses on the two sides of the street was too good to mix with the rest of the world? It's right in the heart of the millionaires' part of town, with the swellest society all around, and 'twas named after some grand place in London, wasn't it?"

McCarty nodded.

"The Queen's Mall. The Burminsters came from there and they owned most of the property on both sides of this block here. The great corner mansion on the north side nearest the park is where they live, and they moved heaven and earth to close in the street with gates, the families in the other houses liking the idea fine. The newspapers put up a holler about the street being a public thoroughfare and the whole business being contrary to democracy, but that little bunch of stuck-up millionaires had their way. That was long before ever you and me came to this country, Denny, but the inspector told me about it, and it's brought up even now when there's occasion for it at some election time or other—"

"Number Four, New Queen's Mall!" Dennis interrupted witheringly as he emptied and pocketed his cold pipe and rose with a glance at the clock. "'Tis twenty minutes to eleven, and you sit there giving me a history of New York! What are we waiting for?"

CHAPTER II.

NUMBER FOUR.

AT the corner the two self-appointed investigators found a taxi, and Dennis, for once taking the lead, insisted upon engaging it. McCarty had protested loudly, but half heartedly to this excursion. The recounting of the strange event at the water front had aroused all the sternly repressed longing to be back in the game once more, and although bitterly resentful of the new order of things at headquarters since his day the fascination of the mystery itself had gripped him with irresistible force. Not for worlds would he have admitted it to his companion, however, and as they rattled eastward through the park he grumbled:

"You must have taken leave of your senses entirely, Denny, and I'm no better, letting you drag me out again on a night like this to gawk through barred gates at a row of rich men's houses! I've one satisfaction, though; 'twas you and not me, as you'll kindly remember, that hired this robber taxi!"

Dennis grinned to himself in the darkness.

"You're welcome to the ride, Mac." Then his tone lowered seriously. "I've been thinking this thing over, and I must have been wrong on that blackmail notion; that the fellow was on the way to pay any, I mean, if he had only a matter of seventy dollars on him. I'm surprised at you, though, and even at Terry and Mike Taggart, that not one of the three of you thought to go back across and get the hat;

it could not have sailed far, in spite of the hill there and the gutters running over. 'Tis not like you—"

"Damn the hat!" McCarty interrupted irascibly. "'Tis the man himself I'm thinking of; now, if the cold, muddy rain water in the gutter had anything to do with it—"

He mumbled and lapsed into silence and after a discreet interval his companion observed in an aggrieved tone:

"Through more than muddy rain water have I followed you on many a case you've dragged me into, but if the grand education you've been getting lately from those books has made you talk in riddles, you can keep the answers to yourself for all of me! By the same token, if that fellow was not running away from anybody or hurrying to meet them, but was just chasing along like that through the storm, staggering and stopping and leaping forward again, he must have been out of his head entirely and the asylum would have got him if the morgue hadn't!"

"True for you, Denny; that's what was in my mind just now," McCarty replied with a quick, contrite return to his habitual geniality. "Not about him being a lunatic, maybe, but delirious from sickness and suffering. When he fell, with his head hanging over the gutter and the cold water rushing over his face I was thinking it brought back his consciousness for that minute there at the end. You could see by the look in his eyes and the way he fought for breath that there was something he was trying his best to tell, something that filled him with more horror than the fear of death itself!"

"'Tis a lot to see in a man's eyes," Dennis remarked in unusual skepticism. "Maybe he'd no notion of dying; he seems to have been a pretty healthy looking fellow from what you tell me. If those books are getting you to read meanings in people's faces that are not there you'd best be sticking to the newspapers."

"'Tis small meaning anybody could read in yours, my lad!" the indignant student retorted. "Here we are, and the gates are shut, just as I told you. What's the next move? You started this, Denny, and it's up to you!"

But it proved to be up to neither of them, for as McCarty descended from the taxi before the great gates of wrought iron which spanned the side street a tall figure emerged from the deeper shadows and a well known voice exclaimed in accents of satisfaction not untinged with amusement:

"There you are, Mac! I've been waiting for you."

"Inspector!" McCarty gasped, gaping at his former superior. "How in the world did you know—"

Inspector Druet laughed.

"How did I know you'd be on the scent with the trail fresh and the wind your way? Good evening, Riordan; it's like old times to find you following Mac's lead again."

"'Tis Denny that's leading this night," averred McCarty with a chuckle as Dennis turned to pay and dismiss the taxi driver. "In spite of the rain and all he was possessed to come and have a look around here when I told him about the drunk that fell dead across the street from the station house down by the water front!"

"The 'drunk,' eh?" Inspector Druet tapped a leather case which he carried. "I have the man's hat here which you found in the gutter, and I needn't ask if you saw the initials inside, though you said nothing to the boys at the house. When I found out you'd been on the scene, and got a line from them on the way you'd collected all the dope on the case and then quietly faded away with a pathetic reference to rheumatism, I knew you would be on the job.

"Then your phone didn't answer a little while ago and I was morally certain you had read that identification tag correctly and were on your way here, so I waited. It looks as though this was going to be bigger than it appeared at first."

They had drawn under the comparative shelter of an overhanging cornice on the south sidewalk just outside the towering grille work of the gate fence, and Dennis, who had turned to gaze reproachfully at McCarty when the hat was mentioned, asked with lively interest:

"Do you mean, inspector, that the fellow didn't just drop dead by accident? What was the initials? Who was he?"

"The initials are 'B. P.'" The inspector spoke with added impressiveness. "I have a list of all the householders on this block; there are only a few, for you can see by the street lamps that each place is several times the size of an ordinary city lot. The owner of Number Seven is Benjamin Parsons, and if this is his hat—"

"But the tag on the key-ring said Number Four," Dennis observed doubtfully as the inspector paused. "Somebody named B. P. might live there, too, sir."

"Number Four is occupied by a bachelor alone, a Mr. Henry Orbit." The inspector shook his head. "I don't know how the keys of his house came to be in Parsons's pocket, but that's a detail. Here's the private watchman now; come on."

He moved out toward the gateway in the middle of the street, but McCarty laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"Just one minute, inspector. Well, I know I've nothing to do with this case, if there is a case in it at all, but 'tis easier to change hats than houses, and if you stop by first at Number Four, and—and let me do the talking to whoever opens the door—"

He hesitated, and Inspector Druet flashed him a keen glance.

"What is it, Mac?" he demanded quickly. "Have you seen more than I have in this?"

"I've seen the corpse, sir," McCarty returned evasively.

Along the inclosed street the solitary figure of the private watchman was advancing with quickened step and when he had reached the other side of the gate the inspector spoke to him in a low but authoritative tone. The watchman uttered a startled exclamation and a brief colloquy ensued during which McCarty and Dennis gazed up the wide vista of the street beyond the high iron bars. In the glow of the quaint, antique lanterns which lighted it in lieu of the ordinary city lamps the smooth pavement glistened like a sheet of glass under the dancing rain drops and the half a dozen houses on either side, built of gleaming marble or the darker brownstone of an older period looked like miniature palaces, with their vaguely outlined turrets and towers and overhanging balconies. Straight ahead another gate loomed and behind it the inky mass of foliage of the great park across the avenue, untouched as yet by the season's first frost.

"'Tis like a picture book scene even in the night!" Dennis remarked in an awed tone, and then he shook his head. "But it's too restricted, entirely. For all its grandeur, the folks living in there will be having no more chance of keeping their private affairs one from the other than if 'twas a row of workmen's cottages out in the factory suburbs. 'Tis small mystery could last for long inside these gates!"

"I'd rather be outside them and free, than cooped up in there for all the millions these families have," acquiesced McCarty. "The watchman's opening up, though, and the inspector is beckoning. Will he be letting me have my way, I wonder?"

The great gates swung inward and the three passed in, the inspector leading and turning to the south sidewalk which was bordered by the houses bearing even numbers.

"Of course I know the servants belonging to every household on the block," the gray-haired watchman was saying in a slightly lofty tone. "Mr. Orbit has none with the initials you mention, inspector, and no house guests at present or I should have been notified. It's my business, and the day man's, to know everybody who comes and goes through the gates."

"You see, Mac"—Dennis nudged his companion—"'tis worse than a jail!"

But McCarty paid no heed. He was eying the house fronts as they passed with a gaze of critical absorption. He gave quick glances at the occasional lighted windows of those across the way, but these were all discreetly curtained, and the first two houses on the south side were utterly dark. The third—Number Six—was a rococo affair of some pinkish stone bristling with tiny pointed turrets and unexpected balconies and a brilliant light shone from the upper floors, but the next house—Number Four—although as comparatively small as its ornate neighbor, in contrast to the huge, older mansions across the street, yet gave an impression of size in its pure, stately,

straight lines of snowy marble broken only by the windows with dark, graceful vines trailing from the boxes on each sill.

It appeared to be semidetached from the farther house by a conservatory of some sort. But there was no time to explore further, for the watchman had halted and Inspector Druet mounted the wide, shallow steps and rang the bell. McCarty followed with Dennis at his heels, and as they paused, the soft but deeply resonant tones of an organ came to their ears from behind the windows to their right, from which emanated a subdued glow of light.

From the far end of the street behind them a faint but echoing gong sounded, and with an exclamation of annoyance the watchman hurried off to open the gate on the park side for the entrance of a motor car. He had scarcely passed beyond earshot when the inspector whispered to McCarty:

"What's the idea, Mac? Did you hear what the watchman said? B. P. didn't belong here, in spite of the tag on the keyring."

"No more he did, sir," McCarty agreed, but there was a significant lack of disappointment in his tone. "I just want a word with the one that opens the door."

There was no sound of footsteps from within, but when the door opened just as McCarty finished speaking he found himself facing an individual silhouetted against the soft light of low lamps before whom for the moment even his ready tongue was silenced, although Dennis choked. They were confronted by a man who, though taller than the average of his race, was unmistakably Mongolian and clad in the flowing robes of his native land. He bowed slightly, but in a dignified fashion, and then as the visitors still remained silent he asked:

"What is it you desire, please?"

His voice was high and monotonously singsong, but it bore no trace of an accent, and McCarty drew a breath of relief.

"We don't want to disturb Mr. Orbit if there's been a mistake made, but a man who says he's a servant here has met with a bit of an accident," he explained glibly. "He's kind of stout with a round, red face and a little bald spot on his head. Forty-five or nearer fifty years old, he might be. Can you tell us his name?"

McCarty had edged closer to the side of the wide entrance door so that in continuing to face him the Chinaman had been compelled to turn until the low light played across his countenance, but it remained gravely inscrutable as he listened. Although there was a perceptible pause, when he did reply the words followed each other without hesitation.

"It is Hughes, the valet. You desire to talk with Mr. Orbit? He is engaged, but I will see if he can receive you."

He closed the door after them and as he started to lead the way the long cue which depended from his head almost to his knees swayed with his silent, rolling walk.

"A Chink!" Dennis whispered. "What is he, the laundress here?"

Once again his remark went unheeded, for McCarty was staring about him. The investigations in which, officially and unofficially, he had played a part had taken him into the homes of the wealthy more than once, but never had he entered an apartment of such studiedly unostentatious magnificence as this hall of Mr. Henry Orbit's house.

He could not know that he walked among almost priceless treasures; that the dim panels on the walls were Catalan tapestries of the fifteenth century, that the frescoed ceiling had known the inspired brush of Raphael himself and the great carved chair, secretly removed from the Duomo long ago, had once rested the exhausted but dauntless frame of Savonarola. The ex-roundsman only could feel with some strange, unerring sixth sense that he was in the hallowed atmosphere of the perfection of art and beauty and he trod as lightly as his clumping boots would permit on the ancient, deep-piled rug beneath his feet.

The Chinese butler conducted them to a spacious room at the left of the hall, bowed them to chairs and withdrew, closing the door behind him, but not before the swelling notes of the organ rose from the room opposite, filling their ears with a crescendo of glorious harmony which made the impressionable Dennis catch his breath and instinctively bow his head.

"Come out of it, Denny! We're not in church!" McCarty admonished, and then turned to the inspector. "You see, sir, that fellow who died down there by the wharves was wearing his own cheap shoes, but the expensive hand-me-down clothes of another man not his own build, and who would that have been but his employer? He'd shaved too often and more close than usual unless he was constantly in service, like a butler or a valet, and if he borrowed, without leave, cigars too good for the likes of his taste he might have borrowed a hat, without leave as well. It struck me the keys was his own, though, along with the little metal tag, and that's why I thought maybe we'd save time by stopping here first."

"You were right again!" Inspector Druet exclaimed heartily. "I was in such a hurry that I took too much for granted. We'll see what Mr. Orbit can tell us."

But Mr. Orbit did not immediately appear, and as the last notes of the organ throbbed into silence Dennis found his voice.

"Valet or no, what was any one from a grand house like this doing down in that tough precinct by the water front, and in all the storm? Answer me that! What did he die of? Did the ambulance doctor know?"

The inspector shook his head.

"It wasn't up to him to say; he just pronounced the man dead and now it's the medical examiner's job, but we'll know in the morning, after the autopsy. What have you found over there, Mac, anything interesting?"

The room into which the Chinese had ushered them was a library, modern and luxurious yet monastic in tone, with tall-backed, cathedral chairs, refectory tables and benches and dried rushes covering the inlaid marble floor. A single huge log smoldered upon the hearth and books lined all the wall space from floor to ceiling between the narrow, stained glass windows, while the light came from torches held in sconces and braziers suspended from massive chains.

McCarty had strolled over to a low row of open shelves where he stood with his back to his two companions and he seemed not to have heard the inspector's query, but Dennis explained gloomily:

"It's literature he's took up now, all along of that new school the commissioner's opening at headquarters. This psycho-whatzis has gone to the head of him, and I misdoubt Mac 'll ever be the same man again!"

McCarty's expression denoted symptoms of apoplexy at this slanderous betrayal, but before he turned he surreptitiously slipped into his inner breast pocket a small, thin pamphlet bound in pale blue paper which had fallen almost into his hands when he removed a larger, leather-covered volume. He replaced the latter and turned with dignity to approach the hearth once more.

"You'll need to lose no sleep over me, Denny, and there's more than me would not be hurting themselves by improving their minds!" he announced cuttingly. "The inspector's here on a case of—of sudden death, not to listen to your opinion of my private affairs!"

There was an amused but affectionate softening of the inspector's keen eyes as they glanced at his erstwhile subordinate and he opened his lips to speak when a pleasantly modulated voice from the doorway behind them fell upon their ears.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" it said. "I am Mr. Orbit."

Dennis and Inspector Druet rose, and the three visitors turned to find a tall, slenderly erect man in immaculate dinner clothes regarding them with gravely inquiring eyes. He must have been well over fifty, but the lines in his strikingly distinguished face were those of strength, not age, his dark hair was only lightly powdered with gray at the temples, and he bore himself with the lithe, unconscious poise of a man at the apex of his prime.

As he advanced into the room the inspector stepped forward to meet him.

"Sorry to have disturbed you, Mr. Orbit, but we will only detain you for a few minutes. I am Inspector Druet from police headquarters, and these are two of my assistants. We want a little information about a certain man who carries a tag with this house address on his key-ring."

Henry Orbit nodded slowly, and the concern deepened upon his face as he waved them back to their chairs and seated himself in a high-backed one facing them.

"I know of no one who carries such a tag, except my valet, Hughes. Has he gotten into any trouble? Ching Lee tells me that from your description the man about whom you are inquiring is undoubtedly Hughes."

"You don't seem surprised, Mr. Orbit," the inspector observed bluntly. "Has this valet of yours been in trouble before?"

A shadow of regret more than annoyance crossed the face of their host, and he shook his head.

"He has gotten into more than one scrape, although nothing to my knowledge, of course, that would engage the attention of the police. I am afraid he is rather a scoundrel, but he has been with me for twenty-two years, and I cannot believe him utterly reprehensible. Has he suggested to you that I would help him now?"

"The man I'm asking about is beyond any one's help, Mr. Orbit," responded the official. "He is dead."

"Dead!" the other repeated in a low, shocked tone, after a moment's pause. "It seems incredible! Did an accident occur?"

"That's what we want to find out," Inspector Druet announced grimly. "There are several suspicious circumstances connected with his death. Do you know of any enemies he may have had?"

Orbit frowned slightly, and his glance traveled in startled amazement to the faces of McCarty and Dennis and back again to his interrogator.

"Enemies?" he repeated. "Surely there was no violence? I know nothing of Hughes's personal affairs, but I should not have fancied he had an active enemy in the world!"

CHAPTER III.

THE NOSE OF DENNIS RIORDAN.

THERE was a second momentary pause, and then the inspector asked: "Did he give you any excuse for wanting an evening out to-night?"

"No, none. It was not unusual, and I thought nothing of it." Orbit's hands clenched slightly. "I cannot believe that poor Hughes is really gone! Perhaps Ching Lee made a mistake, perhaps some one else had come into possession of Hughes's keyring. Will you describe him to me, please, and tell me the suspicious circumstances you mentioned?"

"You describe the fellow, Mac. You examined him and his clothes more closely than I did." There was a double significance in the inspector's tone, and he added: "Special Deputy McCarty happened to be there when this man died."

Orbit nodded, and fixed his eyes expectantly on McCarty as the latter briefly complied with the inspector's request, without, however, mentioning the letters in the hat. When he had finished, Orbit exclaimed:

"It is he, beyond a doubt! The raincoat and brown sack suit were my own, given to him when I tired of them myself; and he must have copied my cat's-eye pin and links, although he was careful never to let me see them, of course. How did his death occur?"

"Well, sir, he was hurrying along in the rain, and all of a sudden he dropped." McCarty chose his words carefully. "When me and a friend of mine got to him, he was breathing his last, and the end came as I lifted his head to my knee. How did he happen to be wearing a hat with the letters 'B. P.' in it, Mr. Orbit? Who is 'B. P.'?"

Orbit frowned again thoughtfully.

"I cannot at the moment recall any one with those initials, but naturally I have no knowledge of his friends or associates," he replied at last. "Surely that is immaterial, however. What was suspicious about the poor fellow's death? He was an irreproachable servant, but when his time was his own his habits were irregular, and I should not have been surprised to learn that his heart had failed or he had suffered a stroke."

"Had he been drinking the last time you saw him—this evening, I think you said?" McCarty asked.

"Certainly not! I have never seen him under the influence of alcohol, or he would

not have remained an hour in my service. He was fully aware of this, and although I am convinced that he occasionally drank to excess, he was careful not to enter my presence in such a condition. Had he been drinking when you went to his assistance?"

McCarty ignored the question.

"You don't ask where that was, Mr. Orbit. Have you any notion where he could have been going to-night?"

"Not the slightest." Orbit shrugged. "I have told you that I am quite ignorant of his private affairs, and now that poor Hughes is dead I have less interest in them than ever."

"Still, he'd been your personal servant for a matter of twenty odd years," McCarty insisted. "Wouldn't you want to know what he was up to if you learned he'd left your house to go down along the water front, in one of the toughest districts in the city?"

Orbit stared in genuine amazement.

"The water front?" he repeated. "I cannot imagine what he could have been doing in such a district as you describe. Even in his dissipations Hughes was never attracted by anything sordid, to my knowledge, but aped even the vices of men of a higher station than he."

"I was coming to that," McCarty remarked. "You spoke a while back of trouble he'd got into more than once; what sort of trouble?"

"Gambling debts and indiscreet affairs with women; upper servants like himself or the wives of upper servants. When monetary settlements were in order he came to me for an advance on his salary, and that is how I learned of his difficulties." Orbit paused and then added reflectively: "He has been in none of late, however; at least, none which required assistance from me."

"About what hour to-night was the last time you saw him alive?" McCarty reverted to the more immediate line of inquiry.

"At a little before seven, when he laid out these clothes for me." Orbit gestured to his attire. "Some guests were dining with me—three gentlemen, all near neighbors—and I was preoccupied; but Hughes's appearance and manner must have been quite as usual, or I would have noted a change. My guests are still here."

He paused significantly, and McCarty replied directly to the hint.

"We're sorry to keep you from them, but we've got to know what your man was doing down in that neighborhood. You don't know his own friends, maybe, but you might know which of the servants employed by your neighbors he's been most friendly with, and if you don't, maybe your neighbors themselves would know."

"Really, is it as important as that?" There was still no trace of annoyance in Orbit's voice or manner, but merely a dignified protest. "You can understand that any notoriety in connection with the death of my unfortunate valet would be highly distasteful to me, and to have my friends subjected to it would be doubly so. My guests this evening are Mr. Gardner Sloane and his son, Mr. Brinsley Sloane, Second, who live across the street at Number Five, and Mr. Eustace Goddard, from Number Two, the corner house next door to me here. I have no idea whether Hughes was even acquainted or not with any of the servants in either the Sloane or Goddard households, but I will go and make inquiries."

He rose and left the room, and the inspector turned to McCarty.

"Is all this necessary, Mac? I know I said this looked big, but that was when I thought the man dead down there near the river was the millionaire Parsons. If it's just a dissipated valet, we can let it slide, at least unless the autopsy discloses foul play of some sort."

"When you asked me if I'd seen more in this than you, inspector, I told you I'd seen the corpse," McCarty reminded him quietly. "Now you're asking me if it's necessary to find out even before the autopsy who this fellow Hughes was friendly with, and I'll say it won't do any harm, because I saw him before he was a corpse! Heart disease he may have died of, or apoplexy, but it may be a good thing for us to know what brought it on him so sudden to-night, even if he was just a valet!"

There was no mistaking the earnestness in his firm tones, and the inspector started

to speak, but once more he was forestalled by the opening of the door, and Orbit ushered in three gentlemen. The first was slightly younger than his host, stout and bald except for a fringe of sandy hair. His mouth beneath the small reddish mustache had a humorous quirk at the corners which appeared to be habitual, his blue eyes twinkled, and he regarded the police official and his two deputies with a frank and not unfriendly curiosity.

The second gentleman was approximately the same age, but his smooth shaven face was strikingly handsome and his youthfully cut dinner coat was worn with a jauntiness which proclaimed the middle-aged gallant.

The last of Mr. Orbit's guests to enter was a tall, thin young man of about thirty with an inordinately serious expression that was enhanced by the shell rimmed glasses of huge dimensions which bestrode the narrow bridge of his high, aquiline nose, yet his chin was cleft like that of the older man who had immediately preceded him, and there was an unmistakable family resemblance between them. Even before the introduction McCarty placed him as Brinsley Sloane, Second, the older man as his father, Gardner Sloane, and the first to enter, therefore, as the next door neighbor, Eustace Goddard.

It was the latter who spoke first when his host had briefly presented the officers of the law.

"Too bad about poor Hughes, inspector. 'Pon my soul, if my man died to-morrow, I shouldn't be able to find a pair of gloves for myself that were mates; so I know how Mr. Orbit must feel. I've seen the fellow about the house here for years, of course, but I don't think I've exchanged half a dozen words with him in my life, and I'm quite sure none of the servants in my household know anything more about him than I do."

"Why, Mr. Goddard?" asked the inspector.

"Well, for one thing, they're all elderly and staid—been with my family for years. Mr. Orbit happened to mention the fact just now that Hughes fancied himself as a sport and was given to dissipation occasionally. He wouldn't have found anything in common with our staff, but you are welcome to question them to-morrow as much as you please."

"Thank you." The inspector turned to the elder of the two remaining guests. "Mr. Sloane, have you happened to notice any acquaintance between Mr. Orbit's valet and your servants?"

There was a slight touch of sarcasm in his voice relative to Goddard's hurried disclaimer, and the flush which mounted to that gentleman's scant red hair showed that the shot went home. Gardner Sloane responded with a hearty assumption of cordiality:

"Can't say that I have, inspector. We are a household of men, for my son and I are alone with my father, who is very old and an invalid. His male nurse, a Swede who speaks little English, and John Platt, the butler, who is nearly seventy, are the only servants in our employ with whom there is any likelihood that Hughes might have come in contact. However, I have observed him on several occasions in the company of a butler in service in another house on this block, and although I find it very distasteful to direct even the most casual of official inquiries to an establishment presided over by an unprotected lady—"

"Father!" the young man interrupted in precise, shocked tones. "I am astonished—"

"You usually are, Brin," interrupted the elder in his turn. "It is my duty to tell these officers what I have seen. The only servant here in the Mall I have ever noticed in Hughes's company is Snape, Mrs. Bellamy's butler. If any of them knows anything about the fellow's private affairs, it should be he."

"Which is Mrs. Bellamy's house?" the inspector inquired.

"Number Six, next door to this on the east," the younger Sloane replied hastily. "I am sure, however, that my father must be mistaken, and if you annoy Mrs. Bellamy at such an hour as this merely for below-stairs gossip you will distress her greatly. Indeed, why should any of us be interrogated? The man Hughes dropped

dead in the street, I understand. It means nothing to any one except Mr. Orbit, who has lost an efficient servant!"

Again the inspector sent a hurried glance at McCarty, who ignored the indignant young man and turned to the master of the house.

"Mr. Orbit, have you any notion what relations Hughes had?"

"None, in this country. He was the son of a blacksmith in Cornwall, and went to London when a lad and took service as a bootboy. From this he rose to the position of valet, and when he came to me he was, as Mr. Sloane has observed, a most efficient one."

"Then"—McCarty spoke musingly, as though to himself—"there'll be no one to notify about the funeral arrangements."

"I shall assume all responsibility, of course," Orbit announced. "I will arrange with an undertaking establishment to send for the body at once. It has been removed to the morgue?"

McCarty nodded.

"To-morrow 'll do, sir. There'll have to be some formalities, permits and such. The inspector will let you know."

Together with his two companions McCarty had remained standing since the reentrance of Orbit with his guests, and now he signaled with lifted eyebrows to his former superior and nodded almost imperceptibly toward the door. Inspector Druet nodded in response and turned to the four gentlemen collectively.

"We won't trouble you any further, and if we can obtain the information we want elsewhere it will not be necessary to question the servants of any one living here in the Mall. Good night."

The inscrutable Chinese was waiting to show them out, but McCarty lingered for a moment after the others had preceded him.

"You're the butler here?"

The other bowed in silent affirmation, and McCarty went on:

"How many other servants are employed here, and what are their names?"

"Andre, the *chef:* Jean, the houseman: and little Fu Moy, the coffee boy. That is all except Hughes." The reply came without a pause in the falsetto singsong monotone.

"Hughes is dead," McCarty said abruptly.

Again the Chinese bowed, and when he raised his head his expression had not changed an iota.

After vainly waiting for some remark in response, McCarty asked:

"You were all in to-night? Did any one leave this house since afternoon except Hughes?"

"No one."

There was a suggestion of finality in the oddly chanting tones now, and the discomfited questioner shrugged and rejoined the inspector and Dennis, who were waiting on the sidewalk before the many turretted house next door. All the lights had been extinguished except one on the top floor which gleamed down upon them like a single wakeful eye.

"What were you getting out of that Chink?" Dennis demanded as they started toward the eastern gate where the watchman waited.

"Not a living thing that I wanted except a list of the other servants of the household and word that none of them but Hughes had left the doors this night," McCarty responded disgustedly. "What he got out of me was my goat! I sprung it on him quick that Hughes had croaked, and he never turned a hair nor uttered a word, but just waited politely for me to go along about my business!"

"It is conceivable that Orbit told him when he went to bring his guests," the inspector observed dryly.

"Did he strike you as being the sort that would stop then to talk to one of the servants? He didn't me," McCarty averred. "He may tell this Ching Lee, as he called him, after his three neighbors go, but it 'll be only so that he can break the news to the others before the morning papers come out.

"Twenty-two years this Hughes has been with him, and Orbit knew no more about his affairs than the day he hired him! 'Tis unnatural that never once in all that time did they talk together as man to man, and yet I don't think Orbit lied, at

that. Look at the way he treated us! He was polite and friendly enough, and never once could you have laid your finger on a word or a look from him that was haughty or arrogant like the most of them act over here when the police get snooping around, even them that trace their ancestry back to that ark they call the Mayflower, and yet didn't you kind of feel as though you were talking to a royal duke at the least? It's just the grand manner of him, that he don't even know he's got."

"A fine gentleman, Mr. Orbit," Dennis agreed. "We've found out nothing, though, about what Hughes was doing down in Mike Taggart's precinct, nor why he ran like that till he dropped, and likely we'll not find it here between these two gates."

"There's something more than that on your mind, Mac!" the inspector declared shrewdly. "You'd never have insisted on questioning Orbit's friends if you hadn't some idea of what caused Hughes's seizure, and that it led back here! What did you see before he died that you're keeping to yourself?"

"Tell you to-morrow, inspector, if you will drop in when you've nothing better to do, or phone Denny and me the word to come down town to you," replied McCarty hurriedly in a lowered tone, for they had almost reached the gate and the watchman was advancing to meet them. "Denny's off duty, and I'm taking him home with me to-night, though I misdoubt he'll keep me up till dawn with his wild theories as to what desperate crime took Hughes down to the water front; Thanks be, the rain has stopped, and he'll not be wanting to ride home in state!"

But it was McCarty himself who hailed a prowling taxi when they had taken leave of the inspector and discreetly rounded a corner. He had no time on the homeward way to glance at the meter, being engaged in mollifying his outraged companion.

"Will you never learn, you simpleton, when I'm talking about you for the benefit of somebody else?" he demanded in exasperation when Dennis with bitter resentment had spurned his hospitality. "'Twas to put off the inspector I dropped that hint about being wishful for my sleep, or he would have trailed along with us to find out what I'd got up my sleeve; and well you know 'tis nothing but the expression on a dying man's face and the way he tried to speak but couldn't! He'll have the laugh on the both of us to-morrow if the medical examiner says 'twas 'natural causes,' and he'll forget all about this night's doings, but I won't. I'm going to find out why Hughes ran the breath from his body and what it was he tried so hard to say."

"Some day," Dennis began darkly but with a telltale softening in his tones—"some day you'll broadcast through me once too often, and this radio station will shut down on you! The inspector was right, though; I can see that now. Whatever made Hughes throw that fit, you think it happened back in that society fire line, or you'd not have listened to the fat, bald little man, nor yet the old he-gossip and his son. I misdoubt but some night we'll be putting a scaling ladder against that iron fence and chloroforming the watchman, so you can put that butler next door through the third degree!"

Back in McCarty's rooms once more, Dennis dried his rain-soaked boots comfortably before the little coal fire in the grate and watched with a quizzical light in his eyes while his host stowed his newly acquired library carefully away in a closet and then proceeded to clear out the accumulated litter of several days' bachelor housekeeping, but he said no word until the task was accomplished. Then he observed:

"When you're working on a case, Mac, you use your head, and the eyes and ears of you, but to-night another of your senses was asleep at the switch. Not that it had anything to do with Hughes, of course, but no more did anything else we learned except his name! You overlooked one little bet!"

"Oh, I did, did I!" McCarty retorted, stung but wary. "And what sense of mine was it that was not working?"

"Smell." The reply was succint. "Unless you're holding out on me, your nose was not on the job."

McCarty stared.

"What was there to smell?" he demand-

ed. "Since when is your nose keener than mine?"

"'Tis keen for the one thing it's been trained to for many a year, and that's fire. Mac, there's been a fire in Mr. Orbit's house, and not more than a few hours before we got there!"

"A fire, is it?" McCarty snorted. "There'd likely be one in the kitchen, since dinner was cooked there, and you saw the log burning on the hearth in the library—"

"Stoves and hearths don't burn wool and silk and carpets and varnished wood, my lad!" Dennis laid his pipe on the mantel and rose. "It could only have been a small bit of a fire, for the smoke of it had cleared away entirely, but the smell hadn't; there was enough of that hanging in the air for me to get the whiff, anyway, even though nobody else could. I've not the gift to explain it right, but there's a different smell to everything that's inflammable, if you've the nose for it, and it was housefurnishings that had been burned this night!"

CHAPTER IV.

FU MOY TALKS.

THE twain slept late the next morning, and they had only just returned from the little restaurant around the corner where McCarty habitually took his meals, when the bell jangled on its loose wire from below.

"Don't disturb yourself, Mac," Dennis admonished with a grin as his host threw down his newspaper. "I'll let the inspector in."

"And why are you so sure—

"'Twas not in my honor you cleaned house last night, but because you knew the inspector would be here, and you did it then for you were sure he'd come so early there'd be no time this morning." Dennis emitted one of his rare chuckles as he pressed the button which released the lock on the entrance door downstairs. "Since I've been associating so much with detectives, active and retired, I'm getting to work their way myself!"

"It's too clever you're getting, by half!" McCarty grumbled, but there was a twinkle in his eye as he strode past the other and, opening the door, leaned over the banisters. In a passable imitation of the inspector's own amusedly satisfied tones of the night before he called down:

"There you are, sir! We've been waiting for you."

"The devil you have!" Inspector Druet laughed as he bounded up the stairs with a lightness which belied his gray hair. "Getting back at me for last night, eh? If you hadn't held out on me, we'd have been on the job still in the New Queen's Mall! Morning, Riordan! I suppose you are crowing over me, too!"

"There'll not be a peep out of me, let alone a crow, till I know what's doing, inspector; for Mac's told me nothing except the look he saw on Hughes's face," Dennis replied as he drew forward the shabby easy chair and placed an ash tray within reach. His homely, long face was set in lines of deep seriousness once more, and the inspector's, too, had sobered.

McCarty closed the door, and taking a box of cigars from the mantel he held it out to the visitor.

"The autopsy 'll be over, I'm thinking." He spoke carelessly enough, but his breath labored with suppressed excitement. "What kind of poison was it, inspector?"

Dennis's pipe almost dropped from his hand, but the inspector nodded slowly.

"I *thought* you had guessed! It was physostigmine, the medical examiner called it: powdered Calabar bean. It's colorless, has no taste, and a single grain would be fatal in three hours or a little longer, but Hughes had taken a trifle more than a grain."

"Holy saints!" gasped Dennis. "So 'twas murder, after all!"

An expression of honest gratification had stolen over McCarty's face, but he shook his head.

"Many kinds of beans I have heard of, including the Mexican ones that jump like a frog, but never the sort that bring death," he said. "If one grain of it would kill in three or four hours, a little more would kill in two or maybe three. It was around nine o'clock when Hughes fell there across from the station house, so he must have

taken that powdered bean before he left the Orbit house or right after, though we've not yet fixed the time he did leave. I wonder what would be the symptoms of that poison?"

"I asked the medical examiner," the inspector responded. "Pain in the abdomen, nausea, then spasmodic respiration, numbness, and a complete paralysis of respiration, which of course would mean death. It doesn't explain his staggering along so that Terry thought he was drunk—"

He paused, and McCarty lighted his own cigar and drew contemplatively upon it before he spoke.

"Maybe it would. The pain had passed and the nausea, but it had left him weak, and the paralysis was creeping over the lungs of him so that he was fighting like mad for breath, reeling and stopping and lurching forward again. He was choking and gasping when Terry and me first turned him over, and he died with a heave and a snort as if a ton weight had landed on the chest of him. It was agony that I saw in this face and the horror of knowing he'd been poisoned. He knew who did it, too, or I miss my guess; for 'twas that he was trying to tell me when the end came."

"What else did you see?" The inspector's tone held an unwonted note of asperity. "I want to know everything that happened, Mac, from the first minute you laid eyes on the fellow. If you had told me last night before the watchman opened the gates, we might have saved precious time."

"I'd nothing to tell but the look on Hughes's face, and him trying so hard to speak, and that I thought maybe he'd been running like that because he was delirious from pain and not in liquor. There was no mark on him when we carried him into the station house, at least none that showed, and it come to me it must be poison; but with nothing more to go on than just my own private suspicions I didn't want to air them unless the autopsy proved there was grounds for them. I'll be reminding you, inspector, that I've resigned from the force long since, and the new methods—"

"New methods be damned!" exploded the inspector. "You've said that about every case we've worked out together since you did resign, but you've come back long enough each time to find out the truth when no one else could. I told Orbit last night that you were a special deputy of mine, and by the Lord you are from now on till we've found out who killed Hughes."

"Yes, sir," McCarty said meekly, avoiding Dennis's eye.

But the latter had an immediate difficulty of his own on his mind.

"If Hughes took that poison, or 'twas give to him, either before or just after he left the house, 'twill be on that block between those two locked gates that Mac will be looking first for clews, and they're guarded night and day. You heard what that watchman said," he remarked wistfully. "You'll be getting a pass for Mac, likely, but unless a fire starts inside big enough for a general alarm there'll be no chance of me following him, inspector, and 'twill be the first case ever he tackled since he left the force that I didn't get in on with him from start to finish, every minute I was off duty."

"Don't worry, Riordan," Inspector Druet smiled. "I've never been able to figure out which of you two has the luck, but your teamwork can't be beaten, and I'll see that you get a pass along with Mac. I've had a diagram of the New Queen's Mall prepared, and brought this copy with me for you two, so you may know without loss of time who owns each house and which ones are occupied."

He produced a folded paper on which the street had been roughly mapped out, with spaces in which names and numbers had been written blocked off from it on either side. The two bent their heads over it eagerly.

"You see there, Denny?" McCarty pointed with a spatulate forefinger. "Looking from the Avenue, the opposite gate to that we went into last night, the corner house, Number Two, on the south side, belongs to the Goddards. That 'll be the stout, bald fellow with the little red mustache and the twinkle in his eye, you mind him? Next to it, but separated by that bulge that looks like a conservatory, is Number Four, Orbit's house; then comes

Mrs. Bellamy's, Number Six, where that butler Snape works, and after that Eight and Ten, but they're marked 'closed.'"

"The Falkinghams, Number Eight, have lived abroad for more than twenty years; and the sole heiress to Number Ten is Georgianna Davenant, a little girl of twelve, away at school," the inspector interposed. "That finishes the Mall on the south side, but starting at the western end again, a great house taking up the entire space opposite both Goddard's and Orbit's, and bearing two numbers, 'One' and 'Three,' is occupied by the Burminster family, who originally owned most of the block and were the moving spirits in having it inclosed with gates. Number Five is the Sloanes'. You met two of the three generations last night—"

"That 'll be the handsome, middle-aged flirt and the son who cut him out with Mrs. Bellamy," McCarty observed.

"How in the world—" Dennis's lantern jaw hung relaxed, and the inspector glanced up quickly.

"'Twas as plain as the nose on your face!" McCarty exclaimed impatiently. "Let's go on: Number Seven, next to the Sloanes', is the Parsons'. That's where this Benjamin Parsons lives, who you thought owned the hat Hughes was wearing, isn't it, sir?"

"Yes. That hat is still a factor in the case—don't forget that!" The inspector bent again over the diagram and indicated the final space. "This house, the end of the Mall on the north, belongs to the Quentin family, and two branches of it are fighting over the property. It's been unoccupied and in litigation for some years. I'm going to call at Mrs. Bellamy's now and interview her butler. Want to come along?"

Dennis rose precipitately and stretched a long arm to the mantel for his hat, but McCarty said with quick decision:

"We'll go through the gates with you, sir, so that you can square us with the day watchman; but I think we'd best prowl around for a while and not interfere with you. We might drop in at the Orbit house later to see if any of the other servants can talk a bit more than Ching Lee."

"If you do, be sure not to mention the autopsy, nor the fact that it is even suspected Hughes's death wasn't a natural one," warned the inspector as they passed out to the stairs. "I'll probably meet you there later."

They entered the Mall by way of the western gate this time, and the private watchman on duty now proved to be younger and less obviously impressed by the dignity of his office than the one encountered the night before. He had evidently been apprised of their possible coming, and readily assented to the inspector's demand that his two deputies be admitted in future without question. When the official himself had proceeded to the Bellamy house, McCarty turned with an affable smile to the watchman and tendered a cigar.

"Have a smoke?"

"Thanks; but I'll have to keep it till later." He was a tall, muscular young giant, with a good natured, not too intelligent, countenance, and he grinned in an embarrassed fashion at the overture. Then the grin faded, and he added in low tones: "They haven't brought Alfred Hughes's body back yet; I've been watching for it all morning."

"It isn't going to be brought here; didn't you know?" McCarty's own tones were invitingly confidential. "Mr. Orbit told Denny and me last night that he was arranging to have it taken to some undertaking establishment and buried from there. Didn't he, Denny?"

Not yet sure of his ground, Dennis contributed merely a nod of affirmation to the conversation, and after a disgusted look at him McCarty asked:

"What's your name?"

"Bill—I mean, William Jennings," the watchman replied promptly.

"Well, Bill, you got a pretty soft job here, haven't you? If you're going to patrol your beat to the other gate, Denny and me will stroll along with you. That's all you have to do, isn't it, except to give the eye to the pretty nurse girls of all the kids on the block?"

Bill Jennings reddened sheepishly.

"The better the neighborhood the less kids there are in it, did you ever notice

that?" he countered. "In all six of the families living on this block there are only three children; the Goddards' boy Horace, who is fourteen, Daphne Burminster, two years younger—she belongs in that great corner house over there, but they haven't come back yet from the country—and little Maudie Bellamy. Horace is kind of sickly and has a private teacher—they call him a tutor, and Miss Daphne has a maid and a governess, both of them old and sour. The Bellamy baby has the only nurse on the block and she's foreign—French, I guess."

"Some of those French girls are beauties." McCarty spoke with the air of a connoisseur and Dennis coughed. The former added hastily: "Is this one a looker?"

"Pretty as a picture and as nice as she's pretty!" There was immense respect as well as admiration in Bill's voice. "I guess she ain't been over long, for she's awful young and shy, but she knows how to take care of herself, as Hughes found out."

He checked himself suddenly, but McCarty chuckled with careless amusement.

"He was a great hand with the women, they tell me!" he commented.

"Not her kind. Lucette—even her name's pretty, ain't it? Lucette is polite to everybody, but Alfred Hughes didn't understand that and thought he'd made a hit, I guess. One night, real late, about a month ago—Dave Hollis, the night watchman told me about it—Lucette ran out to the drug store for some medicine for little Maudie, who'd been took sick awful sudden, and when she came back Alfred Hughes met her right in front of her own house.

"He must have tried to put his arm around her or something, for she gave a little cry, and Dave, who'd waited to fasten the gate again after letting her in, came hurrying up just as Alfred Hughes said something in a low kind of a voice and she slapped his face! Then she ran into the house sobbing to herself, and Dave says he gave Alfred Hughes hell—the big stiff!" Bill checked himself again and added in renewed embarrassment: "I didn't mean to speak ill of the dead, but I guess nobody on the block had much use for him except Mrs. Bellamy's butler, Snape; the two of them have been thick as thieves for years."

"Is that so?" McCarty turned deliberately to his self-effacing colleague. "Didn't somebody say as much to you, Denny?"

"That Hughes and this Snape were friendly? Sure!" Emboldened by having found his voice Dennis added guilelessly: "'Twas that Chink butler at Mr. Orbit's told me, I'm thinking. Nice, sociable fellow, if he does wear a pigtail; didn't you find him so, Mac?"

"I found he'd more brains than most of the galoots who come over here and land in the fire department!" McCarty retorted with withering emphasis, then turned to the watchman again. "What sort of a guy is this Snape—the same kind as Hughes?"

"Underneath, maybe, but you'd never think it to look at him. He's younger by ten years at least than Hughes, slim and dark and minds his own business. If it wasn't for the gates you'd never know when he went in or out."

McCarty darted a quick, sidelong glance at his informant.

"Keeps funny hours, does he?"

"Late ones." Bill grinned again. "I guess Mrs. Bellamy doesn't know it, but being the only man in her house he has it all his own way. He ain't any too anxious to have his doings known, though, for Dave says he's tried more than once to slip in with the milk! I ain't spoke ten words to him and I've held down this job over a year. Here comes Horace Goddard now!"

The trio had strolled past the closed houses which flanked that of Mrs. Bellamy and were nearing the eastern gate. As Bill hurried forward McCarty glanced through the high iron bars of the fence and saw a slender, undersized boy with very red hair and a pale, delicate face who approached with a weary droop of his narrow shoulders and a dragging step. At sight of Bill Jennings opening the gate, however, he quickened his pace, a smile lifting the corners of the sensitive mouth.

"Hello, Bill!" His voice was still a clear, almost childish treble.

"Hello, there, buddy! What's the good word?" the watchman returned cheerily.

"It isn't very good, not for me!" The boy's face clouded once more. Mr. Blaisdell is going away on a sketching tour for

October. I—I wish I could go with him! He'd take me, but dad won't hear of it!"

The two listeners who had remained a little apart, saw now that he carried a small leather portfolio and a sketch book.

"An artist, the lad is!" Dennis exclaimed beneath his breath. "It's out playing baseball he should be, and getting into a good healthy fight now and then. Look at the hollow chest and spindly legs of him!"

"Poor little cuss!" McCarty murmured as Horace Goddard, with a parting word to the watchman, passed them with a mere glance of well-bred inquiry: "Say, Bill, what's that family doing to the kid? Making him learn to paint?"

The watchman had strolled up to them once more and at the question his grin broadened.

"Make him? They can't keep him away from it! We're great buddies, him and me, and he's a lonesome kind of a little feller and talks to me every chance he gets. You heard what he said? This Blaisdell guy is one of the greatest painters in the country and he met the kid at Mr. Orbit's house one day and took a fancy to him. He let Horace come to his studio and watch him work, it seems, and Horace began trying to copy him, and now he's giving him regular lessons. Going to stroll back? I take the other side of the street."

"No, we'll be looking in to see what arrangements Mr. Orbit has made for the funeral. So-long."

"See you later." Bill nodded and turned to cross to the opposite sidewalk and his erstwhile companions started back the way they had come.

"A lot you got out of him!" Dennis remarked.

"I got what I was looking for, dope on some of the families and their servants," replied McCarty. "I didn't want to crowd him too much at the first go, and besides, we've no more time to spend on him."

"Going to tackle that Chink again?" asked the other innocently.

"I'm going to tackle every last mother's son of them!" McCarty set his lips firmly and his step quickened. "I want a talk with Orbit, too, before the inspector breaks the news."

In response to their ring at the bell the door was presently opened by a fat little Chinese boy, whose round, diminutive yellow face was wreathed in shy, roguish smiles. On seeing them he bowed straight forward from the waist with both short arms spread wide, and ushered them into a huge room at the left, where their sturdy footsteps rang on a bare, mosaic floor of exquisite design and inlay. The whole opposite wall was of glass, curving out in a swelling arc, like a gigantic bow window. It was filled with a mass of strange, vivid flowering plants, the like of which neither of the visitors had ever seen before, and a delicate, elusive fragrance was in the air.

On their right, at the back the myriad pipes of an enormous organ reared their slender tubes, gleaming softly in the shadows, and stone settles and benches were scattered about, backed by towering masses of palms and cacti, but the echoing, high-ceilinged room held no other furnishing.

They seated themselves on the nearest marble bench, and McCarty mopped his forehead.

"'Tis for all the world like that grand undertaker's, where the lodge gave Corcoran his funeral!" Dennis had spoken in his normal tones, but they swiftly sank to a hoarse whisper as they reverberated. "God save us, did you hear that? It's worse than a tunnel!"

"Wisht! The little heathen is still hanging around," McCarty admonished. "Come here, son."

The little boy who had lingered in the doorway smiled again and sidled forward silently in his soft embroidered slippers.

"My name Fu Moy," he announced.

"Oh, you're the coffee boy?" McCarty remembered his talk with the butler.

"Can do!" Fu Moy bobbed his head delightedly at the recognition.

"And is Ching Lee your father?" McCarty disregarded the dissimilarity in family names.

"Ching Lee on-clee." He labored over the difficult word with evident anxiety to make himself understood.

"Uncle, is he?" His questioner paused. "You know Hughes?"

The round face clouded.

"Me catchum Mlistler Hughes. Me no like. Mlistler Hughes gone away. Me glad."

"That," observed Dennis judiciously, "was straight from the shoulder. I couldn't have put it better myself!"

Fu Moy hung his head shyly, but McCarty pulled a shining new quarter from his pocket and held it out.

"You catchum some of those nuts with the raisins inside for yourself—lichee. But tell me first why you no like Hughes."

The small, yellow, clawlike hand closed avidly over the coin.

"When Hon. Gleat Lord come, Mlistler Hughes say Fu Moy velly nice boy. When Hon. Lord no come, Mlistler Hughes kickee, stlikee, hurtee head, allee time say Fu Moy go hellee."

The little slippered foot shot out suggestively and he rubbed his ear in realistic fashion.

"The dirty hound, for abusing and cursing a little shaver, heathen or no!" Dennis exclaimed. "Who's the honorable lord, youngster? Mr. Orbit?"

Again Fu Moy nodded and a look of adoration shone on the childish face.

"Can do!" His tone was fervid. "Hon. Lord Orbit velly gleat man!"

"So that's that! We know how he stands with the kid, all right," McCarty interposed as Dennis started to speak again. But Fu Moy had evidently struck a congenial topic.

"Ching Lee catchum Mlistler Hughes make do." He pulled up the sleeve of his embroidered silk jacket disclosing the fresh, livid marks of five thick fingers on his arm. "Ching Lee gettee knifee, can do!"

Fu Moy drew his hand across his throat, and Dennis shuddered.

"For the love of the saints!"

"When was this?" McCarty was careful to keep his tone indifferent.

"Yes—yes—"

"Yesterday?"

Fu Moy's bullet head bobbed.

"Hon. Lord come takee knifee away from Ching Lee, say no can do, p'leeceeman would come. He say Mlistler Hughes hurtee Fu Moy, he go! Mlistler Hughes gone. Hon. Lord one piecee gleat man." He looked down at the coin and then up with a sudden thought. "Lichee nuts no can do! Slipples can do! Slipples 'long Hon. Lord!"

He had gestured toward his feet, and Dennis turned puzzled eyes on his companion.

"Does the youngster mean that he wants to buy a pair of slippers for Mr. Orbit?" Fu Moy's expression was sufficient answer, and Dennis suggested: "Sure, he must have plenty of slippers, lad?"

Fu Moy's head shook decisively.

"Allee blurn. Bang-bang flier Hon. Lord's loom. Littlee flier, gleat big bang-bang! Slipples 'longside chair, all same blurn."

"I've got him!" McCarty spoke aside in a hurried undertone; to the little boy whose dark, bright, slant eyes were fixed upon him as though for approval he added: "Sure, son! Get your honorable lord a pair of slippers, and if you can find any for a quarter let me know where. Now you run and tell him that two of the men who were here last night would like to speak to him. Think you can make him understand?"

"Hon. Lord—speakee—Mac and me—here?" Dennis interpreted unexpectedly.

The child nodded gravely.

"Can do. Hon. Lord talkee my talk." With another bow he turned and trotted from the room, and Dennis murmured:

"Could you beat that? Mr. Orbit speaks Chinee! That kid was talking about the fire last night, but what did he mean by 'bang-bang'? Did somebody fire a shot?"

"They did not!" McCarty replied impatiently. "Something exploded in Orbit's room and set fire to a chair and the slippers under it, but that's neither here nor there. He's a bright kid, little Fu Moy, with a gift of the gab that I'm wishful his uncle had! Only yesterday this Ching Lee tried to murder Hughes for mistreating the child, but Orbit stopped him. Fu Moy's just been told that Hughes has gone away, Denny, and he thinks Orbit discharged him and worships the boss accordingly. I wonder if maybe Ching Lee tried again? I wonder if he ever heard of the Calabar bean?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Dark o' the Moon

By BERTHA LOWRY GWYNNE

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

FANNY LOCKLYN BROOKE, the young mistress of Loch Lyn, sat on her veranda reading a story about the West. Occasionally she lifted her head to look down the narrow brown road which wound its way past the little Virginia plantation set on a mountaintop, and lost itself in the deep woods which bordered a mountain lake.

It was time for Jimmy Gillespie to be coming with the mail.

She turned a page and was translated into alien lands. Here adventurous folk—men and women—lived and loved and fought valiantly. It stirred her deeply. She hoped that some day she could see the West. For Lynnie Brooke, who had been named for her great-aunt, the beautiful Fanny Locklyn, had herself never so much as glimpsed the great world outside. And she was nineteen years old.

A barefooted boy riding leisurely on a gray mule emerged from the black woods. Lynnie rose unhurriedly and went down to the gate to meet him. A crow fluttered from the top step and followed her, walking and flying.

She was a tall girl; her uncorseted figure, straight and full, suggested endurance and a gallant intrepidity. Her deep gray eyes under straight black brows were tender and serene, but there rested in them a look belonging to the mothers of strong men—a hint of fortitude. Her brown hair showed copper colored in the April sunlight. One knew before hearing her speak that her voice would be low-pitched and pleasant.

Jimmy Gillespie had drawn rein and was waiting for her, grinning shyly. The adoration of his fifteen years showed on his freckled face.

"Howdy, Miss Lynnie," he said, and

handed her a bundle of magazines. And then gravely to the crow: " Howdy, Dan'l."

Lynnie returned his smile, but her attention was fixed on the gray mule. It stood at rest, its ears flapping, a picture of dejection.

She went out into the road, ran her fingers expertly down its left foreleg, and there was a hint of reproach in the low voice as she looked up at Jimmy.

" You shouldn't have ridden Rookus today."

" Miss Lynnie," the boy began earnestly, " that Rookus mule never limped a step till he got in sight of Loch Lyn. He's jest a-workin' on your feelin's."

" He's lame, Jimmy. You must use that liniment I gave you. And if he doesn't get better, fetch him to me for a day or so."

" All right, Miss Lynnie," grudged Jimmy Gillespie. " But it ain't liniment that Rookus mule craves—hit's sympathy!"

He turned to go—then wheeled Rookus suddenly.

" I clean forgot the letters," he cried. " I've got two for you."

From the gatepost the crow spoke suddenly, startlingly:

" Dark-o'-de-moon. Y-a-a-s-m."

Walking back to the house Lynnie looked curiously at her letters. One she knew was from her cousin Horace, her only living relative. She had had three letters from him since the death of her mother, a year ago. It troubled Cousin Horace that she lived by herself on this lonely mountain where her mother had kept her in a strangely jealous seclusion. This letter then was probably another invitation to come and make her home with him. But the other? It was addressed to her mother, in a heavy linen envelope, and embossed in one corner in deep blue letters were the words:

" Jason's Quest."

Her lonely childhood had been steeped in mythology. And now golden visions conjured up by the words came thronging in. She sat down on the veranda steps, her lips parted, her gray eyes black with excitement.

Jason's Quest!

Old Aunt Jury, whose real name was Jurisprudence, having, as she often proudly proclaimed, been " named fo' de law," had set her wash bench and tub under the flowering catalpa tree in the back yard. And there, after she had read her letters, Lynnie found her.

Aunt Jury was straight and strong and brown and glistening. She boasted that her great-grandmother had been an African queen. And indeed there sat upon her more than a trace of her ancestor's majesty. She had served at " Loch Lyn " since the time that young Hallet Brooke, Lynnie's father, had brought his bride there. He had died before Lynnie was born, and Aunt Jury had stayed on with Lynnie's mother. Now Aunt Jury was all that Lynnie had.

The old woman straightened from the tub and looked at the girl, sensing something out of the ordinary.

" How would you like to go traveling, Aunt Jury?"

" Chile, ef you axes me—hit's what I been a-honin' fur sence fust I heerd o' de glories an' de wonders o' de yearth! Ef'n I could only see de *aidges* o' de places I done heah de preacher tell about!"

She straightened to a queenly height. Her eyes rolled. Her voice took on the singsong of a tribal chant:

" Ef'n I could jest set eyes on de river Jordan!

" Ef'n I could p'intedly see fo' my own self, de Red Sea like de preacher tells it, a-bustin' an' a-bilin'; hits waves rollin' mountain-high—techin' de sky—*an' as red as blood!*

" Chile, lemme once lay eyes on dem wonderments, I'd say:

" Swing low, sweet chariot, ol' Jury's ready!"

Lynnie was impressed. She had never heard Aunt Jury speak so passionately on any subject.

" Cousin Horace wants us to go to California and live with him and Cousin Evelyn. He says he will come and take us there."

" Is we gwine?" inquired Aunt Jury eagerly.

" There was another letter, Aunt Jury," the girl went on in her low voice. " It was written to mother—"

There was a pause, a tribute to that fragile life in their care no longer.

" Aunt Jury, do you remember the man that came here when I was a little girl to look at the coal seam under Loch Lyn?"

" Yas'm, an' Miss Ma'y swap him de coal rights fer a gol' mine—I mind it well."

" He wants to buy back the shares," said Lynnie. " But he didn't say what he'd pay for them."

" Ought to make us mighty rich, 'pears like—sellin' a gol' mine. What you gwineter tell him, Miss Lynnie?"

Lynnie now delivered her master stroke.

" I thought, Aunt Jury, that we might start out to visit Cousin Horace in California and stop on our way to see the gold mine. Then we could have more idea of what it is worth."

" Yea, Lawd," Aunt Jury exclaimed with unction. " I'se willin'."

" Of course, we *could* send for Cousin Horace and go straight on to California—"

" No, ma'am. We'll bodaceously trabbel to de gol' mine! We'll see Misto' Horace an' den journey on to de Holy Lan'. Dey somepin else I wants to see which I clean fergit to mention." A curious glint came into Aunt Jury's eyes. " Hit's de Hangin' Gyardens o' Babylon."

When she spoke again it was with a touch of wistfulness:

" Hit's been a mighty long time," said old Aunt Jury, " sence I seen a hangin'."

II.

Lynnie wrote to her Cousin Horace, telling him that she and Aunt Jury were coming to California in the course of a month. She set no definite date, nor did she tell him of her other plans. Her letter said that she would let him know just when to expect them.

Her preparations for the journey were soon made. She packed her few simple frocks into an old trunk, and then, a little wistfully, for she had no finery of her own, she brought down from the attic, gowns that had belonged to her great-aunt, the beautiful Fanny Locklyn. They might come in handy, she told herself—for prevailing styles meant nothing at all to Fanny Locklyn Brooke. These gowns were the only ones of all the array in the attic that would fit. For her Aunt Fanny had been just such a straight, tall, full figure as Lynnie herself, with just such red gold hair. And Lynnie, folding the garments of brocades and satins and thin tissue, marveled at their beauty—and wondered about her who had worn them.

Aunt Jury's wardrobe stowed away in a huge canvas " telescope," she joyously added other equipment bearing on the health of herself and her young mistress—and on their general happiness and good luck. There was the " potato " which Aunt Jury fondly believed had turned to stone and which, carried in the pocket, would ward off rheumatism; and a buzzard's tail feather to be worn behind the ear for sores and swellings; her collection of roots and herbs; boneset, golden seal, peach tree bark, calamus root, and sassafras. Aunt Jury was prepared for everything short of sudden death.

" Ol' man Norah hisself," she complacently remarked as she sat on the telescope to buckle in its bulging girth, " ol' man Norah, hisself, when he furnish de ark never had a mo' complete travelin' outfit."

And so one morning they started out: the young girl in old-fashioned clothes, her gray eyes shining serene and tranquil. Aunt Jury, tall, resolute, bearing herself as befitting the granddaughter of a queen. Only the Prophet Daniel, Lynnie's pet crow that she had raised from a crippled fledgling, evinced excitement. Whirling feverishly in his new traveling cage of willow saplings he voiced his entire vocabulary:

" Dark-o'-de-moon. Sho'ly—sho'ly." And then: " Y-a-s-m."

III.

The railway into the desert ended at Coyote Wells.

When they entered the battered auto stage for the last lap of their journey, Lynnie and Aunt Jury were rich in experience. They had journeyed over mountains and plains, crossed wide rivers, seen great cities. Lynnie, possessed of tremendous vitality, was as fresh and unwearied as when she started out. Aunt Jury, a little tired and bewildered by the sights she had seen, and shaken by emotional experiences, was nevertheless undaunted. But the Prophet Daniel

bore signs of stress and weariness. He sat now with his head under his wing, the personification of despair and gloom. Occasionally he would straighten up, cast a glowing eye around and emit a doleful:

"Dark-o'-de-moon—sho'ly—sho'ly."

This performance always brought a loud appreciative laugh from the woman on the front seat. She was a kindly, highly good-humored woman of massive proportions. Her cheeks were bright and her hair a deep mahogany shade. She chatted vivaciously with Bill Gerrish, the driver, who called her "Princess" in a tone of respectful admiration.

She turned to Lynnie and said:

"What 'll you take for the bird? I'd like to buy him," handing her a card at the same time. It read:

THE PALACE OF OCCULT SCIENCE
PRINCESS AIMEE ARDELLE
She Will Tell Your Past, Present and Future
$2.00 Your Life Psychoed
Mines Located, $2.00

Lynnie gazed at the psychic with new interest.

"Will you sell him?" repeated the princess. "I've a feeling he'd bring me luck."

"Graveyard luck!" snorted Aunt Jury. "Sell him, Miss Lynnie. 'At bird gwine scandalize us yit. Gol' mine folks ain't used to his thievin' ways—"

"I love him dearly, princess," said Lynnie in her deep, soft voice. "I couldn't sell him."

The woman on the back seat talking to her husband unconsciously lowered her own voice at the sound of Lynnie's. She was a short, stout woman, heavily corseted. Her round blue eyes were hard and sharp and shining. Her black hair was marceled and shining. Her pointed finger nails were pink and shining. Her clothes were expensive and shining new. She gave out the impression of hard shining surfaces, and cold, high lights.

She and the man beside her gazed at Lynnie curiously.

Bill Gerrish had stopped in a stretch of heavy sand to tinker with the engine.

The Princess Aimee Ardelle turning around, picked up the Prophet's cage, holding it on the back of the seat. The bird straightened up, eying her expectantly.

"Let me teach him a few words," said the princess brightly. "Listen, Prophet! Say this:

"*I knew her in Nome!*"

She flashed a glance of amused maliciousness toward the woman on the back seat, and received in turn a look of hauteur.

This by no means disconcerted the Princess Aimee Ardelle.

"I knew her in Nome, Prophet. Can't you say that?" she repeated, coaxingly.

Bill Gerrish started his engine with a frightful roar. The long, hot, dusty journey was on again.

At Indian Spring, where they had stopped for luncheon, the princess called Lynnie's attention to the back seat passenger, who stood in deep conversation with Aunt Jury.

"She's trying to coax your help away from you," observed the princess in a husky undertone. "It's the first thing some folks do when they make a stake."

Lynnie smiled. "Who is she? Is she any one of importance?"

"Her? She's the wife of Dudley Ricketts—and he's considered the slickest corporation lawyer in Nevada. She married him up North," the narrator went on with relish, "one time when he was sick and she a-nursin' him. When he gits too weak to raise a finger, she calls in a jestice of the peace. And when he comes to, pore Dud Ricketts was tied up for life! She's tryin' to be a queen o' society now—and the camp really *needs* good arm waitresses—"

Aunt Jury came over to them. She wore a new air of pride and happiness.

The tall Joshua trees that had dotted the desert during the first of the journey had now diminished in size, and finally they came to a land where all the cactus was dwarfed, and no green thing lived except sagebrush and greasewood. Mountains rose bare and gaunt. They traveled through a deep wash of shale.

They came at last in sight of Sylvanite, a little camp of tents and cabins scattered along three streets at the foot of Big Boy Mountain.

"Where are you going to stay?" the princess turned in her seat and inquired of Lynnie.

"Isn't there a hotel?"

"It's not finished yet," was the reply. "You'll have to get a tent and eat at restaurants."

"I'll cook fer dish chile," Aunt Jury announced.

The princess spoke to Bill Gerrish out of the side of her mouth.

"We'll have to look after these infants. They might as well be the babes in the wood with that old crow to cover 'em up with leaves."

Bill nodded sagely.

"You sit here," the princess directed when they had stopped in front of the post office, "and I'll step into this real estate place and see about getting you a lodgin' place."

She came back and stood by the side of the stage.

"The Requas had to take their baby out for the summer, they tell me. They left to-day and their shack on Magnolia Avenue is for rent, furnished. You'll have to pay for a month—"

Lynnie turned to Aunt Jury:

"What do you think?"

"Hit 'll take a month er mo' fer me to get my ol' bones onlimbered," Aunt Jury rejoined. "Anyway, we never is see a gol' mine town."

The girl followed the bulky princess into the tent and emerged with the key.

The Ricketts were set down at their bungalow—shining—new. And then Bill Gerrish drove diagonally across the wide wash of shale fringed with greasewood which was Magnolia Avenue.

Aunt Jury, grotesquely white under a thick coating of alkali dust, climbed stiffly down with loud groans. Lynnie followed with the dejected crow. Bill Gerrish and the Princess Aimee Ardelle drove off with loud, cordial good-byes.

It was sundown. A purple glow from the mountains flooded the broad street. The cabins and tents washed in amethyst took on beauty and significance. Never since her mother's death had Lynnie felt so comforted. All the big and noble forces of her nature responded to the purple and gold of the mountains.

"Oh, look, Aunt Jury! The whole world is amethyst! I—I—feel like there's happiness here for us."

But the old woman, with a hearkening look on her face, shook her head.

"I'se a sebenth chile," she rejoined cryptically. "Honey, Loch Lyn was a mighty safe place! Maybe we better not a-been so trabbel-unctous!"

"Sho'ly. Sho'ly," came mournfully from the bird in the willow cage.

IV.

SYLVANITE was booming. The discovery of rich ore in the "Jason's Quest," a mine owned by a small group of men, had brought together from every quarter, men and women who had adventured everywhere, followed every strike since Nome days. They talked of only one thing—gold. Of where it was found yesterday—where it would show to-morrow. And it was the promise of to-morrow's fortune which had drawn them here to dwell together, precariously, in this baked and barren land.

On the surface of this deep current floated other activities. The wives of mining men played bridge in the afternoons, and in the evening danced with their husbands at Slim's Hall. On Thursday afternoons Slim's Hall housed the "Daughters of the Desert"—earnest women with roughened hands and strong, hard, weather-beaten faces. The Daughters of the Desert was a secret society, but through the open windows could be heard hymns, sung lustily, followed by high pitched exhortations. The Daughters were a force—ignorant and earnest—and terrible in their intensity.

Lynnie slept deeply, dreamlessly, after her long journey.

She was awakened the next morning by a monologue floating in through the open side window—a steady stream of flattery, cajolery and, finally, caustic comment.

"There's a good girl—have a heart," she heard. And then:

"Darn you, stand around here and act like a lady!"

She liked the voice. It was a humorous, deep voice, carrying an underlying accent which proclaimed the speaker a Southerner.

She rose and dressed, full of eager interest.

The voice was now coaxing:

"There, there, my dear—stand still. That's a darlin'—"

Lynnie leaned out of the window.

Between her cabin and its twin next door stood an angry, bewildered Jersey cow. Squatting on his heels, his face puckered earnestly, a tall young man was holding a ten gallon oil can, the top chiseled off. Into this he was trying to direct a feeble strain of milk from the outraged animal.

"You're on the wrong side, you know," Lynnie observed interestedly.

The tall young man sprang to his feet.

"How do you do?" he said.

"How do you do?" answered Lynnie. "You are really on the wrong side."

"Is that the reason of her agitation?"

"That's one reason. Your cow—"

"She's not really my cow," the young man began. "She's a rented cow."

Lynnie leaned farther out and regarded the cow with interest.

"A rented cow? I never heard of such a thing."

"The Requas, who lived in your cabin, brought her from California to give milk for their baby. She's the only cow within a radius of five hundred miles—and she puts on airs on that account."

"What's her name?"

"She has a beautiful name. The Requas called her Sukey—but I didn't care for that. An obvious name, don't you think?"

Lynnie nodded in agreement.

He smiled down at her. "Well, I thought up an appropriate one. I'm proud of it, and so is she."

"What is it?"

"Persephone."

"Oh, I've always loved that name! Is there a reason for it?"

"Can't you think?"

"Let me s-e-e! Is it on account of her mother?"

"Ceres? You're getting warm. Think hard!"

"Wait a minute—don't tell me!" Lynnie wrinkled her brows.

"She came from the green fields," he prompted.

"To hell—" they cried in the same breath, and laughed together.

"If you wait," said Lynnie, "till I waken Aunt Jury, I'll show you how to milk Persephone."

She smiled at his exclamation of admiration and relief. She went into the lean-to, off the kitchen where Aunt Jury slept, and aroused her. She opened the cage door, and the Prophet Daniel hopped out. He followed her around the corner of the cabin, cocking his head suspiciously at all the strange surroundings.

The young man held out his hand with an engaging smile.

"I'm Archer Mackenzie," he began. "We're neighbors, and we must be friends."

"My name is Fanny Locklyn Brooke," Lynnie announced in a sudden wave of shy formality. There was something at once gallant and happily trusting in her clear gaze. It was as if she expected every one to be as honest, fearless and strong as herself.

"My grandfather," began Archer Mackenzie, "used to tell me of a Fanny Locklyn—"

"That was my—"

"She was very beautiful, he used to say."

"That was my great-aunt," Lynnie told him. "She was beautiful—and good. She has been dead many years."

"I know. I think my grandfather loved her to the day of his death; although he loved my grandmother, too."

"Why, how *could* he?" began Lynnie.

"It's a sort of family gift," the other said, smiling.

The milking of Persephone was accomplished with frequent laudatory exclamations from the young man.

Aunt Jury had started a mesquite wood fire in the kitchen stove. She went to the window and looked hard and suspiciously at the young man from next door. He and Lynnie sat side by side on a long box drawn up to Persephone, engaged in deep conversation.

Lynnie looked up and saw her.

"Aunt Jury, this is Mr. Mackenzie. He lives in Alabama—and his grandfather knew Aunt Fanny—"

At this the old woman's look of suspicion changed to one of withheld judgment.

"Who's his gran'daddy?" she demanded brusquely.

"Good morning, aunty!" Archer called.

And at the intonations of his voice her face softened.

"Who yo' gran'daddy?" she persisted.

"He was Mr. Angus Mackenzie—"

"Yea, Lord!" Aunt Jury exclaimed with unction. "I mind him well. Sho'ly! Sho'ly! He was a tall, po'tly, stately gen'leman when he come a-courtin' Miss Fanny. I mind him well. He wore a flowin' red beard—"

"That's his picture! You see"—he had turned to Lynnie—"that makes us almost cousins; old friends, at all events."

"Jes' pass de milk in here to me, an' I'll take keer of hit. An' from dis time on I does de milkin'."

Persephone's half gallon contribution sloshing around in the bottom of the ten gallon can elicited a snort from Aunt Jury.

"Won't you have breakfast with me?" Lynnie asked. "You haven't had your breakfast, have you?"

"Not yet. You see, I thought Persephone would lend a hand. You've no idea how monotonous breakfast becomes when you eat the same things, over and over again—and all out of tin cans. Asking me to breakfast is a charitable act."

"Why, it's only neighborly," said young Fanny Locklyn.

They talked happily in low pitched, pleasant voices of the romance of Archer's grandfather and Lynnie's great-aunt. And they marveled over their own meeting.

It was the first time since crossing the Alleghenys that Lynnie and Aunt Jury had heard the familiar elipses and intonations of speech which made of Archer Mackenzie not a stranger, but a friend. And his joy in discovering them was just as sincere as their unaffected pleasure in finding him.

By no word or look did he express the astonishment he felt at seeing Lynnie, obviously of another world, so tranquilly taking up life in this new mining camp.

Presently Lynnie said:

"Do you know anything about the mines around here?"

"A heap," he smiled. "I'm a mining engineer. Not one of the famous ones you read about," he hastened to add. "I've only *been* one since last June! I've been here a month examining a property that our family is interested in."

"I wonder," she began slowly, "if you know anything about the Golden Apple?"

"The Golden Apple? There's no such mine here," he answered. "At least, it is not listed. I'm sure there's no developed mine of that name. Maybe it's a prospect."

Lynnie spoke with gentle certainty.

"No. It's a real mine. I own shares in it."

"From whom did you buy the shares?"

"My mother got them in exchange for the mineral rights of our place at home. A Mr. Baylor—"

"Of Baylor & Carruthers?"

"Yes. Do you know them?"

"They live in the cabin next door. I'm staying with them." Archer's voice was relieved. "It's all right, I know—for Baylor & Carruthers are perfectly square. They own the Jason's Quest—and there's a *mine*."

Lynnie fed a few crumbs to the Prophet Daniel, perched on the back of her chair. She cast a shy glance at the young man opposite, as if she were wondering whether or not he would laugh at her. And then:

"Do you know," she said, "it was seeing those two words—'Jason's Quest'—in the corner of an envelope that caused me to come to Sylvanite. I—I had the queerest feeling! I don't know whether I can make you understand it or not, but—but—all of a sudden I was *seething* with the visions of the old argonauts—"

"I know," Archer Mackenzie assured her solemnly. "I know just how you felt—because that's the way I feel. That's why I'm a mining engineer."

And then, because they were both young, they looked a little awed at these disclosures.

The sound of crunching shale brought them back.

A young girl was coming up the trail which led by the side porch where the breakfast table was set. She was a tiny girl, but exquisitely proportioned. She was bareheaded and carrying a parasol. Her white gown was cut square, disclosing a soft white throat. Her hair lay in even, golden waves.

She bowed to young Mr. Mackenzie, giving him a flashing smile which revealed a dimple. Her eyes rested for a moment impersonally on Lynnie.

"I never saw anybody half so lovely," exclaimed Lynnie. "Is she *real?* Who is she?"

"Her name," said Archer, "is Sophy Sanders. *Isn't* she lovely? She's a mighty sweet girl—but you should see her mother. *She* looks like the Day of Judgment. Sophy must have been changed at birth."

"Does she live here?"

"She's just out of finishing school and came here to be with her mother a while. She dances wonderfully. You must join the dancing club, Miss Brooke."

"But I don't dance," said Lynnie a little sadly. She looked at him for a moment, then said with an effort:

"I—I—don't do anything that girls in real life do! I never talked to a young man before. You are really the very first one I ever talked to—except," she amended, "fruit tree agents and the ones that sell sewing machines and patent churns, or renovate feather beds—young men like that, who aren't, of course, *folks,*" said Lynnie Brooke.

"But—but how does it happen?" asked the amazed young man. "Is that an impertinent question? Somebody brought you up very beautifully, you know."

"My mother," said Lynnie in a voice of hushed tenderness. "And Aunt Jury," she smiled.

The young man was leaving. He held out his hand, and Lynnie laid her slim, brown one in it.

"Would you like for me to speak to Mr. Baylor about you—your shares, you know? He and Mr. Carruthers are away, but they'll be home to-night."

"It would be mighty kind of you," said Lynnie.

After he had gone Lynnie stood for a long time looking into the mirror. She tried to puff her hair. The result was unsatisfactory. Presently she said:

"Aunt Jury, I wish you would let out the waist of Aunt Fanny's white mull—the one with blue flowers in it."

"Sho'ly, honey, sho'ly."

Lynnie stuck a tentative finger into her soft cheek. "I wish I had a dimple," she said.

Aunt Jury stopped in the middle of the floor.

"Quoilin' wid yo' looks!" she exclaimed. "You better take heed to yo' manners an' 'havior!" She moved around the kitchen mumbling to herself. Then she called out:

"Quoilin' wid yo' looks! You de spit'n' image o' yo' Aunt Fanny—an' she was de belle o' de roun' worl'! Huh! *Dimple!* You better thank de good Lawd 'at He done give you somepin better 'n *a hole in yo' jaw!*"

V.

Mr. Charles Baylor, pouring rich cream into his coffee on the following morning, complimented Archer Mackenzie upon his milking.

"It wasn't as easy as I thought when I rented Persephone," Archer laughed. "In fact, I fell down on the job. The old colored woman next door has come to my rescue."

"Who are the people next door?" inquired Mr. Sam Carruthers idly, reaching for the cream pitcher.

"A Miss Brooke and her negro servant. They're on their way to California. And by the way, sir," he spoke to Baylor, "she was asking about you. It seems she stopped off here to inquire about a mine."

"A mine? What mine?"

"As a matter of fact, I had never heard of the mine. She said it was the Golden Apple."

There was a barely perceptible pause.

"A Miss Brooke?" said Baylor. "Is her mother with her?"

"Her mother died a year ago, she told me. I happen to know her family. She is

related to the Locklyns. Miss Brooke is very young—not more than nineteen."

"What did she say about the Golden Apple? Does she want to sell?"

"I think she does want to. She's coming down to your office this morning." He hesitated. "Of course, I knew it was all right when I found she'd acquired the stock from you. Before that—knowing it wasn't listed—I felt a trifle—"

"A trifle what?" demanded Sam Carruthers sharply.

"A trifle uneasy," said Archer Mackenzie evenly. "From what I gathered, from what she dropped unconsciously, I got the impression that it is a matter of importance to her. She is quite alone—"

"Friendless beauty—"

"You are mistaken, sir." Archer's eyes were blue ice. "She is not friendless."

Baylor shot his partner a warning glance.

"Of course—of course," he said heartily. "Mighty good of you to take an interest. And about the Golden Apple—you are right. It ain't worth a damn! We had great hopes for that mine about ten years ago—but it flivvered. Of course we don't want to work hardships on widows 'n' orphans, so that now that Sam and me have got a little money we're buying the stock back."

"Why, that's mighty white of you—"

Baylor stopped him with a large gesture. "And see here—suppose you take ol' Sam and me over and present us. We'll settle it up right now—so's the young lady can be on her way."

The gentlemen comprising the firm of Baylor & Carruthers might have been turned out of the same mold. Both were large and smooth faced. Both had sunny dispositions. Mr. Baylor, however, was more loquacious than Mr. Carruthers, who smiled often but said little.

To-day, as usual, the burden of conversation rested on the suavely genial Mr. Baylor. In the pause following Archer's departure he had inquired about Loch Lyn and old man Gillespie—even remembering, to Lynnie's astonished delight, the name of the old man's favorite coon dog, dead long ago.

He plunged into business with frank friendliness.

"About the Golden Apple, Miss Brooke. We've been wondering why we hadn't got an answer to our letter."

"I thought," said Lynnie, "that it might be better for me to see the mine before I sold the shares. My mother sometimes spoke hopefully about it."

"And we had great hopes for it, too, at the time your mother acquired an interest in it."

"Then, it hasn't turned out so well?"

"Miss Brooke, it hasn't turned out a-*tall*. And we're mighty sorry. But with the cost of transportation, and labor troubles—and all—and then on top o' that, the vein petering out— Well, we're mighty sorry!"

"I'm sorry, too," said Lynnie.

"But we don't want to see you lose," said Baylor, "and we'll buy your shares."

"I certainly shall not sell anything I know to be worthless," the girl said quietly.

Mr. Baylor leaned toward her in his chair, pointing an argumentative finger.

"But they are worth something to us—not much, it's true, but something. We want to wind up the business. We want to get it settled, and settled honorably. You surely understand our feelings?"

Lynnie nodded.

"*Well*, then! You see you mustn't keep us from doing the right thing. We'll give you three thousand dollars for your shares, Miss Brooke. That's a fair price—fair to you and fair to us."

"In that case," Lynnie was beginning uncertainly. She rose to her feet. The two men stood with her.

At this instant the door from the kitchen flew open. Aunt Jury burst in with the force of a tornado. Her eyes were rolling horribly. To all appearances she had suddenly become a violent, black maniac.

"Miss Lynnie," she screamed in a high, wailing chant, "de Prophet Dan'l done snatch 'way our riches!

"De Prophet Dan'l done steal our ce'tify-cut!

"*White folks, heah me!*"

At sight of their stupefaction her voice rose more distractedly:

"Oh, my Lawd! De Prophet Dan'l—*he done flewed away wid de gol' mine!*"

VI.

THE two men, baffled and bewildered, had departed. Lynnie was trying to get a coherent explanation from Aunt Jury. Never in her life had Lynnie seen the old woman under so great an emotional stress. She was shaken by fear and superstition.

"Miss Lynnie," she began, "you know you'd been gazin' on de ce'tifycut befo' de genelmen come—an' when dey knock 'pon da door you laid it down on de kitchen table. Wellum, Miss Lynnie, hit may been de splotch o' red sealin' wax, er hit may been de bright green readin'—I kain't noways tell. But somepin'er ketch de 'tention o' dat debbil bird. An' de fust news I knowed he cotch up de paper in his beak! He flewed outen de window—an' he wing his way toward 'at—ar gulch which dey calls de Daid Nigger Cañon! Yas'm. An' now," concluded Aunt Jury dolefully, "I reckon we done loss our gol' mine."

"No, Aunt Jury." Lynnie spoke comfortingly. "They said that even if I had lost the certificate there is a legal procedure that 'll make it all right."

"Sign a papeh?"

"Yes."

"No, ma'am—you cain't sign no papeh!" Aunt Jury was more excited than ever. "Hit 'd be slappin' de face o' yo' gyardeen angel!"

When she spoke again it was with slow, dramatic solemnity:

"Hit's dis-a-way: De good Lawd done promp' de Prophet Dan'l to do 'at fatal deed—er else ol' man Satan done promp' him. An' *I* ain't gwine interfere. An' *you* ain't!"

"Nonsense, Aunt Jury!"

"Chile," said Aunt Jury, "is I been a good nuss to you, an' tooken keer o' you sence de day you was bawn? Answer me 'at!"

"Yes," the girl returned wonderingly.

"Wellum, don't fergit it. Kase I'm gwine ax you to make me a promise. *Don't sign no papeh twell we find de one which de Prophet stole.* Will you promise me 'at, Miss Lynnie? Will you, Miss Lynnie, honey—jist to please a ol' woman which is almost in huh grave?"

There was something infinitely touching in her humble tones.

"I promise," said Lynnie slowly.

"Dah, now!" exclaimed Aunt Jury in a relieved voice. "Dah, now! An' you look mighty pale an' peaked, honey. Lemme git you a glass o' Sefonee's milk!"

Lynnie was thoughtfully sipping her milk.

"I think, Aunt Jury, that if we don't find the paper to-day, we'd better go right on to Cousin Horace's—"

The old woman busied herself around the kitchen a while before answering. Finally she said a little wistfully: "I'd like mighty well to stay de month out, honey. I'se got a chance to be rich—an' by de work o' my own hands. Hit was foreordained to me by a boss fortune teller."

"To get rich? How?"

"Do you mind de day, a-comin' here, we stop on de burnin' sand? Wellum, de shiney lady which she calls herself Miz Dudlin Ricketts—she say she gimme five dollars fer every night I cooks dinner foh her. An' mo' dan 'at—she say she gwine give a bang-up quality dinner party in 'bout two weeks an' she say she gimme *fifty dollars*—"

"Why, how outrageous of her—" Lynnie began hotly.

"Sho'ly, honey, sho'ly," Aunt Jury spoke soothingly. "*'At's what I tells her!* But I was thinkin'—she don't have her dinner twell eight o'clock in de night time—"

"Look here, Aunt Jury—do you want to cook dinners for that woman? Don't beat around the bush—"

"Wellum, I'm through yo' dinner by early candle lightin'. An' is I ever tell you 'bout Sis Dicey Smailes?"

"What about her?" said Lynnie crisply, but her face had softened. She couldn't be angry with old Aunt Jury.

Aunt Jury closed her eyes and rocked on her heels.

"Ol' Sis Dicey which she is a fortune teller *bawn*, done told me once outen coffee groun's 'at I'm gwine ter be rich! An' by de labors o' my own hands, Sis Dicey, she also say!"

"Aunt Jury, if you really want to do that extra work why—"

"Yas'm, Miss Lynnie, I does. Thanky, ma'am. I craves riches!" she finished simply.

The angry amazement of Messrs. Baylor and Carruthers remained unabated. That this girl, to please the superstitious whim of an old negro woman, would go without the money which they felt she needed, was beyond their conceiving. Archer Mackenzie's aid was enlisted by the two men. He went straight to Aunt Jury with arguments and remonstrances.

"Hit was a sign," she stubbornly contended. And, groaning, would say no more.

VII.

Summer came to Sylvanite in a day, on a sea of quivering, wavering heat, blazing, pitiless. The winds that swept down the arroyas were hot and blasting winds that seared and roasted. There was no touch of lassitude in this heat—rather it inspired a dreadful energy. Men ventured farther and farther into the furnace of Death Valley. Trading in stocks became wilder and more feverish. The bridge players in Slim's Hall bid higher, laughed more nervously—and Thursday afternoons at Slim's found the Daughters of the Desert—singing—praying—in loud, distraught voices.

With the sun's sinking a blessed coolness crept in—the day became a blurred, seared memory.

Aunt Jury responded to the summer gallantly, harking back to her proud ancestress. The heat rejuvenated her. Her skin glistened. She seemed to take on more poise and power. The kitchen rang with noble chants.

Lynnie's back door became a refuge for the sick and homeless. Johnny Jackrabbit, a diminutive Shoshone lad who had drifted into camp from the Panamint Mountains, slept on her side porch and calmly enjoyed the breakfasts that Aunt Jury grumblingly passed out to him on a tin plate. Stray dogs were watered and fed. Sick and crippled burros that had been turned loose to die from the long pack trains, found their way to her door, where they were fed and bandaged and doctored. And in this way Lynnie came to know their grateful owners—old prospectors who passed the word around of a girl who shared her cabin with "a nigger and a crow." "A mighty sweet girl," they said, "with healin' in her hands."

Thus she made the acquaintance of old Uncle Gummy Teel, who lived on the other side of the mountain. After she had saved Uncle Gummy's two burros from death by poisoning, his faith in her had become almost fanatical. He came to see her often, always bearing a present: a bunch of scarlet cactus blossoms; once, a tiny phial filled with gold dust—and, one proud day, a nugget pin.

Lynnie faced the heat joyously. There was something in this white blaze that touched a heroic strain in her own being. Early mornings that were miracles of dawns found her and Archer tramping over the hills, prospecting. They came home before midday, tired and hungry. So far they had found no gold, but they were as hopeful and as visionary as the old, old men they met in the hills.

Sylvanite viewed these excursions as a matter of course. It was only natural that the tall girl and the young engineer should have a try at fortune. For, indeed, all that interested Sylvanite was gold; where it was found to-day—where it would show tomorrow. Only Mrs. Sanders—Sophy's mother—who peeped out of her cabin window in the early morning as they swung gallantly by, saw in their young happiness the frustration of her carefully laid plans for Sophy. She looked at the sleeping Sophy with whom Archer danced every evening. She lay white and delicate. And the look which passed on to Lynnie's unconscious figure bore a hint of madness.

One day she called upon Lynnie—and departing, left behind her a sense of extraordinary disquietude.

Fanny Locklyn Brooke sat on the front steps of her cabin and looked up at the soft, black sky. Even the stars, she thought, were different from the stars at Lovelands. There, they shone with a pale light—vague,

remote. Here, warm and clear, they hung almost in reach of picking.

She caught the strains of the orchestra at Slim's Hall. Only a half hour before Archer Mackenzie had gone by with Sophy Sanders. Across the clear spaces had come Sophy's light, soprano voice, her tinkling laugh. In the starlight Lynnie had caught glimpses of her party frock, the edges gleaming like icicles.

" Well, deary, and how's the camp treating you?"

Lynnie looked up startled into the kindly, cordial face of the Princess Aimee Ardelle.

" Princess! I'm—I'm *mighty* glad to see you! I was feeling lonesome. I believe I was beginning to feel sorry for myself—and I never did that before in my life."

" Don't begin now, child." The princess sat down by her on the steps. " Is there anything troubling you special—anything," she added shrewdly, as there came to them the sound of music, " 'cept you are young and pretty and would like to go to the dance?"

" Well, that's a heap," laughed Lynnie.

" So 'tis—so 'tis," the other responded tolerantly. " I haven't forgot what it's like to be young—" She shook her head impatiently.

" Has your life been a happy one, princess?" Lynnie ventured respectfully.

" It ain't what I planned for," the other answered briefly. " But it might be worse. It's a square life. I've had some hard licks, but I'm respected in this camp—even if I ain't a society queen," pronounced the princess, in whose mind memories rankled. " You've been on my mind," she veered abruptly, " ever since I left you here that day. Tell me—how are you getting along?"

In the face of this sincere interest Lynnie talked at length with slow, grave friendliness. She told of the loss of her certificate of mining shares. The princess listened in astonishment.

" Well "—she drew an enraptured breath —" you don't mean to say that you are doing yourself out of three thousand dollars just for that old colored woman's peace of mind?"

" She would do more than that for me."

Laughing, Lynnie told her of Aunt Jury's good fortune, foretold in coffee grounds, which needed only a week more of realization.

" And she's cooking dinners for Rosybelle Ricketts? What did I tell you that day at Indian Springs?"

" Mrs. Ricketts is getting ready for a wonderful dinner party," Lynnie went on. " Aunt Jury is bursting with excitement over it."

" Huh! Must be something mighty special."

" Yes, it is. It's in honor of some people who are coming from San Francisco—a man and his wife. They've surely impressed Aunt Jury with his greatness. She calls him the " King of the World."

" Old H. B., I guess. Well, he does come pretty near being a king in this country. He's got the controllin' interest of all the big mines around here. All," she amended thoughtfully, " all 'cept the Jason's Quest. Wait a minute—wait a minute, deary! *I feel somepin like a trance coming on!*"

The princess stiffened, her eyes staring straight ahead. She sat motionless for almost a minute. Lynnie watched her in shuddering fascination. The princess sighed and relaxed. Lynnie drew her breath again.

" Umm—huh!" the psychic's voice took on its friendly, natural quality. " The old man's playing on her social ambitions—he's fetching his wife along. Well, he must want the Jason's Quest mighty bad—"

" Princess," Lynnie interrupted, not being at all interested in the ambitions of Mrs. Dudley Ricketts, nor in the financial schemes of initialed gentlemen. " Princess, tell me about Sophy Sanders. Do you know her? Do you know her mother?"

" Her mother—Sophronia Sanders? Well, I should say I do know her. I knew her in Nome! They're a queer couple," the princess went on, laughing tolerantly, " Sophronia and little Sophy! I'll never forget the day in Nome that Sophronia came to consult me. (I was a trance medium and psychic palmist then, same's now.) She was troubled. I said to her: ' Sophonia,' I said, ' I've always heard that bruises and pearls are, what you might say, causes and effects. And,' I said, ' there's nobody 'll

deny that life has bruised and battered you. The baby that's coming will be a pearl,' I said. 'A pearl!' Well, Sophronia believed me and took heart. And it wasn't long after that that Bill Sanders was killed in a mine explosion, which was a mighty good thing for his widow—because he was certainly hard boiled. After that Sophronia took a new turn and set out reforming the world. She's bigoted. She's *hard,* honey! Why, *she* thought up this Daughters of the Desert society—and organized it—and you've heard about *them!* The only soft spot in her heart is for that little Sophy. I think she's ashamed of her mother—but in looks she turned out a pearl—jest as I foretell."

"That describes her exactly," said Lynnie. "She is so fragile and so exquisite."

"She's all of that," crisply agreed the princess. "And Sophronia's brought her out here to marry her off. Well, there's some mighty rich fellers—there's that young Archer Mackenzie—" She broke off.

"Bless Pat! Ain't that him a-comin'?"

Sitting on the steps in the starlight they watched the princess as she picked her bulky way homeward through the sharp stones and greasewood of Magnolia Avenue.

The music from Slim's Hall came to them muffled. The warm air carried strange, pungent odors of desert herbage, and stirred the ends of the thin lace scarf Lynnie wore around her shoulders. The starlight shone on her burnished hair.

"She is fine and dear," Lynnie said as the princess passed out of sight.

"You are fine and dear," said Archer gravely, "to discover it."

"How did you happen to come, Archer? How did you get away from the party?"

"I came to sit out three dances with you." He pointed to his card on which her initials were scribbled. "See—here they are—three in a row!"

"I think that's a perfectly noble act! But I've never sat out a dance with a young man before. Tell me—what does one do?"

"According to one school of thought, conversation is considered good. That is, if it's educational and uplifting—"

She laughed at this. "Well, let's converse! How shall we begin?"

"Questions and answers is *my* way. It's less complex. Like this: 'How do you like our camp, Miss Brooke? How do you like *us?*"

"Very much," she answered in the same spirit. "I like one-third of my next door neighbors. And Persephone. And the mountains. And Uncle Gummy Teel. (Archer, what do you suppose Uncle Gummy brought me yesterday? A rattlesnake hat band!) And I love the stars! I don't care very much for the night winds, nor the chuckwallas, nor the kangaroo rats, nor Sophy Sanders's mother—"

"Oh, Lord—" groaned Archer. "Same here—"

"Mrs. Sanders came to see me to-day." Lynnie's lightness had left her. Her eyes were troubled. "She stayed a long time. Archer, tell me—what is this 'Daughters of the Desert' society?"

"Lynnie, as far as I can make it out, it seems to be a sort of mixture of the old-fashioned Ladies' Aid with a dash of secret fraternal orders and a sprinkling of the Vigilantes—"

"But what do they do?"

"They investigate everything that happens—and pass upon it. They are the judges, juries, and executioners! They are the Fates and Furies returned to earth! I tell you, Lynnie, women are a darned sight more cruel than men."

"But didn't men start this Vigilante idea?"

"They did, my child. But it was to mete out justice to men. To avenge good, healthy, honest crimes. But, see here, what did Mrs. Sanders say about the Daughters of the Desert? And what did she want?"

"Knowledge, I reckon." Lynnie laughed a little ruefully. "I never saw any one with such a thirst for it. After she left I felt like a drained teapot—I felt like a squeezed orange—I felt like the last page in the catechism—"

"Don't gallop around for any more metaphors—I know just how you felt. She leaves me with the same feelin's! But what did she say about the Daughters?"

"It wasn't so much what she *said*—"

Lynnie was looking at Archer with disturbed eyes. "She asked me if I had heard of the noble work they were doing in camp." Lynnie hesitated. "And when she said that she looked at me so curiously—so sort of *secretly*—I can hardly describe it—that I had the same feeling of cold terror I had the day that the rattlesnake sprang at you—when we were panning for gold up by the Cactus Spring—"

Archer himself was disturbed. "The desert has got *her!* She's unbalanced—that's all. I loathe that woman—"

"But—but—" said Lynnie Brooke, "you like Sophy, don't you?"

"Yes, Lynnie, I do. I do like her. She's so darned tiny—and—and—sort of sweet!" He held out his hand. "Why, I could pick her up with one finger. I—I don't know just how I feel about her." His tone was puzzled. "Now, *you*, Lynnie—" He turned to her. "Do you know why I came over to-night? It was to hear your voice! All at once it seemed to me that you and I were the only people alive on earth! The others—why, Lynnie, it just seemed to me that I *had* to see you. There's something so warm and tender and—and—comforting in the *thought* of you—"

She had risen and stood before him, her color flaming, like an angry young goddess.

"I'm not like that," she began in hot anger. "I'm not like that at all, Archer Mackenzie!"

He stared—strangely moved by her lovely indignation.

"I think—I think—why, you might as well be describing Persephone!"

He didn't laugh at this. He stood—staring.

"Lynnie, I don't know what I did mean. But—I must go," he said in a strange voice. But he made no move.

They stood together, two splendid figures. The wind blew out the lengths of Lynnie's scarf. He caught the ends, one in each hand. She looked up into his face. In the starlight it looked white and sharply startled. He drew the ends of the scarf taut. He was drawing her to him. She took an involuntary step.

He dropped the scarf. Without a word he was gone.

Lynnie watched him out of sight, her hand to her throat to stop its throbbing. She held up the scarf. The lace at the ends was crumpled and torn.

VIII.

AUNT JURY'S morning song awakened Lynnie. She stretched her young limbs and yawned. Something had troubled her the night before—what was it? She lay for a while, her arms above her head, her fingers interlocked—thinking of Mrs. Sanders. But now her disquietude had vanished. She was only happy.

Aunt Jury's voice came to her, triumphantly wailing:

"I knows 'at de waters are chilly an' deep,
An' I mus' give *up* dis body!
. . . . . .
Oh, graveyard! O-o-o-o-o-o grave-yard!"

Lynnie laughed aloud. Aunt Jury was happy, too!

Johnny Jackrabbit suddenly appeared at the side porch when she was having her breakfast, and without a word handed Lynnie a note. It was written with an indelible pencil on paper torn from an old ledger.

KIND FREND:

i take my pen in hand to say i am a mitey sick man you was sech a good Doc to them too buros who drunk from the Pizen spring an so becom Pizen that i rite to say will you cum to my camp along o jonny. and Fetch some medsin. you Mite bring that Buzzard fether belongin' to ant jewry. deer frend dont fetch enny of them camp docs fur i no them deer frend. you kood bring some of ant jewrys bone Set. god nos I aint took eny sence i was a kid and i Taste it yit but ime a Sick man deer frend. what I got is like roomatiz only not as Ketchin.

yore frend and wellwisher

JOHN D. TEEL.

John D. Teel? For a moment Lynnie was puzzled. *Teel?* Why, of course—it was old Uncle Gummy!

Uncle Gummy had appealed to her strongest instinct. She was going through her medicine case, her brows puckered meditatively as she thought out remedies for a disease resembling rheumatism, save that it was not contagious. She had often argued with Uncle Gummy over this very

subject, the old man stubbornly contending that " rheumatiz is ketchin'!"

As Lynnie and Archer Mackenzie passed Mrs. Sanders's cabin—Johnny Jackrabbit having elected to keep the Prophet company—that lady, peeping out of her window, saw in their morning excursion a flaunting of her veiled warning of the day before. Her face hardened. Archer and Lynnie appeared to be going away for an extended sojourn. They were carrying blankets and provisions and canteens of water.

Halfway up the mountain they sat down in the shade of a huge bowlder to rest. Lynnie's hair was damp and curling about her. She was flushed and breathless.

The camp lay miragelike before them on a sea of heat, a sea painted palest rose and mauve from the mountains.

" We're leaving day after to-morrow," Lynnie said to Archer. " I wrote to Cousin Horace last night." And as she spoke she realized that Archer was glad!

It was true, then, as she had thought last night. He loved Sophy!

Archer was plainly constrained. " I believe you're homesick," he said.

" I don't know. I—I feel a sort of sad, Sunday afternoon happiness in thinking about home."

" It *sounds* pleasant," said Archer; " but what is it like?"

" Well, shut your eyes, and I'll bring it back," commanded Lynnie. And when she spoke again her voice held a listening quality. " It's like this," she began. " Bees droning; an apple dropping in the orchard, and far away, off yonder, a dog barking; noble words from the collects you've learned coming back to you—words like ' godly quietness,' ' a humble and a contrite heart,' ' the beauty of holiness,' ' grant us Thy peace.' And you smell the cinnamon vine."

" You make me feel *holy* when you talk like that, Lynnie!" He threw away his cigarette. " There's something about you that makes me want to be good. Pretty soon I'll be saying my prayers again before I go to bed."

" And so you should," she told him.

" You and mother are the only ones I ever knew that I'm sure will see God—"

" How about your three sisters?"

" Huh! They'll be mightly lucky to get to heaven at all; it 'll be a mighty narrow squeak."

" Are they worldly?" asked Lynnie in open envy.

" Jammed full and bursting with pomps and vanities."

" I'd dearly love pomps," said Lynnie. " I know that. I *wish* I could have other memories than such simple, old-fashioned, countrified ones, like—well, like remembering how spring water tastes when you drink it out of a gourd! I wish I'd been Cinderella—just for that night. I could always have remembered the lights, the music, the glass slippers—"

" I can't see you in the picture, Lynnie. I bet three cookies that when the clock struck twelve you'd have been discovered nursing the second cook's baby, or poulticing the off foreleg of your godmother's coach horse."

They laughed at this. Archer flicked pebbles at an imaginary target.

Presently he said in a carefully casual voice: " Who is this Jimmy Gillespie you spoke of the other day? He doesn't happen by any chance to be the fruit tree lad, or the sewing machine agent, or the chap who rejuvenates feather beds—"

" Oh—Jimmy!" Lynnie smiled in tender reminiscence. " Jimmy isn't like that at all. Jimmy is the one that brought me books."

" Books? What kind of books?"

" Wonderful ones—modern and thrilling. Loch Lyn, of course, was running over with books—but Jimmy's were different. They told about huge cattle ranches, and feuds, and cowboys, and sage and cactus. That's one reason I came here."

" I thought," began Archer in an offended tone—" I thought it was reading the Iliad and Odyssey that set you out in search of adventure."

" Yes, it was partly that," Lynnie answered serenely. " And partly it was reading Jimmy Gillespie's books."

" I suppose," said Archer, " that you love him?"

" I do," answered Lynnie. " Dearly."

" Are you going to marry him?" Archer's

tone was careful. He held a pebble in his hand so tightly that his knuckles showed white, but he did not cast it. He carefully sighted at a lizard on a rock.

"Are you going to marry him?" he repeated.

Lynnie started to speak, but she had no no gift of coquetry.

"Jimmy is only fifteen," she said at last.

The pebble dropped from Archer's hand. They looked into each other's eyes. They were enveloped in a silence, suddenly poignantly sweet, breathless.

Lynnie rose to her feet. "Uncle Gummy—" she was beginning uncertainly.

But Archer had taken her in his arms. She felt the thunderous pounding of his heart, the suffocating ecstasy of his kisses.

"I love you, Lynnie—I love you," he was saying in a low, desperate voice, which sounded like another's. "But I must not —I ought not—"

With a quick turn of her strong young body she was out of his arms.

"Me?" she asked a little wildly. "You love me?"

"You, of course," he answered in the same low voice. "Who else?"

"Do you love *me*, Archer?"

"Lynnie—yes. But I oughtn't to tell you this. You are young—know nothing of men. Lynnie, you ought to have a fair shake at life—know many men. You ought to be with your Cousin Horace—I ought to talk to him first. What—what I'm doing isn't *right*."

He took her in his arms and kissed her again.

"I couldn't love any man but you," said Fanny Locklyn Brooke—"not if you were to die this minute, and I should live on forever and ever! I—I—love you so much that I was resigned—well, almost resigned to Sophy Sanders when I thought you loved *her*. Archer, are you *sure?*"

"Dearest—surer than sure."

"And Sophy?" She looked into his eyes with sweet seriousness. "Archer, you've never held her in your arms like this—you have never kissed her—like this?"

"*Like this?* No, it had never been like this," he told himself in the brief second vouchsafed him before answering. This love for Lynnie transcended anything he had ever experienced. His sentimental passages with Sophy dwindled into trivialities.

Like this? He hadn't known that life held anything like this.

"Lynnie, I love you—and nobody else."

"You've never held Sophy like this? You've never kissed her like this?"

"No," said Archer. His lips were on hers. "I never did."

IX.

Uncle Gummy sat in a rickety chair just inside his cabin door. He looked feeble and pain racked. His toothless smile of joy at sight of Lynnie turned to a scowl as her companion entered.

"I tole you—" he was beginning.

"This isn't a doctor, Uncle Gummy," Lynnie spoke soothingly. "This is Archer Mackenzie. He's my friend." She smiled shyly at Archer. "He's from Alabama."

"His face looks familiar," said Uncle Gummy. "I've seen him somewheres. If he's an undertaker," he continued peevishly, "he kin save his steps—"

"Of course he's not—not *that*," came in horrified tones from Lynnie. "How foolish of you, Uncle Gummy!"

"They're perched around the camp like buzzards," the old man complained. "Everywhere you go you see 'em waitin'—jist waitin'." He broke off suddenly. "Did you fetch the buzzard feather?" he demanded.

"No. But I brought a hot water bottle."

"Well, why didn't you fetch it like I asked you? She said if you wear it behind the ear it 'll take out swellin's."

"But that's just superstition, Uncle Gummy. You and I don't believe that."

"I do," he replied obstinately. "I believe it. There's a heap sight more in charms and signs than what most folks think they is. They's a lot in 'em. And I wish you'd fetched the buzzard feather."

"Well, I will to-morrow," she assured him gravely.

"See that you do," he rejoined fretfully. "See that you do."

He turned in his chair to peer at Archer. "I've shore seen you somewheres, but I can't call to mind the time or the place."

Uncle Gummy was put to bed. Almost lost in Archer's pyjamas, he lay in languid contentment, his eyes following Lynnie as she stirred around, putting the cabin to rights and directing Archer's herculean tasks. Uncle Gummy, at best, had been a somewhat sketchy housekeeper.

It was on one of her excursions into the kitchen that Uncle Gummy rose on his elbow, cocked his head in her direction, and inquired in a hoarse whisper if Lynnie's hair didn't resemble a pan o' nuggets. And he asked Archer—as man to man—whether he had ever seen anything "fetchinger" than the way it curled on the back of her neck.

Archer assured him earnestly that he never had.

"And there's healin' in her hands," Uncle Gummy went on fatuously. "The Good Book tells 'bout it."

Lynnie, coming in just then, asked: "How do you feel now, Uncle Gummy?"

"Better in some ways," he conceded grudgingly. And after a moment's reflection: "But wuss in others. I'm pained wuss! You better come back to-morrer," he added, "and don't fergit them charms. I'm li'ble to be a heap wuss!"

"Of course we'll come." Lynnie smiled down at him. "And now, Uncle Gummy, you must take a nap. And when you wake up there'll be a wonderful hot supper for you. I'm going to fix it."

"So do," beamed Uncle Gummy. "So do."

His gratified gaze passed from Lynnie to Archer. "They was a young feller like you," he began tentatively—"light complected, which ran a game in Ballarat—"

"Not guilty," grinned Archer. "I was never there."

"I've seen you somewheres," the old man went on in sick peevishness. He turned his face to the wall.

In the kitchen Lynnie and Archer were getting Uncle Gummy's supper in a maze of rapture. They held hands over pots and kettles; they kissed each other to the accompaniment of Uncle Gummy's snores.

Uncle Gummy moaned in his sleep, and Lynnie looked at Archer with pity in her eyes.

"Isn't it sad that he should have to live alone with nothing to love but his two burros? And we have so much—"

They talked now of their love. They talked of themselves; just what they had felt and thought when they had first seen each other.

"It's a queer thing, Lynnie," began Archer, "that while I've been loving you so furiously right along, I didn't know it until last night. Why, dearest, when you were standing there in the starlight it came to me like a revelation. I knew then why you had never been out of my mind—awake or asleep—since I had first laid eyes on you. If—if I were a poet—or a preacher—maybe I could *tell* you, Lynnie—I love you so very much."

"And so do I love you," said Fanny Locklyn Brooke.

After a while she asked hesitatingly: "Your grandfather—Mr. Angus Mackenzie—do you resemble him, Archer? Aunt Jury says that you look very much like him. Do you have the same traits of character?"

"My mother thinks so. And I'm glad. He—well, he was a decent old chap."

"Do you"—she was looking at him with sweet dubiousness—"do you think that *you* could love two women at the same time? You know you told me once that he did."

"You darling! No! Anyway—I should not try to." He was serious now. "I have never loved anybody but you—and on the day of my death, whether I'm young or as old as my grandfather, I'll still be loving you, Lynnie. And right now—though you have a smudge on the end of your nose—I think you're the sweetest—"

"Hey in there!" came the quavering, excited voice of Uncle Gummy. "I rickerlick now where I seed that there young feller—"

"Thank God!" exclaimed Archer. "The old villain's placed me at last. Maybe his mind's at rest."

Lynnie was hastily scrubbing the end of her nose.

"Hey there!" Uncle Gummy's voice was charged with happy interest.

Archer drew Lynnie to him and kissed her. And then they went in to where Uncle Gummy lay. They stood at the end of his bunk.

Uncle Gummy was sitting up in bed, grinning toothlessly.

"I mind now," he began, "where it was I see you. Hit was one day last week I was drivin' my two burros down the bed o' the arroya. And when I git almost behind the cabin where the little yaller hair gal lives"—Uncle Gummy looked at Lynnie—"the one that sets in a green hammick, readin' novel books—"

"I see this here young feller in the green hammick by the side o' the little gal—"

"That 'll do, Uncle Gummy!" Archer had turned a deep, painful red. "Forget it!"

But Uncle Gummy was bound by no shackles of honorable masculine alliance. "They was a-settin' mighty close together," he went on with relish. "They was a-holdin' hands, and they had their heads together like they was a-plannin' merridge. And then"—here Uncle Gummy cackled—"and then this here young devil, he lift his head and looks all round—but he didn't see me ner Jerry ner Julep—and then he draw her up to his bosom and he give her a true love kiss. Young folks didn't kiss that way in my day," he interpolated with envy. "*Gosh, I never see sich a kiss!*"

No laughter greeted this. The old man fretfully settled himself back on his pillows.

They stood white faced, looking at each other.

There was no tremor in Lynnie's low voice:

"You *do* resemble your grandfather, don't you? But I wonder if he would have lied about it?"

She turned to the old man. "I'm going to bring your supper in now, Uncle Gummy, and you must eat every bite of it."

They stood outside the cabin.

"You *must* let me explain," Archer was beginning. "I don't love Sophy. Kissing Sophy meant no more to Sophy, or to me, than—well, than—sneezing."

"You have led her to love you," said Lynnie. "And when I asked you about it, you lied to me. You told me a deliberate lie."

"I did nothing of the kind," he retorted hotly. "I'm not a liar."

"Didn't you tell me that you had never kissed her?"

"I said I had never kissed her like that."

"Like what?" Her tone was gentle.

"It was not like kissing you—"

"Don't you dare mention kissing me! Don't you dare *think* of it, Archer Mackenzie! I never want to see you again as long as I live—"

"Look here!" He took her by the shoulders, almost shaking her in his intensity. He looked into her eyes, which never faltered. "I'll think of kissing you as long as God lets me live! I'll never forget it! And you will never forget it either—you'll always remember it. I didn't deceive Sophy Sanders. I didn't tell her I loved her. She is old enough to know something of life. She is sophisticated—"

"What you want to say is that I'm unsophisticated—"

"If I wanted to say it, I would. I'm not afraid to say what I want—"

"Nor am I. And I tell you now that I hope never to see you again. What you have done is a shameful thing. And a cruel thing. You have made Sophy love you. And then—and *then*—you hold her kisses as lightly as—as—*sneezes*."

He smiled involuntarily. It maddened her.

"God sent me up here," she went on in a low, furious voice; "for if I hadn't come, I might have married you. I might have had children who would have been liars."

He turned very white. "I'm glad you're to be spared that," he said in anger as deep as her own.

They plunged down the trail, each deep in anger and heartbreak; each thinking up words with which to hurt the other—but no words came. He left her at her cabin and took his way down toward Golden Street.

Johnny Jackrabbit dawdled in front of the cabin, making a circle in the sand with his great toe. The Prophet Daniel circled

around him, cawing raucously. Lynnie passed through the kitchen, looking for Aunt Jury; and then she remembered that this was the evening of Mrs. Ricketts' dinner party, and that Aunt Jury would have gone over earlier than usual. She had started back to the living room when something unconsciously arrested her steps.

She went to the little room that Aunt Jury occupied.

The old woman lay straight upon the floor in an attitude of such mournful dignity that Lynnie could think of it as nothing less than death.

X.

Dr. Shepard and Lynnie worked over Aunt Jury. Soon she opened her eyes. She stirred painfully and groaned.

"Oh, thank God!" cried Lynnie. "Aunt Jury—tell me—what happened to you?"

"'Nuff," Aunt Jury laconically responded, and relapsed into half unconsciousness.

They gave her brandy. And after a while she began mumbling.

The doctor leaned over to listen. "She seems to be delirious."

"What dishere camp needs," she was saying, "is a Hangin' Gyarden! An' de fust one I want to see strung up is dishere presidum o' de Daughters—"

"Oh, doctor, she is not delirious!" And Lynnie was swept by fearful forebodings.

"Look here, what happened to you?" Dr. Shepard was addressing Aunt Jury.

Aunt Jury looked up from her pillow with some interest. She was beginning to feel the effects of the brandy.

"Well, suh," she began, "hit seems dark an' foggy like. Hit don't seem like hit could 'a' happen; hit seems more like a skeery dream! But I was in heah a singin' an' a-praisin' de Lawd, when I hears a knock 'pon de door. Den up steps dishere Miz Sanders which she is de head o' a gang o' ladies which dey calls deyselves de Daughters o' de Desert."

Aunt Jury paused, trying to think. "Well, suh, dey say dey come to warn my Miss Lynnie from gwine roun' with Mr. Archer Mackenzie. An' 'en I ups an' says 'at he de only quality in camp—an' I tells 'em 'bout us knowin' his fambly."

Here she hesitated, not knowing how to go on. "An' den de boss lady, she say somepin 'bout you, honey." Her faithful eyes looked into Lynnie's. "An'—an'—I say: '*Woman, say yo' prayers—kase I'm gwine bust you wide open!*'"

After a pause she looked up at them with a shamefaced smile. She spoke apologetically. "But I reckon she busted me fust—an' 'en trompled on me. Kase de fust news I knowed, you is heah, an' Miss Lynnie is heah. An' I got dishere pain in my head, an' dishere swole eye." She definitely turned her back to them. "An' now I craves sleep."

Soon she was snoring.

"She has prescribed the best thing for herself," Dr. Shepard told Lynnie.

"Doctor, will she die?"

"My dear, she's in no danger of dying. She's had a shock—and her heart is not as strong as it once was. But all she needs is rest. She mustn't be disturbed."

He followed Lynnie into the living room, and, when she was seated, took the chair facing her.

"Now tell me what it's all about and what it is that's troubling you."

Lynnie told him of Mrs. Sanders's visit, and of her excursion that day to Uncle Gummy's cabin. And on her face was truth and honor for all men to read. Dr. Shepard was disturbed, but Lynnie could not share his perturbation. Now that she knew Aunt Jury was in no danger, she could think only in sick misery of Archer. The doctor's "Why, I knew her in Nome," failed to bring a smile. And this phrase, heard on every side, had hitherto always diverted her.

Lynnie had suffered a hurt—a hurt past all believing.

It was intolerable in the little cabin after Dr. Shepard had gone. She went out and sat on the steps. She nursed her anger.

"*I never see sich a kiss!*" Uncle Gummy's cackling words had branded themselves into her brain. Her pride was outraged, but that was nothing matched with the pain in her heart.

She saw Mrs. Ricketts teetering toward her, the jet ornaments of her evening gown striking together agitatedly. Why, yes,

surely, this was the night of the dinner party. And Aunt Jury—

Numbly she watched Mrs. Ricketts cry when she told her that Aunt Jury was not to be disturbed. Mrs. Ricketts crying was a most unpleasant sight. Lynnie felt no answering sympathy.

But—*wasn't* there an obligation? She considered for a moment, and then said quietly:

"If you can't get any one else, I'll go over and help you with your dinner, Mrs. Ricketts. I'll serve it for you."

The tears had made devastating inroads through the powder on Mrs. Ricketts's face. There was something grotesque in the relieved countenance she turned toward Lynnie.

"Oh, Miss Brooke—would you? Will you do that for me?"

"I'm doing it for Aunt Jury," said Lynnie.

Lynnie took a last look at the sleeping Aunt Jury. Johnny Jackrabbit sat by her and had promised to come for Lynnie in case Aunt Jury wakened and needed her. She had shown him the bright light streaming from Mrs. Ricketts's open kitchen door.

And it was toward this light that Lynnie was now painfully picking her way. She had bathed and dressed hurriedly. She wore the flowered mull frock that Aunt Jury had vainly tried to modernize, and her Aunt Fanny's low heeled satin sandals.

The shale covered ground was sharp and cruel to her slippered feet.

"Lynnie! Lynnie!" The words stopped her. No one in camp called her Lynnie except Archer. And this was not Archer's voice. It sounded thick and throaty and curiously strained.

"Lynnie, wait for me!"

A little white figure came flying through the dusk. Lynnie stiffened and turned, glad to be taller than this small creature. It was Sophy Sanders.

They had stopped in the light of a cabin window, and Lynnie saw that the other's eyes were almost shut, her face swollen from long weeping.

"Lynnie, is she badly hurt?" Sophy looked up at her piteously. "Is she going to die?"

"Your mother didn't quite succeed in killing her—"

Sophy put out an impulsive hand to stop her. She began crying again in a fearful racking way, as if crying were agony. "I'm so ashamed—I'm so ashamed for my mother. How *could* she? How could my own mother do such a thing? It was so terrible. It was so cruel. It was so c-common!" Sophy sobbed on. "I only knew it an hour ago. I have cried. I have cried—till it kills me to cry."

The other's heart softened. "She's not badly hurt."

"Oh, Lynnie!"

They put their arms around each other. Suddenly they seemed very near together. Sophy said simply:

"It's you he loves."

Lynnie's arms fell to her sides. But Sophy caught her hand.

"Truly, it's you he loves. That's what makes it seem so awful. Poor mother, thinking she was bringing me happiness. Oh, Lynnie, if I could only make you understand about mother! She has had such a hard life! She has had nothing—nothing—and she has tried to give me everything! Lynnie, it seems so—so—*tragical* for poor mother to be trying to snatch happiness for me in the only way she knows—by fighting for it."

Sophy was sobbing again. Lynnie drew her to her breast. "Don't cry, honey—don't cry!" She had the feeling of comforting a downy, yellow chick that had been lost in the rain.

From under Lynnie's arm the other girl spoke again: "He loves you."

"He's not worthy of my love—or yours, Sophy."

The little form stood before her. "Oh, but Lynnie, he is! He is splendid! Do you know that when he found out that he loved you that he came straight as a string and told me so? He said that it was like the revelation of St. Peter or St. Paul—you know the one—"

"Did he say *that?*"

"Yes, Lynnie, he said—"

But Lynnie, deep in self-reproach, was

thinking of Sophy. It was true, just as the Princess had prophesied to Sophy's mother that day in Nome. Sophy *was* fine and genuine: and she, Lynnie herself, had been the jealous, little-spirited one.

"Do you love him, too?" asked Lynnie.

"Well, I did at first," said little Sophy. "But I knew when you first came that he loved you. And then—and then—I turned my thoughts to somebody else—a boy I used to write to every day. And—and—now I am pretty close to loving him." She tossed her head airily and hesitated only a second. "It's that way with me—first I love one, and then another."

Lynnie looked down at her gravely.

"Are you sure that you don't love Archer?"

"Absolutely. But you do, don't you?"

"Oh, *yes*," answered Lynnie in a soft, husky whisper. "I—I—do love him!"

XI.

THE Ricketts' dining room was lighted only by the candles on the table—a table of gleaming crystal and silver and china, heavy with the odor of banked red roses.

Lynnie stood in the dim candlelight, looking into the living room through the French doors which separated the two rooms. She was trying to summon courage to turn on the dining room lights, open the doors and announce dinner. The room beyond was changing, passing, like a moving picture. Mrs. Ricketts clinked and tinkled as she moved among her guests.

She was talking now to a low spoken, gravely smiling woman in white. She was the wife of the "King o' de World," Lynnie decided. She looked around now for the king himself. She saw Mr. Baylor and Mr. Carruthers sitting together in important calm, like Tweedledum and Tweedledee. She caught the fine face of Dr. Shepard. The big man talking to Mr. Ricketts must be the king, she thought. Now he had turned and was speaking to Archer.

Archer! What would Archer say when he saw her there?

A little while ago her offer to take Aunt Jury's place had seemed a noble act and her clear and bounden duty. But now—

She turned on the lights, gave the table a last swift, appraising glance, and opened the doors.

As she stood there in her flowered mull frock, her satin sandals, she might have been the composite embodiment of all the tall, deep bosomed, tranquil women of her race, framed on the walls of Loch Lyn. Her color rose and died. She tried to speak. She could not.

Archer Mackenzie looked up casually. He gave a convulsive start, attempted to rise, thought better of it, and sat gazing incredulously.

The guest of honor, whose keen gaze was resting on Archer's face, half turned in his chair to follow the direction of the other's fascinated eyes. The guest of honor stiffened in *his* chair. His face whitened. He gave a dynamic leap to his feet. As one who believes despite his reason, speaks against his will, he cried out:

"Aunt Fanny Locklyn!"

The Ricketts, their guests, his wife even, were staring.

Only Lynnie was composed. She stood looking at him for a brief second, then she smiled. She came over to him swiftly.

"Cousin Horace!" And then, simply: "I'm Lynnie!"

"My God—I thought you were a ghost!" He took her in his arms and kissed her. "Lynnie, my dear—my dear. Why, honey, I've always thought of you as twelve years old."

He held her away from him.

"But you're Aunt Fanny Locklyn alive again!"

He turned to his wife. "Evelyn, it's Lynnie!" he said in a delighted voice.

The woman in white with the calmly amused eyes kissed her gently.

"Mrs. Ricketts," Cousin Horace had begun perplexedly, "this is a great surprise. Is it a masquerade—did you plan it?"

Mrs. Ricketts opened her mouth. She swallowed convulsively. Before she could find words Lynnie's clear voice interposed.

"Cousin Horace—Cousin Evelyn — it wasn't intended as a surprise at all. I am serving dinner for Mrs. Ricketts in Aunt Jury's place—because Aunt Jury isn't able to come." She turned a concerned face to

her cousin. "She has been hurt, Cousin Horace—just terribly—in a fight with the Daughters of the Desert."

"In a fight!" The man looked from Lynnie to Mrs. Ricketts.

That lady, red with embarrassment, struggled out:

"Dear Miss Brooke was kind enough to volunteer when her servant failed me at the very last minute. It was charming of her. Of course, Mr. Brooke, I had no idea she was related to you."

"But Lynnie," he persisted, "I don't understand how you happened to be here at all. What are you and Aunt Jury doing in Sylvanite—of all places in the world?"

A chair was found for Lynnie. They were all seated again—the dinner forgotten.

"It was because of the mining stock I owned, Cousin Horace—ten thousand shares in the Golden Apple. Mother exchanged our coal rights at Lock Lyn for it."

"You own Golden Apple Stock, Lynnie?"

"Yes, Cousin Horace, I did. But when I got here I found the shares were nothing like so valuable as we hoped they would be. Aunt Jury and I thought they would make us rich, Cousin Horace—but Mr. Baylor and Mr. Carruthers told me better."

Mr. Baylor and Mr. Carruthers exchanged swiftly agitated glances. Then Mr. Baylor spoke suavely: "It's a pretty complicated deal, H. B. We'll explain all the ins and outs of it to you to-morrow."

Mr. Brooke's level gaze rested on them for an instant. He turned to his young cousin.

"Then you've sold your shares, Lynnie?" he asked in a curiously even voice.

"Not yet."

He permitted himself a brief, humorous glance in the direction of the two men. "The Golden Apple mine, Lynnie," he explained slowly, as if he were picking out words that she could understand, "is not in existence any more. The name has been changed to 'Jason's Quest'—and most of the stock exchanged. If you own ten thousand shares I think you can count on being very rich indeed."

"But I haven't the shares any more, Cousin Horace."

"You haven't them?"

"The Prophet Daniel stole them," said Lynnie simply.

Mr. Horace Brooke gave a haggard look around. His wife came to his rescue.

"This has been a beautiful surprise, Mrs. Ricketts," said Mrs. Brooke with grave cordiality, "whether you intended it or not. We are indebted to you for finding Lynnie. We've been trying to persuade her to come to us, and I'm sure she was on her way."

"Yes, Cousin Evelyn, I was. Aunt Jury and I only intended to stay until we sold the stock, and had seen what a mining camp was like. And then, Cousin Evelyn, I don't want to tell you about it here, but there was another reason—a wonderful one—for staying on."

She looked for a brief moment into Archer's eyes, and he felt as a doomed man feels when he sees his reprieve.

Her Cousin Evelyn smiled and said:

"We mustn't spoil your dinner, Mrs. Ricketts, just on account of Lynnie. Won't you let us all wait on ourselves?"

"Do let us, Mrs. Ricketts—" the others were beginning, when the dining room door opened.

Aunt Jury stood on the threshold, swaying uncertainly. Her hands were trembling. One eye was lost behind a huge swelling. A bandage showed from under the edge of her cap. But the spirit of her queenly ancestry animated her bearing.

"Miz Ricketts, ma'am, I's heah," she began in a hushed undertone. Her eyes fell on Lynnie.

"*How come—*"

"Cousin Horace, Cousin Evelyn—this is Aunt Jury—"

Lynnie got no further. Horace Brooke and Aunt Jury were greeting each other joyously.

"Aunt Jury! Aunt Jurisprudence! Named for the law, you used to say."

"An' bidin' by it!" Aunt Jury finished, her face transfigured. "I praise de Lawd!" She was relapsing into her old chant. "I praise His holy name!" Tears were rolling down the old woman's cheeks. "De good Lawd sont you, Misto' Horace. You done

answer de summons! Dis precious chile been besiege aroun' wid revellin' wolves! Dese heah Daughters o' de Desert try to make 'way with her good name. An' dese heah white gen'lemen settin' right heah try to steal 'way her gol' mine—"

"Oh, *hush,* Aunt Jury!" Lynnie cried in an embarrassed undertone.

But Aunt Jury had an audience, and if Mrs. Ricketts had fondly hoped that her dinner party would go down in the camp's history as one never to be forgotten she was destined to see the fulfillment of her wish.

Her guests sat open mouthed, entranced, listening to Aunt Jury's chant:

"I's a sebenth chile!
I's named fo' de law!
I's bawn with a veil!
An' when you is bawn with a veil—
An' named fo' de law—
You kin reckernize de sheep—"

Here she glanced blandly at Mr. Baylor and Mr. Carruthers.

"An' flustrate de goats!"

As she subsided, Mr. Brooke's smile held amusement and indulgent sympathy. But his mind was on the Jason's Quest.

"Lynnie," said he, "this person whom you call the Prophet Daniel—"

"He's not a person at all, Cousin Horace; the Prophet Daniel is a crow."

Cousin Horace was rapidly losing all sense of reality. "He's a *what?"*

"A crow, Cousin Horace, and he flew away—"

But Aunt Jury had stepped forth again.

"Miss Lynnie, ma'am—Misto' Horace, suh," she began; "I slanderize 'at crow when I say he done stole de gol' mine! "Hit was me! An' I got it in my pocket!"

With the manner of a conjurer entertaining children, Aunt Jury lifted her dress skirt and drew out of various deep pockets secreted in her voluminous petticoat sundry objects, which she laid in a row on the table.

There was the "potato" which she fondly believed had turned to stone; a black feather plucked from the tail of a turkey buzzard; a bundle of herbs from which she made her famous "mixtry"; a rabbit's foot; the aged, frazzled skin of a tiny garter snake; and, finally, the lost certificate!

Mr. Brooke took the paper printed in bright green ink and adorned with red seals. He looked at it, smiling to himself, and gave slight heed to Aunt Jury's final observation:

"*You kin kiver up de fire,"* she began in sober impressiveness, "but—I axes you—*what you gwine do with the smoke?"*

Lynnie had been speaking to Mrs. Ricketts. She motioned to Aunt Jury now and spoke in an undertone. The old woman nodded and disappeared. In a few moments Aunt Jury, brown, silent and imperturbable, was serving dinner. General conversation had started in a laughing torrent. Mrs. Ricketts's famous dinner party was under way.

They stood in the shadows of her cabin porch—Lynnie and Archer Mackenzie. Outside, the camp lay grave and still in the starlight. The night winds, scented with sage, swept down the arroya, enveloping them, here in the darkness in secret, hushed ecstasy. They talked in whispers. Just for to-night their happiness was their own—unshared.

And it was to Sophy Sanders they owed it all, Lynnie had told Archer in a passion of contrition. Now, in the generosity of their young love, Sophy was included in the scheme of their future life. In some way they would find a happiness as great as theirs for little Sophy, too.

"Archer," she whispered, "no matter what happens, we'll never quarrel again."

He kissed her for answer.

"Love like ours will last forever," she announced with sweet didacticism. "Our happiness will last forever. Oh, Archer, *I* feel that—don't you?"

Before he could answer there was a stirring of feathers on the tall perch in the shadows. The Prophet raised his head from under his wing. His sleepy, croaky syllables gave the final note to their happiness.

"Sho'ly—sho'ly," quoth the oracular bird. "Y-a-a-a-s-m."

THE END

The Fourth Chum

By JOHN SCHOOLCRAFT

Author of "The Bird of Passage," "Let the Wedding Wait," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

SCUTT, the officer's servant, is approached in the Red Lion Inn near Woolwich barracks by an American crook who offers the soldier a thousand pounds sterling for aid in stealing twenty thousand pounds' worth of diamonds. It appears that three other English privates had taken the stones from a French *château* during the great war; two had since died and a third was a hopeless cripple. The Yankee criminal has deduced that the diamonds are secreted in Woolwich's guardhouse, and Scutt agrees to commit some minor offense that will put him there where he can search the cells. He assaults a bombardier, is sent to a cell and discovers that the diamonds are in possession of a Horse Guardsman, named Morgan, who is an American with a year to serve of his enlistment. Morgan is a huge, athletic young man and a star performer in feats of horsemanship and drills, but he evades all attempts to inveigle him into boxing. This annoys the sergeant major, who suspects the American really is a terrific fighter. Scutt, the batman, comes up for sentence for striking the bombardier and, to his dismay, is given six months at hard labor. He manages to escape after killing an old soldier pensioner.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GHOST.

MORGAN did not go back to the clink. The team on which he served as number six clipped several seconds from the garrison record, and he found himself suddenly a man to whom favors of many kinds were extended.

The officers marked him, and when returning his salute often added a word of greeting, and although the noncommissioned officers bellowed at him as they bellowed at all men, there was that same trace of friendliness in their voices that there had been in Todd's when he called up the prisoner in the clink.

More than once he was asked why he

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 10.

did not box, for a private soldier who brought glory to his unit in that way found his path easy. He could get himself excused from any kind of drill or fatigue on the ground of being in training. But he received the new kindliness with the same bitter indifference, and all offers to show him the rudiments of the manly art he declined with a gravity that was somehow puzzling.

For a man who shunned boxing he was curiously brave. The position of number six on a Horse Artillery gun team was described by England's greatest soldier as being the most difficult in the British army.

In the competition the three teams, dapple chestnut from P Battery, bay from R, and black from AA, swept across the level common at a thundering gallop. Ahead of each rode the officer in command, waiting for the signal which would give the direction of action, right, left, front, or rear. All gunners were mounted, three on the off side of the gun wheel, three on the off side of the limber wheel, and number six riding beside the driver of the swing team.

When the signal was given, the officer in command swept his arm in the prescribed direction, and while the teams were still at the gallop, the gunners vaulted from the saddle, and number six, who of necessity must be big and fast, ran in between the limber wheel and the gun wheel, lifted the trail from the hook, and raising it above his head, whirled the gun so that it pointed in the direction of the supposed enemy. It took bravery to go in between the rolling gun wheels; it took speed to keep up with them while releasing the limber, and it took strength to lift the trail in the air and swing the gun, balanced though the weight be on the axle, through a quarter or half circle.

Morgan had dashed in as soon as he was free of his mount, while the corresponding numbers of the other teams held back for a moment until the speed of the rolling gun had slackened. The consequence was that his gun was firing before the others by a good half minute, and he had clipped fifteen seconds from the garrison record.

That had been on a Saturday. On the Sunday following the games he went on church parade, and after it he went on the north gate as picket.

There was no sentry at that gate; at nightfall the big doors were closed, but on Sundays the civilian population which turned out to see the church parade would try, singly and in groups, to invade the square to see the horses watered and fed. In addition it was calling day, and there was an almost constant stream of civilians asking for brothers, sons, husbands, fathers, sweethearts, or uncles.

It was the picket's unofficial duty to pass the word that so and so was wanted at the north gate. Also, the strip of lawn between the barracks and the road had just yielded a small mound of hay, and every arsenal worker's small son or daughter who passed must turn in for a roll in the hay.

It was a part of Morgan's duty to chase them away. He carried no gun—only a swagger stick. It was a " cushy " job, and Morgan realized that it was a reward for his performance of the day before. His settled melancholy lifted a bit, for it was a June Sunday, with a sky of faintly mottled lavender and blue, such a day as brings out the sweetness of English life.

When the lads and lassies tumbled in the hay, Morgan's pursuit of them turned into a surreptitious lark. He would be free at two, and then he, who ordinarily spent his spare hours lounging in silence on his iron cot, would go for a stroll on Blackheath.

At noon the orderly sergeant sent him a relief, an unheard of courtesy, so that he would get a hot dinner with his battery. When Morgan returned to his post, the relief, a ginger-headed Yorkshire lad, looked at him with an arch wink and said: " Thou hast a way with tha, laad. There was a girl asking for tha."

Morgan, who knew this joke of old, laughed and said, " I don't know a girl in Woolwich."

" Ah, it wasn't a *girl*. It was a laady, a little laady, with a queer get up and streaks of gray in her hair. Didst tha get rabbit for dinner?"

" No. Beef."

" And pickles, I'll warrant tha," said the Yorkshireman in his gentle singsong. " That's the dinner for a Sundah. Hast tha heard aught of the prisoner that's escaped?"

"No."

"There was a Red Cap patrol in the office whilst tha wert gone. There's doings, and the corporal of the guard is like to lose his stripes. The old swett that keeps the coal yard is gone, too, they say, leaving his door open and a herring on the hob. If thou seest aught of either trying to coom in the gate, thou 'rt to hold them. Dost tha know them?"

"I know the old scrounger who kept the coal yard."

"T'other is a little, dark-skinned chap."

A memory stirred in Morgan, and the face of the batman flashed before him.

"Oh, yes. He was in the clink with me. An officer's batman."

"Aye. Perhaps thou'lt hear more. Good luck to tha."

After the other had clattered up the stairs to the dining hall, Morgan wondered about the lady who had asked for him. But he knew the ponderous humor of his comrades, and he recognized this as one of the standard jokes.

He promptly forgot it when a pair of girls between the ages of eight and eleven, instead of running away when he warned them to get off the hay, led him a chase around and around it. When he caught them he walked toward the road with one giggling and kicking child under each arm, and set them over the iron rail.

Almost at his elbow a voice said, "Sir, for a long time I have wish' to thank you. You have sav' my life."

He whirled and looked into a pair of luminous gray eyes, very light gray, flecked with minute streaks of black. They were widely set in a small face that tapered delicately to a fine chin. A winning, haunting smile curved the lips.

She wore black, a simple, broad hat, and a cape which she held wrapped about her by laying her crossed hands on her breast in a curiously nun-like gesture. Her hands were slender, bare, and candidly white. On one sparkled a diamond, set in platinum.

It was an exquisite, exotic figure, more foreign to England and Woolwich than the dark-skinned turbaned rajah in whose honor Saturday's games had been given.

And more, *it was the ghost,* the figure that had been seen standing by the garrison church at midnight, and in the gun park at two in the morning. It was the woman for whose sake he had turned the adjutant's car into the stone wall, and who had disappeared completely from the face of the earth after the accident.

"I have surprise' you," she said with a thrush-like break in her low voice. "You cannot speak? No?"

Slowly his heart settled to a more normal beat, and he raised his hand in salute. Bitter experience had taught him that a soldier must be a soldier first, and two more children were tumbling in the hay. If the garrison sergeant-major should see him standing in converse with a woman while young vandals romped in the ten shillings' worth of hay that lay behind him, he would lose his freedom for the rest of the day, and he wanted that freedom more now than ever before.

The red climbed slowly into his cheeks, and from there to his forehead.

"I am sorry," he said. "I have—my duty. This afternoon at two I shall be free, and if—"

"If it is to save the nation that you must chase the children, I will excuse you," she said with a delicious laugh. "Perhaps, later, I shall walk out with a soldier, like a servant maid? Yes, I shall do worse things before I die. I shall meet you on this road where it runs into the *Champs de Mars* where you performe' so excellently yesterday. Go!"

With the scarlet flooding his face and even his hands, Morgan turned and pursued the two imps about the hay pile. He heard a low chuckle, and shame almost overwhelmed him. When he had captured them and set them outside the rail the woman was gone, but far up the white road by the gun park he saw her small dark figure.

She was walking slowly, keeping the middle of the road, apparently unconscious of the curious glances cast at her by the passers-by. At a bend in the road she disappeared under the shade of a pair of elm trees, and Morgan went back to his post by the gate.

"Ah!" he said with a sudden shock, for it had come to him suddenly that her ap-

pearance might have something to do with Pearsley's diamonds.

He still carried them in the old cigarette box, buttoned into his tunic pocket, for he had not found any safer place. If he concealed them in his section room, some energetic room orderly might find them. It was curious how he had forgotten them.

Pearsley had given them to him and charged him with his dying breath to deliver them to Vine, who lived at Winchester. But what had happened was so outside all experience, and so heavy had been the weight of indifference on him as he lay in the clink, that he had never looked inside the battered Capstan box.

Pearsley had said that they were diamonds, and of great value, and that they were to go to the only surviving chum. But it was just possible that this queer, beautiful, little woman knew of their existence, and knew somehow or other that he had them.

He shrugged his shoulders, and for the first time in many months whistled. Within him there was a deep stirring, a welling up of feelings long suppressed. It seemed as if he might be happy again.

When, just before two he was withdrawn from his post, he dropped into the nearest section room and gave his shoes and buttons an extra rub. His own room lay near the east gate, and there was no reason why he should sacrifice the time it would take to go there, for he had his bandolier and his stick, and Pearsley's stones were safer where they were than in any place he could find within the garrison.

A gunner in the Horse is no mean figure in his "walking out" costume, and as Morgan crossed toward the gate, with his figure made even taller by the heightening effect of strapped-down trousers, the orderly sergeant, sitting in his little bunk by the gate, said, "'E'll 'ave a stripe within a month if 'e minds 'imself."

Morgan saw the woman at the fork in the road where a path, scarred and rutted by the passing gun teams, led off to that part of the common used for gun drill. She stood under a tree, leaning against the trunk, and when he was far down the road he could see the two small, white hands crossed on the breast in that nun-like gesture.

As he drew near she came slowly forward to meet him. He stopped, saluted, and she came to his side and put one hand on his elbow.

"So," she said. "Now we are as a soldier and his sweetheart should be, except I shall not walk as close to you as I have seen many doing.

"I have heard," she went on, looking up at him as they drew over to the footpath, "that the serving maids pay the soldiers to take them for a walk. I have heard that a sergeant gets, oh, I don't know how many francs it is! Is that true?"

"Yes. Not so much now as it was before the war. Tommy didn't get as much then, and if he went out with his girl, she usually had to pay the shot."

"And how much?" she asked, with a tilt of the hat brim so that he got a flash of the wide, gray eyes, "is it that I must pay to have the tallest soldier? And the one who has performe' so beautifully yesterday? And," her voice deepened, "the one who has save' my life?"

Morgan looked down at her with his heart beating high and his throat tight.

"So it *was* you," he said. "You were in the lane after all."

"Yes. Why not?"

"I thought you must be a ghost. I was leaning forward to switch on the lights when I looked ahead and saw you standing in the middle of the lane. You did not move, and I had to take the wall. But when I went back, you had disappeared, and the adjutant swore there was no one there, and that I was either drunk or mad. He put me in the clink."

"The clink?"

"Prison. The barracks jail. I was there for a week and would have been longer if they hadn't needed me to 'perform.' I am glad to know some one *was* there."

Her hand left his arm, and she walked a few slow paces with her head bent. Looking down at her he could see the tiny steel buckled shoes appearing and disappearing under the hem of a skirt much longer than he thought the fashion. He saw, too, as she tipped her head forward,

that she was quite gray. When she looked up he saw that the luminous eyes were swimming with tears.

"I am sorry," she said. "That you should suffer for me is a great pity, although a woman loves to have a man suffer for her. So would I, if you were not the man you are, my frien'. That adjutant," she said, "he is a pig! Sometimes I think all the English are pigs! No?"

"I thought so myself at one time," answered Morgan with a laugh. "Some of them are. So are some of my people, and so, mademoiselle, are some of yours."

"You are a Canadian, no?"

"American."

"I thought so! I have seen your people in the war. I am French and my name is Virginie Eloise St. Alary. I have heard recently that a newspaper in Paris conducted an inquiry, asking thousands of girls of marriageable age of what nationality they should wish their husbands to be. And I believe, sir, they all wanted Americans.

"Ah, it was cruel to put you in jail for saving a life. The adjutant is a pig! What a country! Walls, walls, walls! Everywhere I go I see walls. What is behind all of them?"

"Nothing is behind most of these," answered Morgan, pointing to those stretches of wall that lined the road, "cabbage gardens, and rings for exercising and schooling horses. They might as well be open, but it seems that when an Englishman does anything to a bit of ground he has to put something around it—a hedge or a wall, before he can plough it in comfort.

"That one yonder has a pond back of it. It is a haunted pond. A soldier was drowned there swimming horses, and since then no one likes to go near it."

They walked in silence for a time, past the rotunda where, in the museum, lay Napoleon's traveling kitchen. The faint veil of cloud drew away and the sun came out strong and warm. The white road seemed to slip by under Morgan's feet like smooth, slow water.

There was a charm to his companion that stole over him; after a time he set it down to her grace. In spite of her smallness she was delicately mature, and her grace was the grace of a woman, but with it was the winsomeness of a child. She walked now with one hand on his arm and the other on her hip, in a pose that was curiously theatrical but at the same time thrilling. The cape fluttered in the soft breeze, and he saw that she wore a dress of some soft, draped material which he at first thought to be black, but discovered in the strong light to be a very dark gray which shaded through an infinity of degrees to smoke color at her throat.

"When I first saw you in the lane," he said, "you were standing with your back to me. Your head was bent, and it seemed to me that you were—crying. It seemed to me at the moment—that moment when I thought I was going to run you down, that you must be sobbing, and that you must be very unhappy not to hear the machine coming behind you."

"I was," she said simply.

They strolled in silence until they came to a street full of more dun walls, topped with heavy green. It was a street of villas, detached and semi-detached, with ugly gates, but he knew that it led toward Blackheath, and he turned northward.

She walked silently and steadily beside him, and the unreasoning happiness that had begun with the morning grew to be so strong in him that it became almost a pain. He walked softly for fear of breaking the spell.

"They call you a ghost in the barracks," he went on after a time, "because the sentries have seen you at queer hours of the night—sometimes by the garrison church, sometimes in the gun park, and sometimes on the main parade. You have come to be almost a superstition in the garrison."

"They should not go to bed so early," she said with that delectable chuckle. "That is what makes it seem so strange to them. To-day I have arisen early—at noon. At home I go abroad at night and no one thinks of it. You are very brave?"

"I don't know," he answered, looking down in the suddenly upturned face. "I hope so."

"You are. You must be to do as you did yesterday. Yesterday I stand and

watch while you perform. In front of me are two trumpeter boys. They are like little roosters, with their spurs.

"They talk of you, and though I must listen to know what they say, for they murder their own tongue, I learn that what you do is very brave. One of them is a great admirer and friend, and he says that you give him cigarettes, and that you will give him a radio soon."

"That must be Hector MacDonald," said Morgan with a laugh. "Yes, we're pals, Hector and I. When I first came into this man's army I used to get hot at the way the corporals and sergeants talk to soldiers. I don't like to be sworn at, and for a time I swore back. Then I went to clink.

"But after a time Hector took me in hand—one day he drew me aside and said, 'See 'ere, soldier, you mustn't mind wot any one says to you 'ere.' After that I got along better. It was time—I had been in a year. They say they tame lions in the British army, and I believe it."

"What are you in your own country?"

"Nothing," said Morgan after a pause, and the bitterness settled down on him again. She looked up quickly and was silent for a long time. The end of the street began to lighten, and he knew that they were coming out upon Blackheath.

"Was it a woman?" she asked.

"No."

"There is nothing else that can make a man so young so unhappy. I think it was a woman."

"No."

"But you are a gentleman in your own country?"

"Yes, *mademoiselle*," he replied after a pause. "Some day when you tell me your trouble I will tell you mine."

"Ah," she said. "That is why I take my courage in my hand and speak to you. I know you are brave, and I think you are chivalrous. I have heard an English lady say, 'For bravery give me the Canadian; for beauty give me the Australian; for chivalry give me the American.' It sounds like a speech, and the next moment I expect to hear her talk about the brotherhood of nations, but it may be true. No?

"At any rate you have save' my life, and I have made up my mind to ask you to help me. Sir, I was a rich woman, but now I have nothing but the clothes you now see, this ring, and twenty pounds in money."

Morgan groaned inwardly and the black pall settled. After all, it was only a begging game. Their stride faltered and for a few paces they walked out of step while he gazed at the ground in intense bitterness.

She looked up at him and said: "No. I do not beg from a soldier, so you shall have your cigarettes, and your tea and your buns. It is not that, and I beg of you to brighten that sad face. This other woman, I think she must have said what I have just said to make you look so unhappy. This afternoon we shall stroll on Blackheath like a soldier and his girl, and when we have stroll' and had tea, I will tell you.

"But in the meantime, sir, for the love of God, try to look happy. Otherwise you shame me."

CHAPTER V.

ON BLACKHEATH.

THE heath lay before them, a big, faintly rolling expanse, scarred with little gravel gullies, and spotted with patches of black broom. The fine weather had brought people out, and it was dotted with strolling couples, groups of boys playing football, mothers and nurses with perambulators, and even a grown man flying a kite.

The distant brick walls and the heavy green of the trees that edged it, the spire of a church hidden in one of its hollows, and the far roofs of Blackheath village gave it all a quaint and archaic air. It touched Morgan, and at sight of it the load of unhappiness that had descended upon him again, lifted.

The woman at his side moved like a bird among the heavy matrons.

"I love this place," she said. "Always when I am here I expect to see a stage coach or a curricle on the roads. It is old-fashione'. It is like basque bodices. It has seen much, too, this old place. I have

read when I was at school that it was here Charles Stuart passed through Cromwell's army on his way back to London."

"And farther back than that," said Morgan, "Jack Cade camped here."

"Jack Cade? Him I have not met."

"He was a radical—years and years before Cromwell. He organized a revolt."

"He did not succeed?"

"No."

"He would not—in England. At home I hate them, but in England I wish them success."

This so fits the views of all aliens in England that Morgan laughed silently in appreciation. That was her secret, he thought, as they turned across toward Greenwich Park — she was so completely satisfactory that a man did not wish to express it—he was simply content to walk with her and be happy. Those queer streaks of gray in her hair added to her charm without subtracting from her youth. The rest of her was young.

They spoke scarcely at all as they walked the paths of the great park. At the site of the Roman Villa where a spring still trickles over a worn, carved lip into a great stone basin, they paused, but turned away again without voicing the queer melancholy that antiquity brings. At that hallowed tree, known as Elizabeth's Bower, they paused again and gazed, and at the site of Greenwich Castle. At the observatory she spoke.

"Behold!" she said. "It is where Time lives."

Under a grove of oaks, tables had been set in front of a booth. Here they had tea, bread, thin slices of ham, and watercress. At the end of it she smoked a cigarette with delicate enjoyment. Her companion watched her, enchanted by the movement of the slim hands. Later she caught his gaze upon the smooth strands of black hair streaked with gray that showed about her ears.

"It is true," she said. "I am an old woman. I am an ol' maid. Soon I shall wear a cap. No?"

Morgan shook his head.

"Not on your life. Something tells me that you are one year younger than I am!"

She laughed.

"Ah! You are the one medium I should like to believe. But no! If I were a midinette I should have danced on the festival of St. Anne years ago."

"I don't believe it."

"What a kind soldier it is! And how do you know?"

"I know. I have a hunch."

He leaned back in lazy contentment and nodded to confirm what he had said. She fixed her luminous eyes, partly closed, on him and brushed the faint powdering of ashes from her knee.

"I, too, am a medium, sir. I shall tell you that you are—twenty-one. No? Ah, I see I am right. A young, gloomy soul for such broad shoulders. You should have a care, for you could hurt others as I might hurt a fly. Ah," she finished at the pain that flashed across his face. "I have touche' you. I am so, so sorry!"

She watched him and stretched out one hand as if to touch his in sympathy. He shook his shoulders as if fighting off an invisible foe, and his face cleared.

"Perhaps," she said while her voice deepened to its thrilling contralto, "I am clairvoyant in truth? And I have divine' your trouble? No? But we do not speak of it until we are out on the heath again. It is time to go soon. The guests are leaving and the host is closing the house. Come."

Morgan looked about him and saw that they were the only ones left at the tables. A maid bustled about them, and he could see the park attendants walking along the paths and peering into the more secluded places and warning the occupants of them that it was ten minutes to five and the park was to close at five.

When he had paid his check they walked back out upon the heath. There was a low bank of cloud in the west, and the air was thickening, but there was enough light to illumine faintly some of the distant walls, and to roof the village itself with silver slates.

The woman led him now, and they walked to the northern edge of the plain, where it was nearly deserted. Here, along a walk were benches at long intervals, placed under gas lamps. At one she paused

and seated herself. Morgan sat down by her, and she looked at him with her color heightening, and the wistful smile curving her lips.

"I will tell you now why I have spoken to you and what it is I will ask you to do for me. But first I will ease your fear that I am begging. No! It is true that there is very little between me and starvation, but before I would beg, I would go to work! Am I not a radical?

"But you must smoke. I have discovere' that men will not listen to a story unless they smoke. *Bien!* Now I will tell you.

"I want you to find a soldier for me who, I think, is in your garrison, and when you fin' him you must put your big hands on him and tell him he must do what you say.

"His name is Pearsley."

A dull shock went through Morgan, and one hand flew to that pocket which held the battered cigarette box. It was there, hard and lumpy. He stole a glance at the woman beside him. She sat with her eyes closed and her lower lip drawn in.

"That Pearsley," she said. "He have done me a great wrong. You know him?"

"I did," said Morgan cautiously.

He saw her start, and felt the luminous gaze on him.

"Why do you say, 'I did'? Is he gone? He is not at Woolwich?"

"No. He has been—gone, almost a month."

"*Mon Dieu!*" she whispered. "Oh, my bad luck! Will it never stop?"

He could see that she was close to tears. One clenched hand was pressed hard against her lips to stop their trembling. Morgan put out a hand in sympathy, but she drew away quickly.

"Is it far where he is gone?"

"Yes."

It was on his tongue to tell her that Pearsley was dead, but he checked the sympathy that welled up in him. Pearsley's death and his charge had moved him deeply, and he would be true to the old soldier until it was proved to him that he could do otherwise with honor. This woman had touched him deeply, too; she had somehow with her daintiness lifted the weight of gloom that had lain on him.

But as he cast back in his mind over the queer and touching situation in which Pearsley had found himself, and the curious way in which it was woven in with his own life, he shook his head. It seemed as if there never could be any change which would make him violate his word to the old soldier.

"Ah, well," she said after a time, drawing the cape about her, and laying her hands crosswise in that nun's gesture of resignation, "it is a great shame, just when I have foun' such a champion. I must begin again to hunt him. And you will give me a word to let me know where he is gone?"

"Pearsley," he answered gently, "is dead."

"Dead!"

Again she pressed her hand against her lips, and a shiver went over her.

"I should have told you at once," said Morgan contritely, "but there are circumstances, peculiar things that prevented my doing it. You are the second person who has spoken his name in my hearing, and each time, I think—I am sorry," he concluded firmly. "I cannot tell you any more."

"Then you knew him?" she asked, with a flash of her eyes. "That is, you knew him well?"

"No. We met in the barracks jail."

"The jail! And will you tell me, tall soldier, why you and he were in jail?"

"Yes," said Morgan, after a careful pause. "Why not? I was put in for what is called dumb insolence. I was so hot at the adjutant that I knew that if I spoke I would get into trouble, so I didn't speak. I got into trouble anyway; they have a punishment for every crime. I was caught for dumb insolence. Pearsley was in for overstaying his leave. We used to see each other in the exercise yard."

"You know a great deal about him," she said after a pause, "but it is yours to keep if you will. I shall not beg—even for knowledge of a Pearsley. Now, I must find where he died and who was with him when he died. And, sir, I think it may have been you."

Morgan shook his head and got to his feet. He looked gloomily down at her.

The thick air and the coming night had made the twilight like night, and she looked like a flat, oil painting. He spread out his hands with a hopeless gesture.

"It's no use," he said. "Nothing can come of talk between us about Pearsley. I had hoped that we might come to know each other, for you have made me happier than I can tell you. I suppose that I shall never see you again, and that I must even be on my guard against you."

"Pouf!" she said with a gentle laugh. "It is always so with a boy. He thinks wherever the street turns, it is the end. If you will sit down again, my big, melancholy friend, I will tell why I am so interest' in the soldier Pearsley, and his diamonds.

"I should say *my* diamonds, for they are mine. I have tol' you my name. You have been in France?"

"No, not since I was a child."

"Then you have never heard my name, St. Alary?"

"No." He spoke apologetically, for in spite of his shock and his suspicion, there was that in her quiet manner that told him it was a name worth knowing.

"It is an old name in France and an honored one. There is a *château* where I live' as a child. It is near the Luxembourg border. In 1914 the war comes, and my family go to Paris. They do not know how long it will last, but they do not think very long. They will come back, and in the meantime those six diamonds which have been in my family for over three hundred year', they will be safer put up in a little turret, under a roof tile, than in Paris.

"My father, although he may think the war will be over soon, remembers 1870 when the Germans come into Paris, and will take no chances. The turret is of stone, and it will resist fire. He is prepar' for that. It may be one year, it may be ten, but some time he will come back and there will be his jewels.

"But he did not know about these English signallers. In 1914 the British army is near my *château*. They send their signallers up into that turret, and there they find these six diamonds. And they have kept them since.

"After the war, sir, I come back to my old home. It is there—the turret, although it is much battere', and the rest of the house"—she spread her hands—"it is nothing. My father is dead of a broken heart, my brother in battle, and my sister is kille' by Big Bertha. She was a devout, my sister, and she is struck in her church.

"For a long time I do not know what to do. I find the tile is broken, and I find there is a small box there, and wires, and on them are the broad arrow. That shows they are English.

"My people tell me that no one has been in the turret since the English go up there early in the war. So I think they must have discovere' the diamonds, and have taken them.

"I go to Cartier in Paris and I tell him my trouble, but he shake his head and say it is a hard trail to follow. But he will do it. For years nothing happens, then suddenly I hear a soldier has come into a small shop in London and tol' them he has six diamonds which he will sell. He is followe' to Woolwich, and the detective, he learns from other soldiers the name of this man. It is Pearsley.

"In the meantime my little money is going, until I have nothing but the gems. If I can get them, I shall live in comfort until I shall die, but if I do not, I shall either have to marry, sir, or work, or die. I think I shall die before I work, and work before I marry.

"So I have come to this place two weeks ago, and I have no way of finding Pearsley. I ask at the gate, and they say he is on leave. And they are very rude to me.

"So I say to myself that I must find me a soldier who is *not* rude, and who can make M. Pearsley listen to reason. I have foun' my soldier, but *helas,* I have lost Pearsley."

A lamplighter came suddenly out of the dusk, and kindled the lamp above her head. In that light her face was invisible, but the crossed hands were eloquent. Morgan bent his head in thought and when the man had gone he said: "But why did you not go to an officer? Why did you not go to the general? He would have sent for Pearsley and forced him to give them up."

"Hah! What an innocent! Do you

not think Pearsley would have known? Do you think he would have said: 'Yes, *mon general*, here are twenty thousand pounds of jewels.' Ah, no! The man who would talk to Pearsley must be a detective and work as a detective works. That is the advice I get from Cartier.

"It does not sound plausible? No? I am sorry, sir, but that is the way I have seen it, and that is the way I have done. And I shall not change."

Morgan smiled.

"Charming as you are, I will tell you frankly it does not sound—reasonable. I think it would be wisest for you to go to the general now, tell him your trouble, and let him follow the case up for you. I beg that you will do that."

"I will not." She moved and drew the cape closer about her. "My word, it is dark suddenly, and cold. It seems to me as if we were in a small boat, you and I. That is this bench and the fog about is the ocean."

Morgan nodded, for her fancy was just what had been in his own mind. The fog had settled so thick that he could not see six feet before him. The lamp cast a smoky halo about them, but beyond was a steamy darkness.

"Perhaps you think I am strange. I hope that I am. I have hear' that in your country one man of business will travel several days to see another man of business. He wishes to buy several millions of francs in boots, let us say, or toothbrushes. They meet. One says he will buy so many millions of francs of boots or toothbrushes, and the other will say: 'All right. You shall have them to-morrow.'

"That is not the way in this part of the world, my frien'. If I went to your general, even if I succeed in getting his ear, I shall have to wait a year before he will do anything, then I wait ten year for the government to turn the diamonds over to me.

"No. I ask nothing more of you. I shall go on by myself, and, sir, I think I shall succeed. During the war I have not denie' myself one small lump of sugar. People have said I should be damned, but I have not been."

"And I," answered Morgan, feeling the lumpy box next his skin, "still think you had best go to the general. If not to him to a solicitor. If not to a solicitor, to Scotland Yard."

"The police!" There was a world of scorn in her voice.

There was a faint footfall behind him, and he turned on the bench. Above him towered a dim shape in the fog with an arm upraised to strike.

He sprang to his feet with a hoarse cry of rage, and raised his arm to shield himself. His head was struck a glancing blow, and a streak of pain shot through his shoulder as the blackjack ended its sweep there.

"Damn you!" he cried in a frenzy. "You hussy!"

The woman had disappeared as mysteriously as she had appeared in the morning. He found that he stood alone and he made out three assailants. There might be more.

He stood with his arms bent and his elbows out, but when the biggest of the three rushed he did not strike. He seemed to be chained and fumbled at the man with his hands. He pushed him back, but he came again.

"For God's sake, don't touch me!" cried Morgan. "*Don't make me strike you!*" In spite of the rage at his betrayal at the woman's hands, he did not fight. The attack, which had been scattering, now assumed a strategical shape.

One tall figure bulked on his right, another, not so tall, but still powerful, was on his left, and as he looked over his shoulder he saw in the nimbus of light a short man on whose dark face the light played. He recognized him as that batman who had been in the clink with him and who had made his escape over a coal pile.

Morgan put out his hands and doubled his fists as they came at him, but when they were within striking distance, his courage seemed to fail; he met the two before him, body to body, and struggled with them ineffectually, while the man behind him ran in with the blackjack raised.

Morgan groaned. He knew they were after the stones. They, too, had got wind of them through the dark-skinned man who had been in the clink with him. He remembered the queer voice in which the latter

had spoken when he came upon him in his own cell with his hand on Morgan's tunic.

The charge which Pearsley had laid on him was from its peculiar nature sacred, but he could not fight for it. Again he groaned and said in agony: "*Don't make me hit you!*"

Suddenly the woman was at his side again. There was the spat of a small pistol, and the two melted away before him. She faced about and the weapon in her hand covered the batman.

"No! You shall not!"

For a moment the five were motionless, then her small hand found Morgan's and drew him away.

"Come. *Pick me up and run!*"

He bent and lifted her and ran until a patch of broom clogged his steps.

"Stop here," she whispered. "Let me down, and hide. They will go past us."

He set her down and they crouched in the wet brush. There were blundering steps about them, and low-pitched, earnest voices. She pressed the blunt automatic into his hand and whispered.

"If they come again, you must shoot. Do not be afraid. My word, but you do not fight at all—as if you were asleep. You do not know how I am surprise'."

CHAPTER VI.

MORGAN DECIDES.

THE gas lamp was like a ball of gray light. The steps drew close to them at times, always a huddle of them, for the attacking party did not dare separate in the fog. Morgan heard his name spoken in a low voice and coupled with a curse. Once some one said: "That damned Yank!"

"It is you they compliment so," she whispered in his ear.

In time the steps went away and did not return. Morgan drew a long breath and stretched his limbs. He was deeply ashamed of the part he had played, and all at sea as to what part his companion might have played. He had obeyed her when she appeared at his side, out of desperation. She arose, too, and her hands went to her head.

"I have had an accident," she said. "I have lost my hat. It is lucky I have two. Did you know them?"

His heart thumped and he countered by asking: "Did you?"

"No. I have never in my life seen them. When they came I withdrew, sir, and covere' my eyes so that I might not see how you would handle them. I was thinking you would take two of them and crack their heads together. But, no!

"After a time I hear you groan, and when I look I see you fighting as if you had chains on you. If it had not been for me—ah!" she finished with a long sigh, and he saw the small, ghostly face turn suddenly up toward him. "Ah, I think I see! I think I know suddenly why they attack' you. But I do not know why you do not fight."

"I killed a man boxing," he said in a harsh voice. "Since then I have watched myself as if I were dynamite. I have a hot temper, and when I strike, I strike harder than I mean to. I never speak to a man without praying he will not lay a hand on me. Time and again people have wanted me to fight or to box or to wrestle, *but, so help me, God, I shall never strike another man as long as I live!*"

She looked up at him for a long minute, then sighed again, softly, and nodded.

"So that is your trouble. I knew I could not make a mistake. At first I think you must be a coward, but then when I think again, I know it cannot be so. I see you running in between the rolling wheels, and I hear the trumpter boys say you are a great man.

"That is why I come to your rescue. I think if we walk to our left, sir, and always keep just close enough so that we can see the lamps in the fog we shall get to that road out which we came."

Morgan could not speak. It was a relief to find that she was not a crook, that she had not betrayed him; so great a relief that the words would not come. And he had spoken of a thing buried so deep in his heart that it was a sheer physical pain to wrench it out.

He put his arm about her to steady her as they stumbled over the uneven surface of

the heath. Even in the dim light her hair was quite silvery, and he wondered again at the curious anomaly of the firm, young body and the gray hair.

"So," she said in a musing tone, "that is why you have left your frien's and your country and have enlist' in the British army."

"Yes."

"Such a lonesome soldier! In my country, and I think in your country, a gentleman can be a private soldier and still not suffer, but in England—it must have been frightful!"

"At times. In the main it is good for a man. I have learned patience, and that is what makes the Tommy the great soldier he is."

"Yes. That is true. I shall never be patient, *never!* Not if I am ground into the earth! You must accept trouble to be patient, and I shall never accept it! Sir, I think Pearsley have given you those gems. Why else should they attack you? Am I right?"

After a pause Morgan said: "Yes." He stopped and faced her.

"Pearsley was an old man—one of three chums. There was Vine, Grill, and Pearsley. They were all three soldiers' orphans and they grew up together in a home for soldiers' orphans. When they got to be old enough, ten, I think, they went into the army as trumpeters, and later when they were seventeen or so, they became regular soldiers. They went together to India and served there I don't know how many years.

"But all the time they were chums—the kind of chums that the King's Regulations provides for when it is said that a man shall not be separated from his chum against his wish. I have an idea they tested that provision more than once, and always they kept together.

"By the time the war broke out they were old soldiers, almost ready to retire, but they went to France. Vine was terribly wounded and crippled in the first year, and he was discharged. He went to Winchester after a long stretch in hospital, where his officer set him up in a little tobacco shop. He is bent almost double, and has to be lifted in and out of his chair.

"Pearsley did not tell me whether it was before or after Vine's discharge that the stones were found. At any rate, Pearsley was kept in France along with Crill until long after the armistice. Then they came back to Woolwich, and Crill was drowned swimming horses.

"That left Pearsley, and the loss of his comrades seemed to weigh on his mind. He had been a model soldier, but all at once he became erratic, bad-tempered, and even slovenly. On account of his good record he had some leeway, but the second time he overstayed his leave for a week he was put in the clink.

"I was there—we were in the exercise yard one afternoon and Pearsley was walking to and fro with his head down when all of a sudden he put both hands to his breast and said: 'I feel bloody queer, mate.' Then he fell down, and when I got to him, he whispered to me that he knew he was dying, and that there was one thing that a young soldier could do for an old one.

"He told me about the three chums, and he gave me a packet and said that I must take it to Harry Vine, in Winchester. He was terribly in earnest, and he made me swear that I would do it by all that I held holy. But it was more the idea of the three chums that made me say that I would.

"And, *mademoiselle,* I think I shall. That is why I beg you to put your affairs into the hands of some responsible person, for much as you have charmed me, I shall go to Winchester when I can get leave, and give that packet to Harry Vine.

"Then your man from Scotland Yard can take charge. I shall have done my duty."

By this time the hard road was under their feet and they turned toward Woolwich. The woman walked silently for a time, and then laughed—a cool, confident, friendly laugh.

"So," she said lightly, "that is your answer."

"With regrets, yes."

"And my reward? I have been *so* agreeable."

Morgan swept her up in his arms and kissed her lightly.

"Ah, now I am in truth a soldier's girl.

And I believe it is your way of saying no. I could be a siren, sir, as the women spies are supposed to be, and steal them from you when you are asleep. But, no! For that I should have to make you drunk, and I do not like drunken men. *But you will give those stones to me, nevertheless!*"

She was standing close to him, so close that her hair, beaded with fog, brushed his neck. He felt the pressure of something against his body, and realized suddenly that it was the pistol.

He stood still, and smothered a laugh that came to his lips. But she was different; she had shown no signs of hesitation when she had fired before, and he thought suddenly that it was within possibility that she would fire again.

"Through the gloom came the sound of slow footsteps, the heavy, regular beat of a constable. He felt her become suddenly tense, and she whispered to him: "A crook of my finger, sir, and you are dead. I should not hesitate, and in this darkness I should escape. You will not speak to this officer, I am sure."

"No."

They stood silent, while the heavy tread passed within ten yards of them. When it had drawn away, the woman withdrew from him, but the muzzle of the weapon was still pressed close to his body.

"I am quick," she said rapidly, "and if you should try to sweep my arm away I should kill you. Sir, I will count five, and at the end of that time you shall give me what is mine."

"God knows I want to," Morgan said, while a cold thrill passed over him. "It would be hard for me to make you understand. There are other circumstances of which I have not told you that make it all the more binding—my promise.

"*Mademoiselle,* you will be the rainbow of my days—I mean it. I can never forget you. Two or three times in a life one hears a song or sees a play or reads a story that one cannot forget. That is how it has been with me this afternoon. It is the truth," he said earnestly.

"Bah!" she answered, drawing away so that she should be outside the sweep of his arm. "Am I to listen to you and your boy's philosophy? You want to trap me; you think I will follow your talk, and when I am most intereste' you will get my gun, *hein?*

"No! I shall count five, sir, and at the end if you do not give up what is mine, I shall shoot."

A clock in the village began to strike, and the notes, some heavy and some thin as the mysterious currents of fog changed them, settled like snow about them. She counted with the strokes of the clock. "One, two, three—"

"But, *mademoiselle.*"

"No buts, sir! Will you or will you not?"

"I will not. Neither will I run."

"*Five!*" she said, but there was no explosion of the pistol. She stood silent, and intense for a full minute, then spread her arms in a gesture.

"I cannot. It is too nice a boy. You have won, sir, for this time. But we shall meet. And when I have foun' another champion who is bigger than you, *ah!* It will be a battle of giants! I thank you for the tea an' the pleasant stroll. Good night, *boy!*"

With the last stroke of the clock she was gone. Morgan stood, staring off into the fog. He could not follow, for somehow it would be bad taste.

He drew a long breath, and turning, went back on the Woolwich Road. He would never see her again, and that was sad for the reason that she had pleased him deeply, and all the time he had been with her there were pictures in the back of his mind of the pleasant times they were to have together, theaters in London, dinners in Soho, and bus rides on pleasant Sundays to the small Kentish villages, or up the river to Richmond.

These things would never be, but the spark of happiness which she had kindled in him, while it sank as he went back toward barracks, did not go out. He whistled as he walked, and when he went in past the sentry at the main gate, he, who had gained a reputation in his room for settled spells of surly silence, said: "Good night, mate!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Poor Fish

By JACK CASEY

I'LL hafta admit that the first time I saw "Halibut" Haines I figured him a poor fish. After spending the best part of your life calling balls and strikes in the big league in the summer, and trying to pound football into a lotta college skulls in the fall, you ain't liable to sweeten to a bird who slides up to you and says, "Art thee the football mentor?"

Honest to gosh I thought that bird was showin' me a good time, and for a second I was ready to part his nose with a left-hand jab, and I gotta beaut', when he takes off his hat and stands bowed down like the erring boy in the film come back to the old folks again. Even then I wasn't sure. There was that thing he said, that—mentor. I been called a lotta things in my time, but this was a new one, and for a blazing second I wasn't sure whether this goof was cursin' or insultin' me right in my teeth.

"Mentor," I think fast to myself. "Mentor! That's got somethin' to do with mentality just as sure as my name's Curley and I'm red-headed, and this poor fish is indicating that I'm either all bone or shy in the loft. I'll just let one go from the hip and he'll need his ears to smell with," and my hand was rarin' to go when he says as sweet as a honeydew melon, "If thee art the football guide, I should like a trial with thine eleven."

"If you mean my eleven boot, I'll ride you right outa the park," I says, not liking that "thee" stuff a little bit.

"I was not referring to thy boot," says he, "although I see 'tis ample."

Crowdin' me, see what I mean. First my skull, now my dogs.

"You mean I got big feet," I says, droping the football I had in my right hand and putting my mitts on my hips.

"I took thy word for the size," says he.

"Well, they're elevens," I says, mad as a revenue raider who knows there's stuff in the house and can't find it.

"All right," says he, "shoot eleven."

You could have knocked me over with a brick chimney. From skypilot talk he jumps to craps. "Whaddye mean, shoot eleven?" I says for a feeler.

He pulls out a pair of African jumping beans and rattles 'em in his hands. "Dost thee crave action for thy bank roll?" says he.

"Not just now," I says, it not being according to Hoyle for a football coach to get that chummy with a student. "But thee needn't worry, I'll get thee for thy sox one of thine days." If there's one thing I can do it's roll the bones. I can hand a bird his own language, too, when I want to, and not bat an eyelash doing it. "How dost thee like thy lingo?" I says, rubbin' it in.

"Not so good, from thee," says he. "Thee hasn't the face to go with it."

"Meanin'," I says, doublin' my fists, "that I lack a saintly look to my pan?"

"Exactly," says he. "Thee hast intelligence but not benevolence."

Well, I couldn't get mad at that, it being brains that makes the world go round and not a sweet-cookie expression. Still, I didn't like this church-talking dude for a little bit.

"Just how far are you going?" I says, sticking my chin into his face and itching to put my fists there.

"I understood thee was seeking material for thy football squad?" says he.

"I am," says I, giving him the up and down; "but where's the material?"

That should have knocked him for a row of clam flats, but it didn't.

"Thee are gazing at it," says he calmly.

"Where'd you ever play?" I says, sneering at him.

"That's the funny part of it," he says, twirling his cap and smiling; "I never did play."

"You never played football?" I echoed, "and you're goin' out for Centerville. Don't you know we beat Harvard last year?"

"Sure, I saw the game," says he. "It was the first game I ever saw."

"An' after seein' Boswell Mullings beat Harvard single-handed, you figure you'll come down here, take his place, I suppose, 'n' do it all over again this year 'n' you never even played before?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say that," says he, "but thee never can tell."

And right then and there Halibut Haines said *something*. Put it down in your notebook, brother—*thee never can tell.*

Now don't get me wrong. Don't run away with the idea that Halibut Haines put on a football unie and went right out on the old gridiron and proved a Dick Merriwell. Would that they came that way, then us coaches might not be so continually bordering on a nut factory. Halibut Haines took three dives at the tackling dummy and then a swing at me when I laughed him foolish after every muff. He missed the dummy wider than fielders do Babe Ruth's home runs.

"Thee art some rotten," I says, and wigwagged to Eddie Maloney, third team coach, to add this numbell to his brainless squad, which is the bonafide label for third squads in all colleges.

No, Halibut Haines didn't step onto the ancient gridiron and start performing miracles. Instead, he made himself look foolish, and I'd like to have died at the way he got sore when I gave him the razzberry. I'll be frank. Right then I didn't like him, and was tickled pink to see him skin his nose trying to nab the dummy, which is kindergarten stuff for a football player. But, say, the day came when I kissed that bird—kissed him right on his pan, and would have battled Dempsey had he dared to make a crack about my having done so.

Did Halibut Haines become a football player? Oh, baby. Ask me is Ma Talmadge proud of her daughters.

II.

To begin with, he wasn't Halibut Haines to me the day I speak of. I didn't even know he was nicknamed after a fish. He was Henry Hurlburt Haines, and even that I didn't know till later, my not taking any interest in him after I passed him along to Maloney. He didn't look like football material, you see, so I didn't care if his name was Ford or Studebaker the minute I found it out.

I was facing a tough year. We had trimmed Harvard the year before, and that win had made Centerville and *me*. I got more writeups after that game than Bella

Donna has plasters. Every football writer in the country gave me credit for having developed Boswell Mullings, who won the game, and I got offers from big colleges everywhere. That was just what I wanted, too, but things broke tough for me. I was angling for a three years' contract from one of the big three—Harvard, Yale, or Princeton — and wanted twenty-five thousand dollars a year. I don't think I'm worth it, or any football coach for that matter, but they're getting the dough right now, so I figured, while riding the crest of fame on the Harvard win, I'd horn in for a cut of it. I'm only getting four thousand dollars a year at Centerville, a little school in the South, and, when I get six offers of three-year contracts averaging from ten thousand to twenty thousand dollars a year, I see where I'm going to be sitting pretty at the end of three years with a fortune in the bank and maybe touring Europe to while away my spare time.

But, just as I'm considering which one of the contracts to grab, a friend of mine wises me up that Harvard is going to come through with a two-years' contract at maybe twenty-eight thousand dollars a year, which is going to hurt awful. Right away I get dizzy and pass up everything else, and then, when all the worth-while colleges have signed up their coaches for the coming year, I get word that the Harvard faculty has decided to stay with the coach they got, and I'm completely outa luck.

Of course I don't say nothing, and when the Centerville faculty, thinking they're going to lose me, begs me to stay, and offers me an increase to seven thousand five hundred dollars a year, which is two thousand five hundred dollars more than they can afford, I'm on the level and tell 'em I'll stay, but won't take more than five grand and I sign for one year. But I'm sore at myself. I'm sore because I figure it one of those opportunity-comes-once-in-a-lifetime things and it knocked at my joint to find nobody home.

Had I made Boswell Mullings a great football player it would have been something else again, but great football players are born as often as made. I had no more to do in making Mullings great than Barnum made Jumbo an elephant. Mullings was a natural football flash. He had more brains than any three average players. He was a genius, and he'd have beaten Harvard last year if the Siamese Twins or Hank O'Day had been coaching. But his coming through for the only score of that game, while Red Hastings, almost single-handed keeping Harvard from scoring, proves the win that gives me my big chance and I muff it. You can imagine the mood I was in the day Halibut Haines horns in on my vision with his "Art thee the football mentor" stuff.

Here I was with a football squad so ragged looking they'd make a crazy quilt. Mullings had graduated, so had Hastings, a wonderful defensive player, and three other high-class men. We had Harvard on our schedule again, because of course they couldn't drop us after we beat 'em, as it would look like they was afraid of us. And, what I expected they'd do to us this year was plenty. Which meant that all the rep' I had gathered last year would explode like a toy balloon that's draped itself on a picket fence.

III.

I HAD forgotten such a thee-talking bird as Halibut Haines existed, being busy trying to make a lotta good longshoremen look like a football team, when Maloney comes up one day with a grin and says:

"That baby's a pip'."

"What baby?" I says, watching Gorman, a sorrowful looking fullback, muff a tackle little Jackie Coogan could have got with one hand.

"That fishcake, Haines," says Eddie. "He's cleaned the school outa watches, and there ain't two pairs of cuff-links in the place."

"Whaddye mean?" I says.

"He ain't crooked?"

"Craps," says Eddie. "He's a passing fool. He's so good he'd take Lily away from the Wildcat."

I signaled the two alleged football squads to call it a day and we walked toward the clubhouse. "Come to think of it," I says, recognizing who he meant, "he wanted to

shoot me for my shoes or something the first day he piped up with his 'Art thee the football mentor?' I thought he was insultin' me."

"By callin' you mentor?" laughs Eddie. "He was payin' you a compliment. Mentor means a star—a shootin' star."

"That's all right then," I says, "but how does this baby come to be using church talk and shooting big league dice? They ain't what you'd call twin accomplishments."

"Both habits; one taught and one learned," says Eddie, squatting to the clubhouse stairs and stuffing his pipe. I bit on a dry cigar. "This guy," says Eddie, lighting his pipe and puffing it aglow, "is a freak. After he took my safety razor from me the other day on the fastest seven I ever saw, and says, 'Thee see how simple it is,' I says, 'Listen, Hezekiah, what's the idea of Bible conversation and wicked dice?' He grins, and after a while gets in a confidential mood and tells me.

"Seems he was raised by a Quaker grandfather on an island up in Maine. Only about one hundred families on the place, the men and their sons all fishermen. The fathers were fairly religious, but the sons, with nothing else to do in their spare time, gambled. They used to shoot craps for their lobster hauls or a catch of cod. Haines, it seems, was raised to use only Quaker lingo, while by knocking around with the younger fishermen he learned to handle the dice."

"And now he bats a thousand at both," I says.

"Exactly," nods Eddie. "So proficient, in fact, he's known all over New England as Halibut Haines."

"Halibut Haines," I says. "Why the 'Halibut'?"

"He caught the biggest halibut ever brought into Portland, and had a pair of dice made out of a piece of the backbone. Seems a Boston newspaperman heard about it and ran a big story with a lotta pictures in the Sunday paper. He had a vivid imagination, according to Haines, naming him Halibut, and picturing him as the crap-shooting terror of the Maine coast. Even said he had once shot craps with a rival for the hand of a beautiful island girl, had won her, but then gallantly given her to his rival. Well, it seems that Halibut's grandad heard about the crap shooting after the article appeared in the newspaper, and threatened hell's fury on the boy if he didn't quit pastiming with Satan's weapons despite the old man having won all his dough, according to Halibut, gambling in Wall Street, giving orders to his broker something like, 'When Consolidated Thumb Tack hits ninety, thee sell.'"

"Has the kid any money?"

"A barrel of it," continues Eddie, relighting his pipe which had gone Democratic. "The old man kicked off a year ago and left him most of the island they lived on, a lotta jack, and instructions to keep on with the Quaker oats chatter as long as he lives. The day after the funeral, Halibut, it seems, blew into Boston to decide on a college to go to, and picked Centerville, after seeing Mullings beat Harvard. Now he'd like to be—"

"Another Mullings," I cut in.

"I suppose so," says Eddie.

"And can't play a lick," says I.

"He was so rotten I told him to stop coming out. So now he hangs around occasionally and practices with the bones."

"Is this his first college?"

"First school, in fact," says Eddie. "His grandad had him tutored on the island by some queer old bird who had buzzed around the world and knew Epictetus and half of those babies by their first names."

I puffed a while on my smoke and looked off into the fast-gathering dusk. "That goes to show you," I finally says, "what football means to a college nowadays. Here's a customer Centerville gets just through us beating Harvard. I'll bet there's two dozen more in the school this year, and a thousand waitin' till they're old enough to come."

"Absolutely," says Eddie.

"It's too bad this guy can't play," I says. "With all his jack if he made good he might slip Centerville a hundred thousand toward athletics, and then we might have a better chance to compete with some of the real football teams."

"You should worry," says Eddie; "you're made. That Harvard win fixed you for life."

"Yes, it did," I shot back at him. "It fixed me fine for the time being, but my name's going to be mud this year. We gotta team that looks like a set of second-hand harness. We might get a fifty-fifty break with some of these teams like Sheridan and W. and M., but listen, son, our grand entrée at Harvard this year's going to be a funeral procession. If we walk out we'll be lucky."

Eddie sighed, then shot a smoke wreath twisting out before him. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if you beat 'em," he said. "Imagine beatin' Harvard two years runnin'."

"Throw that pipe away," I says, getting up; "you're smokin' hop."

IV.

Well, I don't know how things would have panned out if it hadn't been for Chuck Blaisdell's sister. Chuck was my first assistant, in fact my right-hand man, handling the second team and coaching the 'varsity ends and fullback. He had been a bearcat at both positions in his day, and had big league football ambitions, being ambitious to coach at one of the big universities. He had a lotta jack, but loved the game. In the off season he traveled and did a little stock dabbling to keep his dough working. He was at Centerville only because his sister was in her last year at the Cora Higgins School for Girls, a swell Southern finishing school two miles from Centerville.

It's about a month after the night I had the talk with Eddie Maloney about Halibut Haines when Chuck chugs up to my house in his Winsome Six and gives me a whistle. "Come on out for a ride," he says; "wanna talk with you."

I needed a little air, so I tossed on a cap and sweater and strolled out. We had just barely won our first games with two very rank prep' schools, and I had been nursing a headache trying to dope out some kind of a miracle by which my ham-and-eggers could be made to look respectable against a real team.

"Let 'er go," I says, climbing in. "Take me as far from this football team as you can."

"You aren't discouraged, are you?" says Chuck.

"Foolish question to ask an umpire, son," I says. "After lookin' at ball players for fifteen years nothin' can discourage you."

We rolled along for a while on white gravel roads through the prettiest country God ever made, and the smell of the trees was like perfume, when Chuck finally slows down to a nice easy roll, and says: "What do you know about this bird Haines?"

"You mean 'Halibut' Haines?" I says.

"The boy that says 'thee' and 'thou,'" says Chuck.

"That's Halibut," I says. "I don't know nothin' about him except that he shoots fast craps."

"Then, I want to tell you something," says Chuck; and he did. I'll say it was *something*. I almost fell out of the car.

"And your sis swears to it?" I says.

"Absolutely," says Chuck. "She and her roommate's been with him every afternoon on the old public ball field, and she says he hired some shines to help, too."

"My gosh!" I says. "And me weepin' my eyes out for a football player."

"Sis knows football," says Chuck, "and she swears he's a wonder. Says he doped out how Harvard could have beaten Centerville last year if they had only had one man to develop like he's developed himself."

All I could do was gasp: "I wonder why Maloney didn't find it out."

"I suppose he saw him miss a couple of tackles and discouraged him," says Chuck.

"And you say he's been doing this every afternoon on the quiet?"

"Almost every afternoon," says Chuck, "and sis tells me he did it all last winter on a beach up in Maine with fishermen helping him."

I sat up. "In all kinds of wind, too, I suppose?"

"Why," laughed Chuck, "some days it was ten below zero."

"Good gosh!" I says. "Don't tell a soul. We'll save him for Harvard."

We circled around, and Chuck drove me back to the house.

"By the way," I says, before I turned to go in, "how did your sis come to know this dude?"

"Why," says Chuck, sort of embarrassed, "seems sis met him up at the island last summer. She spent the season with her roommate's family; they have a summer home there."

"Then, I guess it wasn't Centerville that pulled him down this way," I says.

"As to that," says Chuck, stepping on the gas, "I guess you'll have to ask sis. All I can say is, she thinks shooting craps is wonderful, and says 'thee' and 'thou' should never have been abandoned from everyday language."

V.

I MIGHT have used Halibut Haines and beaten Georgia and Texas State. I was certain that I could have, but I didn't wanna tip my mitt, if you get me. There was nothin' much to be gained beating either the 'Crackers' or the 'Big Horn' crowd, while there was a great deal to be gathered by holding this prize fish of mine back. There was a matter of psychology, if nothing else.

Psychology, you know, figures as much in football as in anything. Remember when Terry McGovern was in his prime, the greatest featherweight champion of them all? Well, Terrible Terry used to scare half his opponents to death just by looking at 'em from across the ring before the fight started. Then this bird Young Corbett comes along, and the night of the fight on his way out to the ring he stops at the door of Terry's dressing room and, pounding with both taped fists, says: "Come on, you false alarm, and get your licking."

Get me?

Unexpected!

McGovern was licked then and there. They say he shook all over. When Young Corbett got him into the ring, he did just what he said he'd do—gave him the licking and became champion. Psychology, plus ability. They're twins you can't beat. Surprise the other guy, and you've got him on the run.

That's the kind of a surprise I was holding back for Harvard. Ever since the day after the night Chuck Blaisdell had wised me up to Haines and I had seen for myself, I had been champing on the bit for this Harvard game. When the season opened, the mere thought of facing 'em had been a nightmare. Now I couldn't wait to get North fast enough. Halibut Haines was not only what Blaisdell's sister had said he was, but she had been modest in giving away his secret. He had combined fisherman's knowledge with a great natural ability, and through weeks of the hardest kind of practice had developed until he was absolutely uncanny. Defensively he wasn't worth a row of ten pins. In a tackle he'd miss an elephant. And to attempt to make a line man out of him and get him to charge low would have been like matching the milkman to race Morvich. He was good for just one thing, and that solitary accomplishment, along with the psychological angle to it, I hoped would prove a combination that would beat Harvard and double my rep', as I'd get credit for developing another wonder player.

As far as the rest of the Centerville squad went, all I had to do was to make a defensive team out of it, and that proved easier than I thought it would. From the three squads I got a whale of a combination that I developed into a stone wall, with fast ends and little Jerry Borden at quarterback, a sure tackler and a whale of a defensive player, but only ordinary at running a team. I sent North and got a coupla good line coaches, and paid them outa my own pocket to come down and spend three weeks drilling the line in defensive play. Boy, they did a job, too. There's a lot in a good defensive line man's bag of tricks, when he knows his game.

Well, these babies showed my crowd all there was and a few new ones. Now, don't get me wrong. I had a whale of a team to keep the other fellows from scoring, but all was wet when it came to getting any points myself, with the exception of Halibut Haines. I was banking my all on him. If he got stage fright and fell down, or somebody busted through the line and laid him for a headache, I would be outa luck.

We went North doped to get the worst licking Harvard had given a team in years. I had seen to that. Reporters had come down from big city papers to find out what was wrong with Centerville after we only got a tie with Texas State and Georgia. I told 'em plenty was wrong: that Mullings, Hastings and the others graduating had left Centerville, as far as football went, looking like a guy lost in Alaska with only a vest.

" Then, there isn't much hope of you duplicating your win over Harvard?" they says.

I just laughed.

So they wired their papers about what a fine cheese omelet I was bringing North for the Harvard game. I read what they wrote on the train, getting the papers at stations on the way up. We had a special train, as we did last year, with a coupla cars hitched on for the society folks what came along to boost. There was a delegation from the Cora Higgins School, headed by Ann Blaisdell, a coupla Kentucky colonels and their families, and a mixed crowd of brothers and sisters and those Centerville students who had the price of the trip—there not being many, as the little college is what you might call a poor institution. We put up at the Lenox in Boston, which is out in the Back Bay you read about. Of course, we had to pose for pictures and all that stuff, and then Harvard offered me the Stadium for a morning practice the day before the game.

" I don't know whether I want it or not," I bluffed when the offer was made.

" Well, it's yours if you want it," the business manager says.

" Then, I think I'll take our manager over," I says, " and let him inspect the locker rooms and the seating arrangements and all that sort of thing; but I don't think I'll work the team."

" Suit yourself," says this chap—I think his name was Moore; and a mighty nice gent he was, too. " Anything we can do to make you comfortable, just let us know."

" I've decided to use it," I says, " from seven to-morrow morning until nine."

" Kind of funny hours," he says, " but you're welcome. I'll see that there's a man to let you in."

There was, too. Me and Halibut Haines slipped out of the hotel at six o'clock and walked all the way to the Stadium. All we took with us was a little hand bag that I carried with just a football in it. Halibut was dressed like he was on his way to work at a down town office, and looked anything but a football player being groomed to star against Harvard. We slipped into the Stadium promptly at seven, and at nine slipped out again, me with a grin on my pan as wide as Boyle's Thirty Acres, and Halibut as happy as a bird dog with a quail.

" Son," I says, stopping under one of the entrances to the big cement stands, " it's going to mean a lot to me if you beat these boys to-day."

" Mr. Curley," he says, gripping my hand with a grip like only a halibut fisherman could generate, and tears springing to his eyes, " it will mean no more to thee than me. If we win—" He choked up.

" I know," I says, patting his shoulder, " she's going to be up in the stands, and—"

He nodded, and we walked out.

VI.

We got a break on the game. A mean wind whipped across the field in the big Stadium—a wind that was poison to Harvard, but a godsend to us. It couldn't have been more opportune if made to order. It blew dust into the eyes of a lotta customers on the north side of the field, but it was worth a little dust to see that game.

We came onto the field with the betting in Boston and New York clubs seven to one against us even scoring, and twenty to one that we'd get beat. And, to see the slaughter, forty thousand maniacs were packed into the stands, more than half of them thirsting to see us licked after beating Harvard last year. But we got a great hand when we ran in, and say, maybe you don't need it.

Boy, that Stadium's an awful thing. Every time I go into it—that is, on the playing field—I get to knowing how the Christians felt back in Nero's day when they was tossed to the lions in front of a crowd just about as rabid as these football

fans. Maybe if they had got a hand they might have licked some of those lions. The cheering for us lasted until we got to our bench on the north side of the field, and then the boys squatted in blankets and we watched Harvard practice. They looked good, and ran through a fast drill, up and down the field a few times, and then slipped into their blankets and sat down. It was our cue for action. I let 'em sit, though, looking over at us for maybe a full minute, the crowd all eyes too, and then I says: "How do you figure the the wind, Halibut?"

Haines wet a finger, held it up, eyed the big flag above one end of the Stadium, and says: "She's fresh north to northeast, and about twenty points off the west goal."

"All right," I says; "go out and do your stuff."

I tossed him a ball.

"Barnes and Murray," I says, "go down behind that goal and shag it."

Halibut walked out to the fifty-five yard line and, half facing that wind, drop-kicked into it and made the prettiest goal you ever saw. It was uncanny, and everybody knew it. Nobody could believe his eyes. I could see the Harvard coaches and players sit up suddenly, then slump back in their seats, staggered. Side of me Higgins, the right tackle, just says, "My God!" and that went for everybody.

For a second there was dumb stupefaction, and then that Stadium let go a roar that could have been heard back in Kentucky. Men and women stood up and tried to shake those big gray stands till they rattled, looking down all the while on a stocky little fellow out in that big field all alone, sweatered to his ears, but seemingly as indifferent to what he had done as a dip who's lifted a copper's pistol.

"Who is he?" you could hear buzzing around the field, and even on our bench, my having kept this wonder-kicker strictly under cover.

There was commotion on the Harvard bench. Everybody was leaning forward and talking excitedly. They'd looked at Halibut, at the wind flag, then down the field at the distant goal. Drop-kicking a goal from the middle of a gridiron is a job any day. But drop-kicking one with a cross wind and allowing to the fraction of a nicety for the wind's velocity is art. Only a bird who had spent all his life in fishermen's sloops, who knew winds, and who had practiced kicking in all kinds of weather, could have done what Halibut Haines did.

There was a hush. He stepped back to the sixty yard line. With an easy motion he dropped the oval, came the terrific thud of his boot against the leather, and up rose the ball. It spiraled in the wind, described a long, revolving arc, and then, as pretty as a picture, cleared the bars for as perfect a goal from the field as you'll ever hope to see. The cheering became thunder. Up in the press stand on the Stadium roof, I could see movie men turning the cranks of their machines furiously. The crowd was on its feet, a giant, swaying mass, cheering and idolizing Halibut Haines. He kicked three more goals from different parts of the field, and then I wagged him to the bench.

He walked off while the mob went frantic, rattling programs as they compared the number on his back and shouted his name. I tossed a blanket around him, introduced him to the boys as Barnes and Murray hurried up and shook both his hands. Then I ordered everybody around me, and this is what I said:

"Boys, Harvard is worried. Peek over across that field and you can see the scare in their eyes. They're all nice, game boys, same as you, but no football team can have confidence knowing a man like Halibut Haines can walk out and drop-kick a goal from the field any time he wants to. But listen! That's all that bimbo can do—get me? It's up to you boys to go out there and fight your heads off to keep Harvard from scoring. Haines will go in once every quarter, and once every quarter he'll kick a goal. You can bank on that. That gives you a twelve point edge. Is that *enough?*"

Did they cheer? No, sir! They were all filled up, tears in their eyes and their voices husky. The sudden surprise of having a wonder man on their team had got 'em away down deep where it hurt. They just silently gripped my hand, one by one, turned away, and I knew Harvard was

going to know that they were in a football game.

"Up to your old tricks," says Tom Thorpe, the umpire, as he came over to shake hands and eyed Halibut. "Last year Mullings, now another wonder. Where do you find 'em?"

"It's a secret, Tom," I laughed, chewing on my cigar.

The two captains raced out, shook hands, and watched the referee, Charley Doyle, of Pitt, toss the coin. Harvard won, and chose to be kicked off to, defending the east goal. The teams lined up, and me and Halibut Haines, sitting side by side on the bench with Blaisdell, Maloney and substitute players crouched around us, watched a first quarter that was terrific for action. Harvard battered its way clear down the field in the first five minutes, and then, crashing for a touchdown, was stopped and lost the ball on downs. It was on the ten yard line, and my boys held like a stone wall. I knew what it meant, too, with Harvard coaches tossing in fresh players to batter away at 'em, winded already from the onslaught of the bigger men. It was a battle-stand with heart and blood pounding to the bursting point, a stand for a lone little school in the far South they loved so well.

Now they had the ball, and of course, in the shadow of their own goal, there was but one thing for them to do—take no chances, and kick out of danger. Swope, our captain, taking the full back's position, fell back to kick, then caused an electric quiver to run through forty thousand people, including myself, when he took the ball behind his line and, instead of kicking, shot a forward pass to Murray, our left end, and that rabbit kid whisked along like a streak until he had passed the center of the field and reached the forty-five yard line, where he was dumped. It was a thrill even to me. For a defensive team to pull such an unexpected and daring offensive attack on a team like Harvard was unbelievable. With Harvard's backs pulled up close to the line, expecting a kick, and our ends spread out as if to get down the field under the ball, made it a beautiful piece of strategy. Without giving Harvard a chance to recover from the shock, and while the crowd was still yelling, I called out Henry at fullback and shot in Halibut Haines.

"Just do it like you was out there all alone, son," I begged.

"Thee watch me," says he; and say, that bird could have taught crocheting at Verdun. A cucumber is supposed to be cool, but a cucumber's a hot dog compared with this Quaker talking bimbo when he stands back at the fifty-five yard line allowing himself ten yards from where the ball is, and signals for it. He had taken a quick squint at the wind flag, sprayed fingers out of closed fists, and, when the ball sailed to him, coolly dropped it to the ground and booted it forth—a perfect goal, it clearing the cross bar with yards to spare. I had to stick a mitt inside my vest to see if my heart had started beating again, and I'll bet half of the forty thousand fans had to do the same. The place was bedlam as the score went up:

Centerville	3
Harvard	0

Sweet daddy, what a line that was for me, who had started the season with a team that looked like something the cat dragged in.

I ain't going to describe the game to you; maybe you was there. All I'll say is that when we went to the clubhouse after the first half we was 6 and Harvard 0.

Halibut had come through twice, and did it with an ease that was almost careless like. In the locker rooms the players fell on benches, tickled pink, but all in. I cheered 'em, you bet, but I was worried. The hardest part of the game was to come, and already I had had to make half a dozen substitutions. If the battering kept up, I was afraid the boys might cave in completely.

That's the hell of playing a big college. They've got sixty men to shoot at you, while you're lucky if you have two full elevens. I was petting the boys when somebody hollered "Time!" and we filed out. Suddenly I looked over the mob.

"Where's Halibut?" I says.

Everybody looked, but nobody knew. I ducked back into the locker room, and where do you suppose that bimbo was?

Over in a corner showing the assistant shine rubber how to throw a " Big Dick " with a new wrist snap. No wonder that bird could kick goals before forty thousand people in a wind, like it was as simple as taking a morning shave.

VII.

HALIBUT kicked another goal in the third quarter, and we had 'em 9 to 0 when *it* happened. *It* came after a scrimmage over a fumbled ball. Players disentangled themselves to leave three of my boys stiff on the ground. They were out cold, Barnes and Murray, my ends, and Jerry Borden, the quarter. I'd rather have lost any two men in the lineup than any one of them. And they were out, too, Barnes with a twisted ankle, Murray with a gashed eye, and poor little Jerry with a dislocated shoulder. All I could do was shove in substitutes and hope for the best. When your three best defensive men go out against a team like Harvard there's only one thing to do when you're ahead, and I did it. I signaled them to stall for time. On every play somebody or other manufactured a busted shoestring. But it couldn't last a whole period.

Harvard pulled a fake kick from placement and Guernsey skirted Bolan on right end for a touchdown. There wasn't a chance in the world, though, for a goal. The wind had freshened until it was sweeping across the field in a gale, and although Halloran made a game try, the wind swept the ball so far from the goal it was laughable. I don't think Halibut could have kicked the goal, the wind was that strong. I signaled the boys to stall some more, and they did. The game had eight minutes to go; score: Centerville, 9; Harvard 6.

I held my watch in my hand, and was sliding along the bench, nervous as a cat. If it was only a minute we might have a chance, but nine minutes in football is like the millenium. At seven and a half minutes Benton kicked off for us, and Mallard muffed the ball, the wind taking it out of his hands after he had tried to make a leaping catch and run it back with a flying start. It rolled back to the goal line, and a Harvard man fell on it, my ends being blocked off trying to get it. It was a mighty sweet break, believe me. It meant that they had to kick from behind their line or take a chance on a forward pass to get it out of danger, and a forward pass in the wind was a mighty risky thing. If the boys could keep them from breaking through for a sensational run or pass, and stall cleverly enough, we might eke out a 9 to 6 win.

The teams lined up, and Mallard at quarter for Harvard faked a kick and threw a fast low pass just over the line to Tierney, who made fifteen yards before he was pulled down. Morgan got twenty around left end. Tierney went around right end for ten more. Fisher went through center for fourteen. The referee warned my men for stalling. The wind was actually whistling, and it was growing dusk. Morgan tore off twenty yards through right tackle. Harvard was ripping my team to pieces, and I was darned near crazy.

" How much time?" says Buck Blaisdell, almost crying at seeing our 9 to 6 win about to be shot full of holes.

" Five and a quarter," I says.

Fisher faked a forward pass and went around left guard for ten yards. Mitchell, my guard, was out cold, and had to be carried off the field. The only man I had left to send in was Simpson, a third string quarterback. Fisher went through him, like water through a sieve, on the very next play, bowled over three tacklers in succession, picked up interference, and while the crowd yelled themselves foolish ran down the field for a touchdown.

Score: Harvard, 12; Centerville, 9.

I fell forward, chin in my hands, elbows on my knees.

Blaisdell was crying and looking at my watch through his blurred eyes; he had worked hard on the team.

They tried for the goal and missed by a mile. There wasn't a chance to get any kind of a goal the way the wind swept across the field.

" We're licked," I says.

" Three minutes yet," says Maloney, peering over Blaisdell's shoulder. " We may tie."

" Not with that wind," I says. " We're licked."

You could almost hear the sadness drip-

ping from the bunch of cripples blanketed alongside of me. They had given everything they had, and that only for defeat. That's what hurt. You could see the hopeless look in their eyes. They knew, like I did, that even Halibut Haines couldn't get a score in that wind.

Benton kicked off; Fisher signaled for a fair catch, and then Harvard started to stall. They ran the ball to our forty yard line, and it was nothing but slaughter on every play. Bang! They'd hit the line, and it would crumble like an eggshell. I was cursing. Oh, for a Hastings to bust up those plays, or a Mullings to grab the ball and go through that bunch like the eel he was. They got to the thirty-five yard line. A minute to go. They'd score again. You could hear the drone of numbers. The ball was snapped, there was a crash, and—*they had fumbled!*

I was on my feet like a shot, hollering like a fool.

The wind bounced the ball crazily toward the side lines. Figures dived funny like for it. Who'd get it? The blood was pounding to my ears. Suddenly some one scooped it up and darted off. Who was it? Hurray! Benton. Down the field he raced, darting in and out as players dived for him. Would he get clear? I shook my clenched fists, prayed, cursed, and then suddenly sat down with a thud. He had been tackled on the fifty yard line.

"Oh, God!" moaned Blaisdell. "Oh, God! I thought he'd get through."

Sweat was dropping off my face. I looked at my watch. *Fifty-four seconds* to go. I jumped up and yelled for Halibut Haines—our only chance.

"Halibut," I says—"Halibut; "my God, boy, where are you?"

Maloney had me by the arms.

He's out there!" he screamed.

I looked. Benton was limping in, and Haines, with his sweater off and hair touseled was screaming at the line man, patting the center on the back, and then as he stepped back on the sixty yard line to try a kick against a wind that was impossible to buck, I saw him turn, face the little group of Centerville folks looking so small and lonely in the stands, and then hold his clenched fists over his head. It was like a man appealing for power. A second later he turned, stood tense while everybody on that darkening field and those shadowy stands sat as if petrified, and then signaled for the ball. There was a thud, a jumbled mess, and the ball rolled on the ground. Our last chance, and a *fumbled pass.*

I saw a strange, sort of surprised and hurt look come over Haines's face, all in the flash of a second. He stooped, scooped up the ball, made as if to set himself for a kick, then, seeing gray bulks and pawing hands coming toward him with the speed of wind, darted to one side and was off.

I grabbed Blaisdell, jumped on the bench and leaned forward. My nails dug into my hands. Beside me stood every player crouched forward, throttled stiff in dumb agony.

"Thirty-one seconds!" shouted some one.

A tackler lunged at Halibut and rebounded as if shot from a gun.

"A stiff arm!" screamed Blaisdell. "My God—beautiful!"

Another lunged, half caught on, but was shook off. Past the forty yard line Halibut ran with the speed of a deer, five Harvard men trailing him. One dived and missed. Suddenly a man sweeping crosswise leaped for Halibut's neck. The boy stopped short, turned like a rabbit, went sideways and then straight ahead—Mullings's stuff to a T. The tackler missed by a yard and slid out of sight in the darkness. There was only one man between Halibut and the goal line, Burrill the quarterback. Would he stop him? I was screaming it. Somebody was shouting at my left ear and banging me on the back.

"If he'll only get by!" I moaned. "If he'll only get by!"

The stands looked ghostly.

The field was being blotted out by darkness.

"*He's done it!*"

Blaisdell screamed it. Halibut had crashed over Burrill, leaped his form and swept behind the goal posts, touched the ball to the ground, and as he straightened and looked off toward the murk that had

devoured a certain girl, grinned like a kid.

Out of the dungeon and cheers came a whistle.

It was the game's end.

We had beaten Harvard 15 to 9, and Halibut Haines, the boy we thought could not play football, had done it all.

It was then I kissed him. Could you blame me? And, lemme tell you something, to go no further, so did somebody else.

VIII.

I WAS at the door of the big private dining room at the Lenox looking in at the hero sitting at the head of the table with Ann Blaisdell at his right, when one of the Harvard advisory board tendered me the contract I had longed for. I opened it, looked at the figures, sighed, and then gazed in at the faces of those boys who had fought like soldiers in that terrific game, at the fine loyal Southern ladies and gentlemen who had accompanied us up from their sunny South, and suddenly I realized that money ain't everything in life.

"It's a mighty sweet offer," I says, "but I'm sorry; I can't take it. I just sorta like folks where I am, and—well, I guess I'll stay on there."

He murmured something in a shocked way and passed on, a nervous little man, rubbing his hands, stepping into his place.

"Mr. Curley," he says apologetically, "you didn't give us much notice to lay out a victory spread that would—er—do our hotel—er—justice. Isn't there—er—something you might—er—suggest; some—er—one thing you'd like—er—particularly well?"

"Why," says I, "as far as the boys are concerned I think there's only *one* thing they would eat."

"What's that?" says he, with popped eyes.

I answered by shouting the question to everybody at the table: "Whaddye want to eat, boys?"

And the answer was: "*Halibut!*"

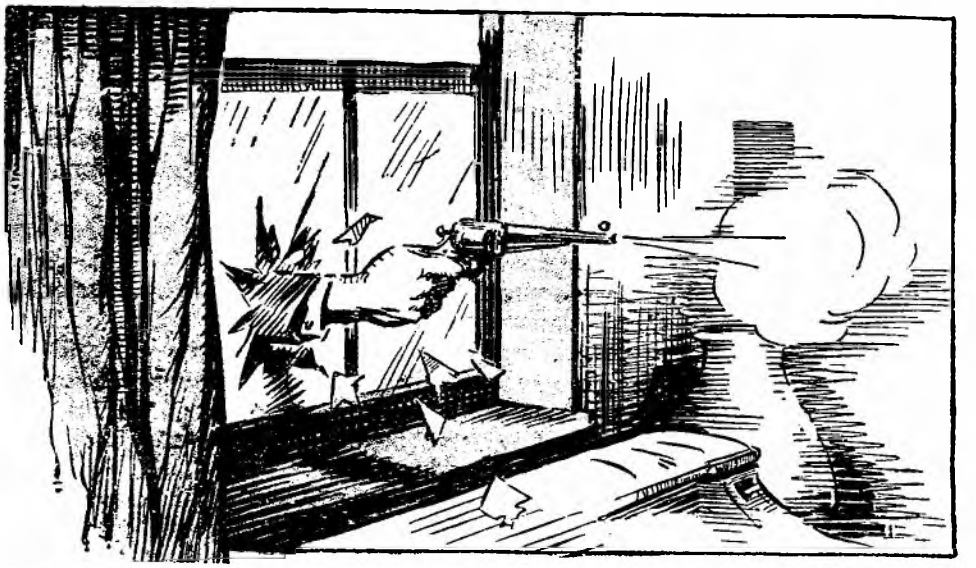
ʊ ʊ ʊ

THE ADVENTURER

WE find him at his desk when we come down,
The first man in the office every day;
He has a small place out Westchester way—
His orbit is his suburb and the town,
And regularity his one renown!
The train runs by his watch, we always say;
His daily schedule knows no work nor play—
Love—married to Routine, we say, is Brown!

And yet—his desk looks on the bay—when ships
Stride out to sea we watch his eyes and lips!
He studies maps and time-tables and trips;
Knows lands and cities he has never seen;
And every night, after his day's routine,
He tastes adventure—in this magazine!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery.



The Stranger at the Gate

By MAX BRAND

Author of "Dan Barry's Daughter," "The Night Horseman," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

HIGH spirited Olivetta Dascom is informed by her father, Hugh Dascom, an idle gentleman, that it is her duty to marry to improve the family fortunes, fallen since the death of old Commodore Dascom. In a sudden temper she declares she will marry the first man to enter the gate of their Long Island estate. Through the entrance strides a stranger, John Hodge, who says he is an amateur historian. Later, through the wreck of a little sloop, two other strangers, Samuel Logan, and a sailor, Louis Kern, enter the Dascom house.

In the night Olivetta discovers both Hodge and Logan are playing some dark game in which a big globe owned by the old commodore features. She examines it and discovers a secret opening. The globe is empty. She returns to bed, but is disturbed again by an intruder. She fires at the man. Hodge dashes in to her assistance and they discover the wounded burglar is Logan.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COMMODORE'S SECRET.

OTHERS were pouring fast as water into the room. Men came first, men with frightened faces and resolutely set jaws. They stood about suspiciously and said nothing. Behind them, hanging back chiefly into the hall, were female domestics and Mrs. Hugh Dascom, keeping up a shrill and chattering chorus. Olivetta swung the bathrobe about her and waited wisely in a corner until the first outburst of the excitement was over.

When it cleared away she found that a smooth voice was giving orders. It was the voice of her father. It was directing certain people to stay. It was sending nearly every one, however, away. Of those who remained, there were only a chauffeur and a gardener who had come running into the house from their rooms over the stable.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 3.

They were resolute looking fellows, a little too old for active battle, perhaps, hand to hand, but apparently masters of the weapons with which they were armed. There was John Hodge, too, standing in the corner with his arms folded, looking as much out of the picture as if he had had nothing to do with making the capture.

Mrs. Dascom had been herded away with the rest. All of the women were gone saving herself alone. And there was poor Logan revealed, when the crowd dissolved, with his back braced against the wall and Hugh Dascom busily bandaging his wounded leg. The door was closed upon the last of the crowd. They waited in the hall and the waves of their excited voices rose and fell and gathered like the volleyed chirruping of birds in the morning.

"Just turn the key in that door, Mr. Hodge," said Hugh Dascom, rising from the floor.

John Hodge obeyed. Olivetta noticed with pleasure and wonder the perfect calm of her father, the entire ease with which he dominated the situation and had reduced everything to order.

"How are you now, Logan?" went on Hugh Dascom.

"Well enough for the hospital," said Logan with amazing cheerfulness.

"Are you in pain?"

"Nothing to speak of."

"Lift him onto the bed, will you?" said Dascom to the gardener and chauffeur. They obeyed at once, and Logan sighed with relief as he lay back among the piled pillows.

"I have sent for the nearest officer of the law and an ambulance," said Hugh Dascom, standing beside the bed. "I am very sorry that this has happened."

How strange was that courtesy, offered to a man who had just abused his hospitality so vilely! Olivetta, seeing her father with new eyes, admired all that she saw. But who could have guessed that he had such qualities in him? He had seemed to be made for parlor use only. And now he showed a tempered steel in his make-up.

"I'll take my medicine," said Logan calmly. "Those who know me know that I don't whine."

"Is there anything I can do for you while we—er—wait?" said Hugh Dascom.

"A cigarette, if you'll be so kind."

"By all means."

The cigarette was offered and a match held from which he lighted his smoke.

"Olivetta!" said Hugh Dascom.

She came to him.

"My dear," said he, "you have done beautifully."

"I screamed like an hysterical child," said Olivetta.

"But that was afterward," said Hugh Dascom. "That was after the battle. Do that always, my dear. If you have to remember that you have nerves, wait until the crisis is past."

He laughed softly. It was evident that he was immensely pleased, and when he looked on her, his eyes shone. A word from Logan and another from John Hodge had apparently made the entire incident clear to him.

"And you, Mr. Hodge," he said to the lanky historian, "have a very special claim to my gratitude. I shall never forget you, sir. Never!"

Hodge waved his hand. He had not taken his eyes from the face of Logan for an instant. He seemed to be fascinated by the spectacle of this fallen man.

"I want to know one thing," said Olivetta. "Has he been carefully searched?"

"Why?" suggested her father. "Have you missed anything, my dear? The emerald is still in the box, you know."

"There's no need of searching," said Logan. "I'll give them up. Tut, tut! I know when a game's played out and I've lost the rubber! Here you are, Mr. Dascom. I gather these will be good news for you, eh?"

A grin wrinkled his lean face. He thrust his hand into a coat pocket and brought out a great heap of shining jewels.

"Hold out your hands, Miss Dascom. These ought to go to you. By the Lord, you fought for 'em like a man!"

Into the cupped hands which she extended he dropped them one by one. A name and a brief remark accompanied the larger stones.

"Here you are, a couple of neat little

pearls. And here's a yellow diamond that would make a good many mouths water. And here's the White King. Look at that, will you?"

It was a great diamond, an unspeakably brilliant pool of light.

"Oh, they've chopped heads off for that boy!" went on Logan, chuckling. "And he's worth all the heads. A diamond like that isn't for sale. Only a swine can sell a jewel like that. For my part, I should have made it a part of my religion. It should never have left me. But—let that go!"

He dropped one or two more lesser jewels into her hands and then two sapphires.

"The Hindoos call 'em the Twin Heavens," went on Logan. "And I suppose we'll all agree that the names will do to fit 'em. Good gad, what a blue! And what size! Well, let's skip over them and get on to the next."

It was a blazing ruby, a red giant full of fires. It made the diamond and the sapphires and the clustering smaller stones insignificant in contrast with its wonderful color.

"That's the Blood of the Prophet—or a long Arabic name which means about that. It's not worth as much cash as the White King, but I'd give it a spare hour by way of attention, now and then. For every sparkle there's been a drop of blood. You know that saying? It's true for the Blood of the Prophet. I remember just one chapter, for instance, by way of giving you an idea.

"It was back in the fourteenth century, or something like that. A Venetian ship heard that the Blood of the Prophet was to be sent to Tunis. They held up three Turkish ships and sank 'em because they were unlucky and didn't have the ruby. Then they tried a fourth ship and got the Blood of the Prophet, well enough, and made the crew walk the plank just the same to honor the occasion. D'you see? Jolly old times they used to have in those days!"

He paused and looked around the room, his glance lingering an instant on every face, and Olivetta followed his example. Every one was tensed with excitement as this strange story went on.

"That was only one little turn in the path that the Blood of the Prophet has followed. In India they say it's a sacred stone—they say that it actually represents just that much of the blood of Mahomet turned into a ruby!"

He laughed softly.

"But here's another that will catch your eye less, though there's more to it than to all the rest put together. It comes last. And that's the best place. I'll wager that even John—er—Hodge"—he remembered the name with difficulty—"will want to come up close and take a look. How about it, Mr. Hodge?"

John Hodge made no pretense of covering his interest. He simply strode out from the corner where he had been lingering up to this point and now stood close beside the bed, a hungered, a wolfish face. Olivetta looked at him in amazement. So strange was his expression that she wondered every eye in the room did not turn and hold upon him. But the other eyes were too intently bent upon her cupped hands into which the jewels had been falling, one by one.

The fingers of Logan separated. They allowed a great pear-shaped pearl to roll out over the tips and fall with the softest crushing sound upon the heap of jewels.

"There," said Logan, "is the Sheik!"

A whisper came from the onlookers. A great tawny-skinned hand came out.

"Steady, Mr. Hodge. Steady!" said Logan.

He pressed his head back, made a gesture with his now emptied hand, and smiled mockingly up to John Hodge.

"Ah!" he said. "I thought this would interest even you!"

The hand of John Hodge trembled, and fell away. Olivetta, looking up to him, saw that he was gray with emotion. And he was more wolflike than ever.

"And to whom," said Hugh Dascom, his voice a little uneven, "do these jewels all belong?"

"To whom?" said Logan. "Well, Mr. Dascom, I understand that in that peculiar will of his, Commodore Dascom gave you the use of his house during the summer and all of the furniture in this house to keep forever. Isn't that true?"

"Well?"

"Unquestionably, then, the globe in the library is an article of furniture."

"Unquestionably. But what of that?"

"I know! I know!" said Olivetta. "It was in the globe that he kept them all! And you found the trick, Mr. Logan. Madras, Calcutta, Singapore—"

"My dear," said her father, "do you mind telling me what in the world you are talking about?"

Logan seemed even more disturbed. He gaped and stared at the girl as though she had changed to a monstrosity.

"And do you mean to say," he breathed, "that *you* worked it out, too? That *you* saw through the meaning of that death bed speech of his?"

"Why not?" asked Olivetta.

"Nothing," murmured Logan, letting his body relax and his head fall back a little. He inhaled a great breath of smoke and blew it forth in a gust. "Except," he went on, "that I was flattering myself that had it not been for me the jewels would have been lost to the world forever—or until the globe fell to pieces, say!"

"And except for you, after all," said the girl, "I think they would. I saw you at the globe. And that started me thinking."

"My dear," said Hugh Dascom, "I am completely in the dark as to what you mean."

"You'll learn in a moment or two, though," said Logan. "And if— Hello!"

The last exclamation came as the lights burned suddenly low, and then slowly regained their former brightness.

"But what I had been hoping from the first," went on Logan, "was that if these jewels were discovered through me, you might lose your interest in sending me up the river, Mr. Dascom. What do you think?"

"Up the river?" queried the latter.

"To prison, I mean."

"Ah, yes! I hardly think it likely, Logan. Not from the way you handled your gun, you know!"

"And yet, dad—" began Olivetta.

"And yet, Olivetta," said Hugh Dascom, "I think you have the right to dispose of him one way or another. The policeman who comes with the ambulance can be put off with one sort of a story or another, eh?"

"Then, let him go free. He's been punished enough. Not by the bullet, but by losing the jewels. Isn't that true?"

"You understand," said Logan softly. "You simply understand, I see!"

"But suppose we make a bargain out of it," said Olivetta.

The face of Logan darkened.

"Well, then?" he said.

"It must have been a queer adventure—that which gave you the knowledge about these jewels and where they were."

"Not where they were," said Logan hastily. "Nothing in that. I worked out where they were with my own poor brain, Miss Dascom."

"But at least, you knew that he had this little treasure?"

"Do you call this a *little* treasure?"

"No matter how much—if you will tell us exactly how you came to know—then I think we can call it a finished bargain, Mr. Logan."

He paused, smiling, but his face was colorless.

"You don't really mean it," he said. "You wouldn't make my liberty hang on a story?"

Her curiosity was afire.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Logan."

"You stick to it?"

"I think I shall have to."

Logan closed his eyes and began to bite his lip in silence, as though enduring a great torture. And yet it was patent that it was only a mental agony.

Suddenly he looked up. His eyes were wild as they flashed about the room.

"That's final," he said. "That's promised?"

"It is."

"And no matter what's told—mind you, I haven't time to make up lies—I go free?"

"Yes!"

Logan turned a little on the bed and fastened his glance steadily upon John Hodge.

"I'll tell on one condition!"

"Name it, then.

"That nobody leaves the room while I'm talking."

"That's a queer provision. We'll grant that."

"And that all the weapons be given to one man. To—to—Mr. Dascom, eh?"

"Queer again," said Dascom, "but I think it can be managed."

The revolvers were handed over to him in silence.

"And now," said Logan, with a malignant glance at John Hodge, "I'm ready to begin!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SHEIK.

SO pointed had been his attitude toward Hodge that the attention of every one swung between the narrator and John Hodge. The latter endured this surveillance with a perfect equanimity, smiling upon the others and regarding Samuel Chester Logan without apparent malice.

"Now," went on Logan, "I have a stock of cigarettes and a pleasant audience. May I be indulged in sufficient time to tell the story from the first?"

"By all means," said Hugh Dascom. "Take all the time you require."

"Thank you. And when the ambulance comes—"

"I think that, taking all things into consideration, I may promise you that I shall be able to get rid of the ambulance and the officer of the law. Does that satisfy you?"

"Perfectly. Very well, then. To go back to the beginning. The beginning is my earliest meeting with Commodore Dascom. He was an assiduous traveler in the South Seas, as you know. And he knew the Orient from heel to head, of course. I suppose you have heard a thousand of his tales of his voyages?

"Nevertheless, I am confident that there are a few details of which the commodore rarely spoke. Among other things, I doubt if he dwelt at any length on his adventures with the ladies. I beg your pardon, Miss Dascom, but I must tell everything. And the commodore was celebrated for his belief in his attractions. In that respect, his fame was limited to the Orient, I know. But men have a habit of stepping into a new character the moment they are east of Suez. At any rate, it was in the affair of a lady that I first crossed swords with the commodore. And though he had fame and fortune on his side, he came off second best on that occasion.

"I was proud of the victory at first, but since that time I've had reason to regret it. For the commodore never forgot a loss or forgave the man who had come in first. He was like the English. He could win in the most graceful fashion and make light of a victory. But a defeat he could not tolerate or the man who defeated him. He hated me with all his heart after that first trifling affair. And when the commodore hated, there was nothing he would not do and, in the Orient, very little he could not do. Every one knew him. Most people feared him. When he called a thousand people were eager to listen.

The result was that when my friends heard that I had fallen afoul of the commodore they recommended that I make my peace with him, and if I could not do that, take leave of the Orient for a cooler climate.

"I tried an honest best to make a truce with the commodore. He smiled and declared that everything was well between us, and ordered Scotch and soda. But I caught him watching me with a quiet eye even while he was trying to laugh at one of my stories, and I knew that he still had me on his books to be paid off.

"And that was how matters stood with us in the beginning.

"I spent an uneasy month or two waiting for a blow to fall, but at the end of that time the commodore sailed back to the States and I was left in possession of the field of battle, so to speak, with a skin unbroken.

"I thought at the time that the commodore had given up the trail, had decided that our dispute was too insignificant to be worth his further attention. Some of my friends tried to undeceive me. But I was younger, then, and more trusting. I thought that the commodore, after all, could not be such a bad fellow.

"The next season came, and with its

coming the commodore returned to the Orient, met me, passed me, and seemed to have remembered nothing against me. Three years followed, and I was unharmed, going about my business, with no cause to regret that I had crossed the path of the terrible commodore.

"As for the nature of my business, that is neither here nor there in this story. I shall pick up the thread of the story again at the point where I first heard of the Sheik.

"It was from a Hindoo in Calcutta. He was a sailor. He was also an expert in jewelry of certain sorts. A good many Hindoos are. That is the national extravagance. Instead of blowing in their entire fortune on an automobile as people do in our own more enlightened country, they sink their spare cash and mortgage their homes in India to buy jewels. They have an advantage in that they don't have to pay for gas and upkeep. And as for living up to the family jewels, it simply isn't thought of. A dingy laborer's wife may crowd herself with half the colors of the rainbow in precious stones. If the rest of her clothes are rags it makes no difference. The jewels are appreciated by themselves, if need be, and quite apart from their setting.

"Lajpat Rani was one of that type. He was poor as the very devil. But in his own line he knew as much as any one in Tiffany's. He was a connoisseur of pearls.

"And, as usual, he had his wonderful story. A pearl fancier is like one of our Western prospectors. He always carries about with him a few magnificent yarns about incredible riches. I've never known a hunter after fortune with drill and double jack who didn't have tucked away in his experience the stories of three or four great mines which were just around the corner from discovery and exploitation. It's just the same with a lover of pearls. He can always tell of some milky beauty which, if it were seen, would put to the blush every other pearl in existence.

"Lajpat Rani had just such a story to tell; but his story was a shade more extravagant. It had more border to it. It had more embroidery, as though it had been told and retold until all the sharp corners were worn away and the kernel of a tiny truth buried under a Cheops' pyramid of exaggeration.

"His story began with a scene on the coast of Ceylon. A little sloop broke up on the rocks off the coast, and one survivor came ashore, so terribly battered by the waves and the rocks that he only lived an hour.

"But in that hour he told the story which began the Sheik. He was a diver, a pearl fisher, he said. In his life of labor he had amassed a considerable fortune, enough to live upon contentedly to the end of his life. He had gone out for his last summer of work, however, and at the close of that summer he had gone down for his last time, guaranteed the possession of whatever he should find, as a reward for his years of good service.

"When he came up he told them he had nothing. But concealed under the pit of his arm when he went ashore was the Sheik, and it was such a monster he knew the promise of giving it to him as a reward would not be kept if the jewel were seen.

"He went ashore. He took the treasure to an old and wise uncle. At a glimpse of it the old man knew that they had a great fortune, and he advised that they take the sloop which the uncle owned and with it strike away across the sea for India, because in India they would be apt to find a purchaser who would ask no questions about the manner in which they became possessed of the pearl.

"In short, with the uncle and the finder and two brothers as a crew, they set sail within the week and steered for India. Adverse winds swept them from their course. At length the wind increased to a violent storm when they were just off the coast of Ceylon and, coming together, the four men agreed that the ship was certain to be sunk. And with the ship one or more of the crew might well go down. Therefore, the pearl could not be entrusted to any one of the four. Instead, they hastily dropped the little box which contained it into a great iron-bound chest which was bound with a rope and securely locked. When the ship sank the chest would be washed ashore.

"But they had failed in one point of their calculations. There was so much iron in the binding of the chest that instead of floating it dropped, at once, to the bottom of the sea.

"This story was hardly ended when the narrator died. And the natives of the coast, including Lajpat Rani, went out in boats as soon as the storm was ended, to search the beach. But though they continued their labors for a month, unremittingly, they never were able to locate the great chest and the great pearl which it contained.

"Lajpat Rani, however, fished for the pearl more with his brains than with his boat. He discovered that, a hundred yards from shore, there was a deep current which swept along the bottom of the sea when the wind blew from a certain quarter in a storm. It was one of those shallow water currents which storms will on rare occasions set up. And when the ship went down, the storm had been coming from that identical quarter of the horizon.

"Lajpat Rani then went out in his boat and examined the point of land which jutted out from the coast just beyond the scene of the wreck of the sloop. He found that there was a solid wall of rocks rising. And he reached the conclusion that the reason the search along the shore where the sloop went down had been unsuccessful was because the storm-raised current had tumbled the chest to the side and against the rocks.

"But the roots of those rocks lay too deep to be reached by ordinary divers. It would be necessary that a diver with a full modern equipment be sent with an electric torch to probe the depths. But there was no one in his village with sufficient means to undertake the task. Besides, Lajpat Rani knew that a prophet is always without honor in his own country.

"So he went to Calcutta and laid his scheme before such of the well-to-do Hindoos as he could reach. One and all, they had shrugged their shoulders, and so he had come to decide that the white men must hear his idea.

"It was mere chance that brought him to me as the first white man who was to hear the story. I heard it. I believed that there might be something in it. At that time it happened that my credit was fairly good, but my property was almost nothing and I was in desperate need of a sudden turn of fortune. So I decided to take the gambling chance.

"I outfitted a diver, chartered a boat, and dropped down to the Ceylon coast, taking Lajpat Rani along with me. We found the point of land easily enough. And there was a long black nose of rocks running out into the water like a great sea beast about to dive for the bottom.

"Around the roots of those rocks we searched for three days—no, it was on the fourth day that the diver put a hook into a great sea-rotted chest and came to the surface in triumph.

"I shall never forget how the boat heeled over as the windlass tightened and shortened the line. There was a devilish wind just beginning to blow up, and coming in puff on puff, each puff ten miles an hour stiffer than the puff which went before. But we paid no attention to the rise of the wind. We were too much interested in what was drifting up toward the surface on the end of that line.

"Finally a corner tipped out of the water. It was a corner covered with red iron rust and soppy with seaweed. We yelled at the tops of our lungs. We lay down on our bellies and reached for the box and helped the windlass bring it over the side.

"I yelled at the rest of 'em, then, and drove them back—there were seven souls of us aboard that boat—and I smashed at the box with the ax. The head of the ax sank into the wood with a thick thudding, as though it were flesh. But finally I pounded the spongy stuff away and we were at the insides of her. And, sure enough, the little box was there.

"I tried to work the lock, but it was rusted into a solid mass with the wood. The six others crowded about and kept yelling advice at me. I remembered how their voices came screaming and whistling in that wild wind. Finally I dropped the box to the deck and smashed at it again and again. Finally the axhead struck. The box crumpled up, and out of the wreckage I picked the Sheik.

"It was—"

Here the narrator paused and pointed to Olivetta. She held out her cupped hands with the piled jewels and the great pearl on top.

"There it is! With this light on it, it looks fair enough; it looks the sort of thing that empires buy for their emperors, eh? But I give you my word that when I picked that pearl out of the wood pulp, it looked brighter to me than it does now—it looked like a lump of the moon, the way the moon seems when it is hanging in the center of a blue-black sky!"

Olivetta drew closer, so that the light could fall more amply on the pearl. The others followed in, to look at it, all saving John Hodge, who hung in the background. His whole manner was full of the indifference of one who listens to a twice-told tale. Then Olivetta, like the others, forgot that John Hodge was in the room. They were entranced by the narrator, and the narrator was wholly wrapped up in his story.

CHAPTER XIV.

BY RIGHT OF FORCE.

"AS for the six," said Logan, "they were like wild men. One would have thought they were to share alike with Lajpat Rani and me in the profits. And poor Lajpat was like a man demented. He raised his hands to the heavens and wrung them. He dropped on his knees and beat his forehead on the heaving deck.

"I say the deck was heaving. In fact, by this time the little boat was fairly standing on her head, what with the wind whooping up and the waves beginning to smash at her.

"We started to run in for the harbor, picking up the three anchors which had moored us during the search for the box. With the engines of that honest little boat going full blast, making her quiver from bow to stern, we were barely able to make a walking gait into the teeth of wind and current and beating waves.

"Still, we were getting on fairly enough, and the harbor was hardly a mile away, when the captain stuck his head out of the cabin and began to scream and point. I could barely hear his words, like a whisper in the yell of the wind. But his pointing directed us to take notice of a black curtain which had dropped from the sky to the sea across the horizon from which the storm was whooping it up.

"It spread wonderfully fast. It came running over the sea at us, blanketting out everything behind and with a long line of white at its feet. I was enough of a sailor to know that that wall of blackness meant the very devil turned loose on the water.

"We would have been far wiser to have laid at anchor and ridden out the storm. I remembered, then, that the captain had begged us to do it. But I was too eager to get ashore with the treasure, and the rest of the men were mad, too. Now the storm was too close on us to allow anchors to be dropped and well secured. But we anchored for all that. Two anchors were thrown out from the bows of the boat.

"In the meantime a hope of rescue came shooting up behind us. It was a long, low ship steaming at a good clip in spite of the head wind. One glance told me that it was the ship of Commodore Dascom, his yacht Elise, in which he'd combed the South Seas and the ports of the Orient. And I never felt my heart go out to any man as it went out to the commodore at that moment.

"He had a stanch craft in that Elise. She cut through that storm like a warm knife through butter. She was walking right up to us, also, as though she meant to find out if we were in need of help. But before she could hail us, or put a line aboard us, the storm struck.

"It was all over quickly. But in the few seconds that it took to pass my mind was moving quickly. A hand strikes in a tenth of a second, but a quick moving brain will see every slightest move of every finger on the striking hand—the hand will seem to be hanging a perceptible time in the air.

"It was that way with me in the striking of the storm.

"I remember that it first beat down the bows of the boat as though a ten-ton hammer had struck the poor little craft. Then it gave a kink and twisted the boat to the side with a jerk. We were held on the lines from the anchor, and while those lines were

holding the boat seemed to be blowing right out of the water. But it wasn't in rope to hold up against that devil of a wind for any stretch of time. Suddenly there was a double jerk, both anchor lines parted and then we seemed to lunge back through empty space.

"The dive through air lasted only a second or two—but every second had a solid hour in it. For instance, it seemed that I clung in my place for a full five minutes watching Lajpat Rani hanging onto the rail, his body blown out into the storm, until the rail sagged and broke in a section. Then another section went, and finally Lajpat, terrible face and all, whipped off into the sea.

"He had been only a few feet from me. I could see his screaming for help, begging me to give him a hand. I could see his throat swell as he shrieked. I suppose he was offering me his half of the pearl, offering to be my slave during his life, if I would save him. But I couldn't raise a hand. The wind would have got under me and knocked me into the sea after him.

"Well, that was the end of Lajpat Rani.

"A minute later the little boat stood back on its stern with a lurch like a trained elephant. It shook all over, then spun and went down.

"I had seen what was coming. I had jammed the Sheik into a vest pocket where it couldn't possibly get out. Then I took a breath that filled up every nook and cranny in my lungs and when I hit the water it was in a perfect dive. At that, I was traveling so fast that the blow half stunned me. I had been flipped off the end of that boat like a stone out of a sling, literally.

"The force of it kept me under water until my lungs nearly burst. When I fought my way back to the surface, I expected a blast that would knock me back under and stifle me instantly. But there was not half the force I had expected in the wind, though there was enough to make the rope which was trailing the Elise whip out as though an invisible dog were pulling at the end of it. I managed to get that rope and they dragged me onto the commodore's yacht.

"How I managed to stick to that rope while they pulled me in is a mystery. I was smashed and battered and bumped. The wind got under me and buoyed me like a feather. Then it struck down from the top and knocked me into the water.

"But I got the rope tangled around my legs, twisted around my body, and so, when they pulled the rope in, I was there, unconscious, but alive.

"I came to in the cabin of the commodore himself.

"I found him sitting at my side juggling the pearl in his hands, the old rascal, and smiling down at me.

"'I see,' said he, 'that you have had good fishing. The clubs will be having less fear of you at the card tables during the next winter, I take it, Logan.'

"I was too glad to be alive to think much of what he said. I reached for the brandy bottle which was standing on the table beside the bunk. Standing, mind you, and not fastened. Because that black gale was the last effort of the storm. It passed in a few seconds—I mean the sledge-hammer, tornado part of it—passed in a few seconds. After that it was an ordinary hurricane for a breath longer, and then it fell away quickly to a dead calm with the sun out washing the last of the clouds out of a blue sky.

"At any rate, I took the brandy bottle, poured myself a stiff shot of the stuff, and then let it burn home on the inwards of me.

"'Commodore Dascom,' I said to him. 'I owe my life to you.'

"'You're wrong,' he answered. 'You owe your life to the wind that blew that rope overboard.'

"'Put it that way, if you please,' said I, 'I have a sense of gratitude. I hope to make you aware of it, one of these days, commodore.'"

"He merely grinned at me and kept on playing with the pearl. He wanted to learn about it, and I told him the whole story over some more brandy and soda.

"'And it seems to me,' said he, when I finished, 'that you're the last man alive who's ever had anything to do with the Sheik, as you call it.'

"'I am,' said I. 'I'm the only person

in the world who's seen the Sheik and kept his life.'

"'Doesn't it strike you that it's an unlucky gem?' said he.

"I simply laughed at him.

"'Of course,' said I, 'Men of intelligence take no stock in such truck as luck.'

"'Perhaps not,' said he. 'But for my part, I can't help but be a great believer. For instance, what but sheer luck could have brought you aboard my ship?'

"'I admit,' said I, 'that that was a rarely fortunate coincidence for me!'

"'For you?' he said, and looked at me from under those shaggy white brows of his in a way I could not soon forget. 'Lucky for you? Well—it was not your luck to which I was referring.'

"The first inkling of what he planned came home in me with a shock. I managed to smile. But I was sick at heart.

"'I don't quite follow,' said I.

"'Come, come!' said he. 'You aren't such a young ass as all that. At least, you know that I've been a collector of precious gems all my life?'

"'Of course I know that,' I said.

"I was beginning to be more and more sure of what was coming to me. But still it seemed impossible. I searched his face. How would he look when he told me his intentions? Well, I had not long to wonder about that.

"'You know,' he went on, 'that the thing which first took me into the Orient was a search for rubies of a certain type?'

"'I know,' said I. 'I've heard the story very often.'

"'I'll show you at a greater length than I show most,' said he.

"He went to a big safe—a safe almost as big as the safe in a bank. It stood at one side of that huge cabin. He unlocked it and took out a drawer. It was not large. On the bottom of it, buried in felt, were the jewels in the hands of Miss Dascom, or at least, most of the jewels were there.

"'Look,' he said, and he spread them out before me.

"They were beauties, of course.

"'Some of them,' said he, 'I got in my youth. I was newly in the game, then. I was buying to please my eye, and my eye at that time was terribly uneducated. But I kept on trying, and I kept on learning. There is nothing like the lesson which experience teaches. She gives no preliminary examples for warning; she allows no time for study. One is simply brought around a corner and confronted with an examination. That was the way with me. I picked up my knowledge of gems in odd corners, and here and there. I was tremendously cheated, I can assure you.'

"'But in the end,' I said, 'you learned.'

"'I began too late to learn a great deal,' he said. 'But still I do fairly well. Take this pearl of yours, for instance. It looks to me as though it is not of the first quality. It is very large, of course, but it is not of the first quality.'

"I smiled at him. It was a subject about which no man knows everything, but on which I was as well up as most. I asked for a magnifying glass. When he gave it to me, I studied the pearl. Ever since I started on the expedition, of course, pearls had been much in my mind, and I had at the tips of my fingers all of the points which one should look for in such a jewel.

"And when I had completed the examination, I closed the glass with a snap.

"'I don't like to challenge the opinion of an acknowledged expert like yourself,' said I, 'but I believe that pearl to be nearly flawless in spite of its great size.'

"'Well, well,' said the old rascal, shaking his head at me. 'You don't mean it, my boy. You don't mean it! What would buy it from you?'

"I laughed. I sat back against the pillows at the head of the bunk and laughed. It seemed to me that every joy, every pleasure in the world was just at the tips of my fingers, waiting to be picked up. God how I had longed for wealth, and now I was rich.

"'It is worth,' said I, 'exactly what the purchaser can afford to pay for it.'

"'You mean it is beyond price?'

"'I shall tell you what I intend to do,' I said to him. 'I intend to take it to Paris and let the dealers fight for it, not because I intend to sell it there, but because I wish

to get a value placed tentatively upon it. When that has happened, I shall double the highest price that has been offered and then place the pearl on sale. Within a week it will be a sensation. Within a month it will be bought by a king or an American millionaire. I can't say which would pay the more liberally.'

"'I think you are right,' said the commodore. "For my part, I cannot pose as an expert on pearls. You will see by a glance at my collection that this is true. The pearls are the fewest in number and the least desirable of the lot.'

"I glanced at the jewels. It was true. The pearls were very ordinary in quality and they were few in number.

"'But,' said the commodore, 'that will make it easier for you to understand how greatly I appreciate what you have just told me about the Sheik.'

"I did *not* understand, and I told him so. He merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled down at me in that damnable way of his.

"'A little reflection,' he said, 'will teach you. Did I not say that it was I who was lucky when the storm blew you my way?'

"I looked at him in sudden terror. The fears which I had felt before swept back upon me. I jumped from the bunk.

"'Commodore!' I cried to him.

"'Hush!' said he. 'You are making unnecessary noise, my friend.'

"And he drew out a great black revolver and laid it in his lap and kept on tossing the pearl up and down and smiling at me.

"'Good God, commodore,' I said to him, 'do you mean to murder me and steal the Sheik?'

"'Murder you? By no means!' he said. 'Why should I?'

"'You cannot steal the pearl otherwise,' I assured him.

"But he laughed in my face.

"'Only a few seconds ago,' he said, 'you were telling me that you and I are the only living human beings who have ever seen the Sheik.'

"'What of that?' I asked him.

"'You will see,' he said.

"And with that he stood up, crossed the cabin, dumped the great pearl into the drawer, closed the drawer and the safe, and that was the last time, until to-night, that I saw the jewel!"

CHAPTER XV.

A TALE UNFINISHED.

LOGAN paused. During his narration he had smoked constantly, heavily, and the bed was now surrounded with a blue-brown haze. Through this he looked into the tensed faces of his audience. He had swept them so easily along that they now were murmuring with indignation.

"I was stunned at first," he went on. "But when I ran across the cabin at him, he shoved the gun in my face and threatened to blow my head off and tell the authorities afterward that I had gone mad with brandy, and as a result of the unbalancing effects of the storm.

"'And,' he went on, 'if you give me any trouble I shall be tempted to complete the business at a stroke, in this very fashion. Logan, be careful—be very careful. You have been on the very verge of death, and you are still close to the precipice!'

"I believed him. The circumstances would have been too much against me. What earthly purpose would he have in killing a storm-racked stranger unless I *had,* as he would declare, gone mad with liquor? Also, a bullet would put out of existence the last person, outside of himself, who had ever seen the great pearl. And the pearl was worth murder.

"I saw all of these things in a flash, and I said no more. When we made port, I simply assured him, as quietly as possible, that I should do my best to recover the gem, and then I went ashore and found a lawyer.

"He listened to all the details of my yarn, and when I was through he assured me that he was intensely interested, but that his practice did not include any great deal of criminal work; but he gave me a card to a friend of his, another lawyer, he said, who would be delighted to take such a case.

"I went to the address which he had written on the card, and when I reached

the place I was put under arrest at once. An hour later alienists were studying me.

"In short, my story was too strange to be believed. They considered that, exactly as the commodore had suggested, the storm and my narrow escape had been too much for me. It was felt to be too highly circumstantial that I should have succeeded in getting the great pearl out of the depths of the sea only a moment or two before the storm struck.

"They called upon the commodore. They took me with them. They confronted him with me and I rehearsed my story. The commodore, without a word, opened his safe, took out the drawer, and exposed the pearl.

"'Is this,' he said, 'the pearl you refer to?'

"I shouted at him in a fury that he knew well enough it was the pearl I referred to.

"At this he shook his head and told the alienists that they could make up their minds for themselves, that he was a known collector and would be glad to have them look up his record as a purchaser of jewels; that he had bought this pearl in such and such a place—giving the name of a jeweler who would, of course, be bribed to lie until he was blue in the face—and finally, that he would be glad to have the gentleman taste his brandy before they returned to the shore.

"What could they do? They stayed, they were enchanted by the quality of his brandy, the quality of his cigars. He told them a merry tale or two, sufficiently spiced to suit men of their standing. And then he asked their opinion as to my condition and suddenly and magnificently offered to bear the charge of a ticket to the States for me, and six months in some good sanatorium: 'because,' he said, 'he did not wish to leave half finished his work of saving a life from the sea and the storm.'

"The alienists left the ship convinced that he was a fine fellow, worthy of heaven, indeed. As for me, I was lucky to get out of the affair without landing in jail.

"That first attempt taught me what I had to expect when I appealed bluntly to the law. And I have never tried it again. I tried the commodore, however, again and again. What else was I to do? I even went so far as to call on him.

"He received me willingly enough. I accused him point-blank of having done all this simply as vengeance because of my success with the lady of whom I have already spoken.

"And he was frank enough not to deny it. He had suffered, he said, on account of my victory in that affair. He was now determined to have as much pleasure at my expense as I had once enjoyed at his. Besides, he had grown attached to the pearl. That, he felt, was a sufficient answer for me.

"There was nothing that I could do. I took up my hat and left him.

"After that, I made an attempt upon his safe. I managed to get the combination of it, and when I had opened the safe I made a thorough examination. But I could come upon no trace of the pearl.

"And following this, it became the work of my life to recover the pearl which he had stolen from me. I had many reasons for centering my attention upon it. For the one thing, my career in the Orient was wrecked. I was broke. My debts were large. I had depended upon the sale of the pearl, you may remember, to put me in the clear. And because the pearl was lost, I was utterly wrecked.

"I could no longer hold up my head among men of my own caste. The result was that I gave up year after year of my life to schemes to regain the Sheik. My efforts at least caused the commodore to keep the pearl secretly. I was so closely on his heels that he dared not show the Sheik to any of his friends. It was a pleasure which he kept to himself. He feared that one of his companions might be a confederate of mine. And the Sheik is of such a value that it is well worth the efforts of half a dozen men of position.

"So he formed the habit of showing the pearl to no one. After a time he kept all of his collection of jewels secret. He told his friends that he had sold them. But all the time I knew, and there are others east of Suez who also know that he must have kept them with him all the time. One cannot sell such gems as those without having

it known. There are not so very many dealers who can afford to buy them, you see?

"But where he kept them—that was the mystery!

"Among other things, I kept track of the servants who were discharged by the commodore. Some of them might know something. And among others, I tried Louis Kern. He was formerly in the service of the commodore. He had been terribly injured. He was in a hospital with one arm amputated when I talked with him. And he denied knowing anything about the Sheik. Yet he denied it with a reservation in his voice. You understand what I mean? Later, I learned that although he was no longer in the service of the commodore, he was receiving a pension from him. When I heard that I was confident that this man had the secret.

"I maneuvered until I had him at my command. When he was helplessly in my power through means which I need not take your time in describing, I cornered him, pressed him to the wall, so to speak, and demanded to know the hiding place of the Sheik.

"He admitted that he knew it. But he declared that sooner than tell me, sooner than offend the terrible commodore, he would kill me and himself afterwards.

"And I believed him. The commodore had the ability to inspire a well-nigh superstitious reverence in the hearts of his servants—and even in his equals, from time to time. Fear of him was more than the fear of death in Louis Kern. Half white and half black, he has the strength of both races and the weakness of both races.

"At any rate, he swore that although he could not tell me then, he would tell me the instant he knew that the commodore was dead. And therefore I settled down and waited for the commodore's death. You will begin to understand from this how completely the recovery of the pearl has been my life work.

"The news came at last. The commodore had died. And when I had the proof of it I found Louis Kern. He told me at once. The jewels were kept in the commodore's globe which, being specially constructed for the purpose, was in reality a little safe by itself.

"In the meantime I waited for the mails and the American newspapers with a terrible anxiety. For it seemed impossible that the commodore should have died without mentioning the Sheik in his will. And yet I saw, on reflection, that to name the pearl, and to describe how it could be found in the will would simply be to point out the way to a thief to get it. All that he could do, if he wished to keep the pearl as he had done before, was to wait until he was on the point of death and then convey the information by word of mouth. And that, it seems, was exactly what the commodore did, saving that he waited too long!

"When I was certain that the pearl had not been mentioned in the will—and if it had come to light there would have been columns in the papers about the unexpected discovery of the treasure, I started straight for New York with Louis Kern. When we arrived I rented an automobile, explored the district around the house, and decided, being an amateur thief, that it would not be safe to attempt to get at the globe in a house where there were so many servants unless I should be there as temporary guest and in that manner have access to the globe.

"And to foist myself into the house I could only arrive at a most elaborate plan. I bought an old sloop for a song, gave her a coat of white paint so that she would look trim from a distance, and then sailed down the coast with Louis Kern.

"We knew all about the waters in Hallyt's Cove before we started, and of course we planned to break up the old boat on the rocks in the center of it. We could then swim ashore, and it would be strange if two shipwrecked strangers could not get shelter for the night in such a mansion as this.

"It worked out smoothly. To-night I waited until a reasonable hour, made the attempt, followed the directions of Louis Kern, and got the jewels. But when I examined them I missed one, a beautiful emerald. Then, after a moment, I recalled having heard in the house of the emerald which the commodore had given to his favorite, Miss Dascom.

"I decided to go for that emerald, also. And in that, of course, I took the step which wrecked me. Otherwise, I should have got safely away. You notice that I make no excuses. Yes, it was robbery. But I looked on the other jewels as little more than interest on the Sheik. However, that is past. I have lost. I don't pretend to ask you to believe my yarn or give me the Sheik. I only ask that you keep your word and let me escape scot free. Is that agreed?"

"I have given my word. That is enough," said Hugh Dascom. "And that is the end of the story?"

"The end of it?" said Logan, and a singular light came into his face. "By no means. That is the end of only a part of it. And there is another part which I wish to have you know. It will interest you all, I hope. But first, come closer!"

They swarmed nearer to the bed with audible breathing.

"In the first place," said Logan, "his name is—"

A gun boomed with deafening loudness. Logan jerked to an erect sitting posture, his head back, his arms thrown out wide as he gasped for breath. There was a tinkle of falling glass from the shattered window pane through which the gun had been fired. Then Logan fell back upon the bed.

He strove terribly to speak, but there was only a pink froth bubbling at his lips, for he had been shot through the throat. Yet his lips went through the horrible gibberish of framing silent words. In his wild struggles for breath and for the speech which would name his murderer, he fell from the bed and to his knees.

But death was close to him now, and he knew it. With his last strength he dabbled his hand in his own blood—he trailed across the spread of the bed the letters "H-o-d—"

"It's Hodge!" screamed Olivetta to the confused mass of people who had broken open the door and run into the room, some showing weapons, all alarmed, some climbing out through the window and onto the balcony from which the shot had been fired. "It's John Hodge who has killed him."

A tawny form sprang through the crowd and kneeled at the side of dead Samuel Logan. It was Louis Kern, half naked, and with his long black hair standing on end. He gathered the bloody head of the dead man in his arms.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RECKLESS RETURN.

THAT cry had come from her in an ecstasy of grief and anger and terror as she saw for the first time, so it seemed to Olivetta, the true John Hodge. And, indeed, that was he as he had been from the first, assured, sinister, cunning, all the devil in him peering out not when he frowned, as in other men, but when he smiled!

She scorned herself, she hated herself for the strange fascination with which he had gathered her in, actually hypnotized her. All of those emotions were tearing her when she cried out the accusation. But others had seen the scrawled writing. At the first tracing of the H, indeed, Hugh Dascom had looked around, but John Hodge was gone.

He had disappeared during a crisis of the narrative of Logan. Now he was neither in the room nor in the hall beyond. But Hugh Dascom, standing in the center of the room and folding his arms, was organizing the pursuit, shouting instructions in a ringing voice while he himself remained perfectly cool, perfectly self-contained.

But there was little that could be done. They scoured the grounds about the house. But there was no sign of him. They went to the garage and there they found that, strangely enough, he had dared to go directly there after the murder and, opening the garage, had taken out the same car in which he had driven into the place. He had trusted rightly enough to the momentary flurry of excitement after the killing to cover his flight, and by the time the searchers arrived he was out of sight, beyond the grounds. He had entered the highroad by the Dascom gate, and from this he might have turned into any of a dozen byways.

Olivetta had joined in the scurry of the searchers, but only in a dilatory fashion, for she was too busy keeping one hand over the

pocket of her dressing gown in which she was carrying the jewels for which so many men had died already and for which Logan had died on this night. She was at the front door again when the ambulance arrived and the policeman stepped down from it, followed by driver and doctor.

They had sent out for more police in the meantime, but the first officer to arrive took charge of the case at once. The room where the dead body lay was locked for the time being. Then the series of examinations began, the answers being jotted down as rapidly as possible in note form by the policeman. When it came to the turn of Olivetta, his task was made difficult by the appearance of Mrs. Dascom.

She had slept miraculously through the early portion of the night. But when all the noise was ended, she had appeared full of questions which, half answered by the first servant she met, sent her into a talkative hysteria. She insisted upon installing herself at the side of Olivetta no matter what happened.

"Because if we are all to be murdered," she said, "I shall die by your side, Olivetta."

The examination proceeded in jerks.

"He poured the jewels into my hands," said Olivetta, "when she came to that portion of the story.

"With the murderer standing there to look on!" cried poor Mrs. Dascom. "Oh, Olivetta, if he had chosen to make you the target instead—"

"If you please!" said the man of the law, holding up his hand to secure silence. "And may I see them?"

"Certainly," said Olivetta, and scooped carefully from the pocket of the dressing gown—a whole handful of common agate marbles!

Her cry of amazement was answered by a bewildered exclamation from the policeman. He took the marbles into his own thick fingers and turned them with a frown.

"If these are jewels," he said, "then I used to go around with my pockets full of pearls and rubies when I was a kid."

He dropped the marbles into her pocket again. But it was not a jest in which the others could join. An oath came heavily from the lips of Hugh Dascom, the first which Olivetta had ever heard him utter. A handsome fortune had been turned into worthless stone. They gathered in a closed circle, staring in speechless dismay from one face to another as though in the expectation that an explanation *must* be forthcoming. But no explanation came.

The eyes of the policeman gleamed an instant at her. Then he dismissed the first explanation which, apparently, had come into his brain. Some one, during the moments of wild confusion which followed the killing of Logan, had scooped the jewels out of her bathrobe pocket and dropped the agates into it. As for the choice of the agates in substitution, that was easily accounted for.

Olivetta, in a tomboy childhood, had acquired an extraordinary dexterity with marbles, and when the period of longer dresses and more complicated arranging of the hair arrived, she had given up the game, but had retired with the spoils which belong to the victor. In her treasure there were only agates, for marbles of a baser sort had been despised. And still, in her room, she kept a little box brimming with the old trophies.

And in the rush of people which entered the room after the shooting of Logan, it had been easy for some one to make the theft and escape without detection; and to find the criminal seemed hopeless.

Three detectives now arrived in a cluster. The house was filled with bustle for half an hour, and then peace, all as suddenly, dropped over the place.

The body had been removed, the depositions had been taken, and with the speed of perfect skill the detectives had "bottled" the case for later inspection. There were no arrests. There were no gloomy hints. The gloom of death was simply removed from the house and the occupants were left to sleep if they could.

As for Olivetta, after the family council at which her mother wept and her father sat with bowed head, she had gone back to her bed and lain there quivering, telling herself that she could never sink into unconsciousness in this same room which she had seen Logan steal into, and where she had seen him die. And yet she would go to no

other. It seemed to her as though the drama which had begun before her eyes alone might begin again and continue into another phase if she were there unaccompanied. At least, there was a half-formed impulse in her subconscious mind which kept her there.

But by dim degrees the horror slipped away, and, in sudden waves, sleep overcame her brain.

The sleep was shattered into a thousand bits. She found herself standing in the middle of the floor of her room. Her ears were ringing with a sound to which she had reacted involuntarily. Then she knew that it had been a man's voice which she had heard, a man's voice, yes—her father's voice, crying out in a wild alarm.

She ran to the door and flung it open. The hall was pitch black. But down it she could hear running footsteps, thudding heavily along the padded carpet. A light snapped on farther down the hall and the burst of light showed her no other person than John Hodge racing down the hall, a revolver in his hand. His deep overcoat collar was turned high around his face and the brim of his hat was flapping low across his forehead, but in spite of that partial masking, she knew him.

For the truth of him, she felt, was plain for the first time. He ran swiftly and softly. The gun was poised as for instant action. And as he whipped past her, where she sank half fainting against the side of her door, his eyes gleamed at her. Then he was gone bounding on.

Somewhere behind him was a heavy groaning. Was that her father lying bleeding to death on the floor of his room? Was this the second murder which had been committed by the wolfish fellow?

She looked down toward the head of the stairs. He who had switched on the light darted into view, caught sight of John Hodge, and tossed up a gun with a shouted command to halt. Instinctively Olivetta tensed herself to hear the barking of guns. But instead of shooting, the hand of John Hodge went back with a flash of the rapidly moving revolver which he held. Then that heavy weapon was hurled at the armed man before him.

The latter blazed away with his own gun and tried to dodge. But the bullet flew wide and ripped a crashing furrow along the wall, and he dodged too late. She could hear the thud of the steel glancing against the head of the man. Then he went down in a crushed heap at the corner of the wall and the floor while John Hodge leaned in his career, scooped up his fallen revolver without coming to a full halt, and then his footfalls jarred as he plunged down the stairs.

Olivetta did not pursue. He who had fallen at the head of the stairs was one of the detectives. Evidently they had returned in secret to the house to keep a watch. Perhaps there were more below. She herself fled up the hall and, while the sudden roar of the awakened house was once more commencing, she ran into the room of Hugh Dascom.

He was in the very act of picking himself up from the floor. She caught him in her arms as he lurched to his feet.

"Dad!" she cried with the overwhelming sense of all her bad treatment of him flooding her mind. "Oh, dad, he's killed you!"

He pushed her back roughly, and dropped a hand into his coat pocket—for he was still fully dressed and had apparently decided to stay awake the rest of the night. She thought at first that he had reached for a weapon, mistaking her for another enemy in his dazed condition, but he drew out his hand at once. Recollection came back to him.

"Good gad, Olivetta, not quite murdered, I thank you! But—turn on the light! That tiger Hodge—that devil—"

She flashed on the switch. Outside, and below, there was a rattle of revolver shots, a clamor of shouting, and that uproar was drawing all attention after it, except that Mrs. Dascom was sobbing hysterically in the next room and calling faintly for her husband. But Dascom's room itself was a scene of the wildest confusion, chairs overturned, rug kicked into a heap, all the evidence of a stern struggle. And her father leaned against the wall with one hand pressed to the side of his face.

"Thank God!" cried Olivetta. "Oh, dad, dear old dad!"

"Thank God," echoed Hugh Dascom,

and to her astonishment he was smiling, "that the modern robber uses a hard fist instead of a revolver bullet to knock out his victims!"

He lowered his hand and indicated a purplish and rapidly swelling bruise near the point of his chin.

"He came in like a cat," he said, "but when it came to a fight, he hit me like the blow of a club. That man should give up robbery and go after the prize ring. Besides, there's more money in it in these days of million dollar fights!"

She was bewildered by his calmness and his good humor.

"But he isn't away yet," she cried. "Do you hear? They're after him!"

"H-m-m!" said Hugh Dascom, yawning. "It's my personal opinion, my dear, that the automobile isn't made that can catch up with that speedy young man once he's under way."

But he went with her to the window and they leaned out and listened to the roar of a machine getting under way in front of the house.

"And there he goes!" cried Hugh Dascom.

Another exhaust began to crackle deeper in the grounds. It roared away to a distance toward the road. Presently a headlight was flashed on and gleamed down the polished surface of the highway.

"You nervy devil!" cried Hugh Dascom. "Good luck to you!"

"Dad, to a murderer?"

"Murderer or not," cried Dascom, "he has the nerve of the archangel Gabriel!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

ʊ ʊ ʊ

SANCTUARY

THERE is,
Away down by the sea,
A little house I love;
Tall trees lean over it protectingly
And hide it from the world;
Green vines
Clasp it in loving arms
And deck it with their tender tracery.
There is a garden for the birds
Where softly shines the sun;
It holds a balm for aching hearts,
And when you see the open, friendly door
You lose your sense of loneliness
And leave behind your care.
It is a little house
That holds you close
Where you find time for dreams.

Edith Tatum.

Fate and Evelyn

By WILLIAM SLAVENS McNUTT

IT'S funny how you meet people, ain't it? You meet a lot of people some place that you never saw before, and right away maybe you get acquainted with one of them and make friends with them and all like that, and the rest of them you don't pay no attention to. I don't know why it is when you meet a lot of people like that you should pick out one of them, or sometimes two or three, and get acquainted with them and maybe get to be friends and maybe have a lot of influence in their lives and all like that.

It's funny, ain't it? There ain't any sense to it. You don't pick them out because they got blue eyes, or for the way they talk, or because maybe they could do you some good if you got to know them well or something like that. No! There ain't any sense to it. You just kind of get to talking with them somehow, and then maybe you make a date to see them again some time, and then first thing you know you're friends.

Why shouldn't you be friends with some of the other people you meet for the first time? You can't tell. Maybe they're better people than the ones you made friends with and maybe they got more money and could have done you more good if you'd made friends with them, and everything like that. But no! It just happens. It's funny, ain't it? I guess it's Fate.

Fate is funny that way, ain't it? You can have all the sense you please, but you never know nothing about Fate. You can be a college professor, or God knows what, and you wouldn't know any more about Fate than I do.

I think Fate is like a fellow said to me once I was out on a party with in San Francisco, when we was there with the "South Sea Maids," and we'd had a couple of drinks, and he was a fellow with a lot of education. You wouldn't believe what a lot of education that guy had. You'd think he was a preacher or maybe a Governor of a State or something like that, the way he sat up stiff and wouldn't say much but just kept on looking like he was busy thinking, until we'd had a couple of drinks.

You know it's a funny thing, but if a fellow's got an education—a good education, I mean—and he thinks a lot, you know what I mean, thinks deep stuff—he's always measly company until he's had a couple of drinks.

This fellow was that way. I don't know how he come to be in the party, because I'd had a couple of drinks before he came, but after he came me and him was sitting together. And gee, was I scared of him? I'll say so! He had a face like you see in pictures of big men that's done something in the world.

And was he serious? Oh, was he serious? And polite? You'd think I was somebody of his own class that he'd just met and didn't know very well, the way he treated me. He was so polite he made me kind of nervous. He made me feel like he was a judge or something like that, and I had been pinched, and he was thinking how long he should give me. And then he got a couple of drinks, and you should hear the way he talked!

Deep stuff. All about life and everything like that. I bet he could write a book about what he talked to me about. Maybe he did write one. I don't know. I forgot to ask him his name, and while he was talking to me about this deep stuff he kept on taking a couple of drinks now and then, and right while I was listening to him and thinking to myself this is the kind of a guy you should learn something from that could do you some good, right while I was thinking that, all of a sudden he slipped off the chair and begun to snore. Went out cold just like that.

You know fellows like that, that do a lot of thinking about deep stuff they can't drink very good. It gets to 'em quick. Goes to their heads, I guess. I don't know. They're more sensitive than ordinary people, maybe, and that's it.

Poets is that way, too. I know a couple of poets—not very good ones, you know, but poets anyhow. They wrote words for songs and things like that. You know what I mean. They didn't write any books like for libraries, but they was poets. They could make words rime and everything like that, and they was both that way. They couldn't drink anything either. A couple of drinks, and they'd pass out cold, both of them.

Well, now, before this fellow I was telling you about passed out, he says to me: "If it's going to happen to you, it will happen! If you're going to get rich, you're going to get rich, and nothing's going to make any difference about it. If you're going to be poor, you're going to be poor, and you can't help yourself. It's all laid out beforehand, and you have nothing to do with it. That's Fate," he says to me. And then he took another drink and passed out. A couple of guys carried him out to a taxi to take him home, and dummy like I was, I forgot to ask what was his name.

The next afternoon just before dinner, when I got up to dress for the show, I telephoned to some addresses I had that I had got the night before from fellows who was with the party, to ask them what was this fellow's name, and none of them was there. I don't know if they give me phony numbers or maybe whether they had not got up yet. It was some party!

But anyhow, even if I don't know his name, I never forgot what this fellow told me. When anything happens to me, them words ring in my ears.

"It's Fate!" he says to me just like that. "It's Fate!"

And you know I never forgot that. No, indeedy. I suppose that influenced me a lot one way and another. You know what I mean. I just never forgot it. It's funny, ain't it?

Well, anyhow, I got a job once with the "Broadway Baby," and we started rehearsals in August. Oh, was it hot? Honest, if you was rehearsing with me then in that company, and you went to a Turkish bath, you would think maybe you was at the seashore and it was nice and cool.

The first day we was rehearsing I seen this girl Marie du Claire, who was in the chorus with me, and right away when I first seen her something come over me. I don't know what it was, but it was something. I didn't pay no attention to it at the time, but I thought about it afterward. It's funny, ain't it, how you feel things like that sometimes?

So we rehearsed a while, and it was hot like I was telling you, and we got tired, and the stage manager he give us a rest for a minute, and this girl Marie—course I didn't know her name was Marie then, because I never seen her before, never even heard about her or nothing like that—she come right over to me where I was sitting, and she sat down right alongside of me and she says to me: " My God, my feet hurt!"

Ain't that funny? I mean, she didn't know me, and there was a lot of girls there that she didn't know either, because she didn't know any of them. Wouldn't you think she might just as well have gone and sat down alongside of some one of the others and said how her feet hurt her instead of sitting down alongside of me? It's funny, ain't it? It's Fate, that's what I think! I believe in Fate. I don't know much about it, but I believe in it.

So I says to her, I guess her feet don't hurt no worse than mine, and she asked me did I ever try Pettie's Pink Powder for them, and I asked her did she ever try soakin' 'em in brine? The kind of water that comes off pickles, you know. Because once a fellow I knew who was a prize fighter told me he done that to make his hands tough, and I says to him I bet it would make your feet tough, wouldn't it? And he says he didn't know if it would, but why didn't I try it? And I was going to, but I didn't. I don't know why, but I just never got around to it.

So me and Marie we got to talking, and she says to me, didn't I think it was a measly show and probably wouldn't run more than a week and one thing and another, and I says to her:

" What do you think of this director we got? Ain't he the limit?"

And she says, " Deary," she says, " how does men like that that ought to be driving a truck get such jobs?"

And then we talked about some of the girls that was sitting around that we didn't know, but I didn't like their looks, and she didn't like their looks either. Wasn't that funny? If I didn't like something, she didn't like it either, and it was just the same way if she didn't like something I didn't like it either.

And then she says to me: " Who you rooming with, honey?"

Now, can you beat that? I wasn't rooming with nobody, and just before she said that I was thinking myself if this girl ain't broke or she ain't rooming with somebody maybe we could room together. So I looked at her and says, " Well, what do you know about that?" I says. " You can't tell me that there ain't something in this mind reading. I was just thinking about that same thing."

Then I says to her, " I ain't rooming with nobody," I says, and she looked at me kind of funny and she says, " Well, what do you know about that?"

And then we looked at each other, and she says, " You know, it's Fate." That's what she says. " It's Fate!"

Can you beat that? Made me feel kind of queer meeting somebody like her because she thought just the way I did.

" Do you believe in Fate?" I says to her; and she says did she! And she told me about a lot of things that had happened to her that she couldn't make heads or tails out of unless it was Fate; and we started rooming together.

The first night we started rooming together it was hot. And we went out with a couple of fellows and thought maybe we would have a good time and go to a roof some place, but they was pikers and we went to a movie show, and then they said:

" What do you say we go into Childs's and have a cup of coffee or something?"

And we shook 'em and went home and took off our things and sat by the window to try and get cool, and Marie says to me, " Deary," she says, " if I could only go back!"

And I says: " Back where?"

And she says: " Back to the country."

You know what? Till then everything she said I knew what she was going to say before she said it. It was the limit the way we thought alike. But when she says that about wanting to go back to the country I didn't understand so good; so I asked her what did she mean, and she told me.

You know what? She was a hick! I don't mean she was a hick then. She had

got over it. I mean she had been a hick when she was a kid.

You know what? She wanted to go back and be a hick again! Just because it was hot and we'd met a couple of fellows that was pikers she wanted to go back and be a hick again.

" Deary," I said to her, " you ain't feeling good. It's the heat. Listen, deary. I know a couple of fellows, only they ain't in town now, but when they get back I'll call them up, and if they ain't doing nothing they'll take us to a roof, and it 'll be cool up there, and we'll dance and have a swell time, and when you are up there dancing and having a swell time then you'll see if you want to go back and be a hick again."

And she begun to cry, and she says oh, she wanted to get away from it all. " Oh, you don't understand!" she says. And I says to her, no, she's right, I don't understand nobody wanting to be a hick.

I says to her, " I can understand if you're a hick and you don't know you're a hick, maybe you could think you was happy; but," I says to her, " when you have been a hick and got over it," I says, " what do you want to be a hick again for?"

And she says to me: " Oh, you never lived in the country, did you?"

And I says, " No, thank God, I never lived in it; but listen, deary," I says. " Don't think I don't know about it. I been through the country," I says. " I ain't been trouping for five years and being on the road a lot without being through it."

" Oh," she says, " but you've just seen it from the train window."

" Now, deary," I says to her, " wait a minute. Don't get me wrong. I ain't only seen it from the train windows, honey. I know more about it than that. I been out in it in automobiles And once," I says to her, " I forget where it was—but I think it was about halfway out between here and San Francisco—I don't know for sure where it was, but it was one of those places that's all flat and about a week and a half of one night stands going to the coast from Chicago—and I was out in it in an automobile with another girl and a couple of fellows, and the car upset. We went to one of them houses that they have on farms and stayed there all night. You would think," I says to her, " that you was asleep up in the Central Park zoo or maybe some place where there was one of these here animal acts. There was cows making noises all the time; and chickens and horses and frogs. My Gawd!" I says. " One frog can make more noise than a tenor standing in the wings saying ' A-a-h ' to see is his voice all right. And they're worse than tenors," I says, " because they're more of them. And listen," I says to her. " You know all them animals they got on farms, like horses and chickens and cows and all such like as that, they don't put bay rum or nothing like that on them to make them smell nice. Don't tell me!" I says. " I been in the country."

And then she says to me she wasn't talking about farms because that wasn't where she was raised. What she was talking about was a small town, because that's the kind of a hick she used to be. You know, not a farm hick, but a small town hick. She thought it would be nice if she could go back and live in one of them tanks. Can you beat it? A one night stand!

And I says to her, I says: " Listen, deary, them is just things you got on your mind, when you think like that. Like when you think for a while you would go and jump in the river if some fellow you like pretty well is mean to you. Listen," I says—" you ain't in love with somebody, are you?"

And she says no; and then I says to her: " Listen, deary, if you ain't in love with somebody and you feel like you wanted to go back and be a hick again, you take some calomel, because there is just two things," I says to her, " that makes you feel foolish like that and get them funny thoughts in your mind. One of them is when you are in love," I says, " and the other is when your liver's on the bum."

But she says to me her liver ain't got nothing to do with it, and she was kind of mad about it, because I thought maybe it did. So we went to bed, and I didn't think no more about it until after a while the way things come out, and I remembered about it and then I felt queer. I guess

maybe we must have had kind of a feeling that things was going to happen like they did happen or we wouldn't have been talking the way we did that night about going back and being a hick again or not going back and being a hick again. It was fate, that's what I think. Just fate!

We went on the road for a couple of weeks, and then we come into New York, and it was just like we had thought it was going to be. Honest, the only time I ever get a chance to stay on Broadway for more than two weeks is when I'm out of work and looking for a job. If the managers only knew what tough luck I got they would pay me big money just never to get a job with one of their shows. Honest, I bet if Belasco would give me a contract something would happen to him and he would have to go out and do the one-night stands or run a stock company in the sticks or something like that if he ever got me in a show of his. If I ever got in a show that would stay in town more than two weeks I bet somebody would make a law against Broadway and shut it up.

So we played in town for a couple of weeks, and then we went out on the road and played everything but schoolhouses. You know sometimes you get talking with a girl who is a waitress or a manicure or something like that, and she finds out how you're in the profession and she says she would like to go on the stage because it must be such fun! If any of those people that think it's such fun had been with us on that trip of one-night stands in the tanks, and split weeks in the places that are too big to be little towns and ain't big enough to be cities yet, I bet every time they'd see a finger nail or a dish of ham and eggs they'd feel like jumping in the river because they'd give up good jobs to be bum troupers.

It was one of these shows where the manager's wife was in the cast, and if you know anything about shows and managers and wives, you know that after you been in one of them you wonder why people make such a fuss about a little thing like a world war or something like that. Everybody was mad at everybody else and always trying to get somebody fired. The manager wouldn't talk to any of the men, except to call them down, because he was jealous of them, and his wife wouldn't talk to any of the girls for the same reason only the other way around. His wife didn't dare to talk to none of the men, because if she did, then the big stiff would beat her up, and the manager himself, he was scared to talk to any of the girls except to call them down, because if his wife caught him at it he would be out of luck. Why, honest, it was so bad between them two that she would get mad if he talked to the wardrobe woman, and you won't believe this, but it's a fact, he would even get jealous if she talked to the chorus men.

Me and Marie got along pretty well because we roomed together all the time and we didn't fight with each other much, and when either of us had a fight with anybody else we'd always fight them together. So we didn't fight much, because the rest of the people in the show didn't like to pick on us alone, and none of them was ever good friends enough so two of them could get together and pick on us. So we got along pretty well.

And all the time Marie was making a roar about wanting to go back and live in one of them little hick towns like one of them she come from.

I says to her: "Listen, we don't have to go back," I says. "We're in 'em now," I says. "Ain't it bad enough playing these tanks without having to live in 'em?"

She says living in 'em was different. She says when you play in 'em you don't get to know the nice people and don't know nothing about the homes or nothing like that. She says only the hotels and the theaters is bad. She says when you get to know them hicks in little tanks like that they're fine people. She says they're good hearted, and have lots of fun, and don't ever talk mean about each other or fight or anything. She says it's all jake.

So, by and by we come to one little town in one of them flat States that you come to just before you get up to where you can see the mountains going West. I forget the name of it. I don't mean I forget the name of the town, it was the name of the State. Anyhow, it was one of them States

along in there. The name of the town was Blueville. We got into that town, and the manager had a fight with his wife, and had a couple of drinks, and me and Marie met him on the street alone near the hotel, and he stopped and wanted to talk to us.

Marie says to him: "What's them marks all over you?"

Then he looked at himself all over and says: "What marks?"

And Marie looked at him like she just found out something, and she says: "Oh," she says. "I know! Them is the marks where the apron strings is tied around you all the time."

"Say, listen, kid," he says to her. "Don't get fresh with me!"

"Is that so?" says Marie. "Well, any time I want to get fresh with anybody it won't be with anybody like you," she says. "I will find somebody that ain't married to get fresh with," she says. "And if he is married it will be somebody that ain't so scared of their wife that they are afraid to wear a clean collar for fear the old lady will think they are trying to make a hit with somebody else."

"Is that so?" the manager says.

"Yes, that's so!" Marie says.

And then he hauled off and slapped her alongside of the jaw, but he did not knock her down, so I hauled off and I hit him with my parasol and broke it, and I says to him, "I'll teach you to hit my friend!"

And he says: "Is that so!" he says.

And he hauled off and he hit me alongside of the jaw, only he hit me harder than he did Marie, or maybe I wasn't standing so flat on my feet or something, and he knocked me down.

As soon as I fell down I got right up again, and I was going to hit him again with my parasol, only when I got up a lot of fellows who had been standing around here and there—hicks they were—they had already hit him. They were yelling and hollering and shouting and cursing and swearing and everything. He was down on the sidewalk, and some of them were hitting him and some of them were kicking him. A woman come over to me when I got up, and she was a hick, too—a kind of a nice hick—and she says to me: "You poor child," she says, "are you much hurt?"

I started to tell her no, I wasn't hurt much, but I begun to cry. Some other women come and asked Marie was she much hurt, and she begun to cry, too, and then a fellow come along and took hold of Marie's arm and says, "Are you bad hurt?"

He was a kind of a nice looking fellow for a hick; kind of a young fellow, only not too young, and he had pretty good clothes on, and was he mad? Oooh! Was he mad! We found out later that he was the first fellow that hit the manager after he hit Marie and me.

So he says: "Are you bad hurt?" and Marie looked at him and shut her eyes and done a flop. Huh! I bet if he had been an old hick, or one that was too young, or maybe not good looking or something like that, I bet she would have told him to go on and mind his own business. But no! She done a flop, and he grabbed her in his arms and he says. "The poor child!" he says. And he carried her into a drug store.

The lady that asked me was I hurt, and some more that come and asked me was I hurt, too, they all took me into the drug store, too, and then the cops come and got what was left of the manager after all the hicks got done hitting him and kicking him and took him off to the jail.

The way them ladies made a fuss over us you would think we was some famous convicts that had reformed, or maybe a couple of girls that had shot some rich fellow for love and was sorry for it or something like that. The fellow that carried Marie into the store—the good looking fellow—was all worked up like an actor playing the part of a fellow that gets mad. He stamped around and waved his arms and said it was a shame and all this and that. The woman that had asked me was I hurt got an automobile to come for her, and she took Marie and me to her home, and a doctor came to see us there and said we was all right, only we was suffering from shock.

Can you beat that? You would think we was run over by a street car or had drunk some stuff with wood alcohol in it or something like that instead of having

just a little battle with the manager that wouldn't ever amounted to anything if all these hicks hadn't butted in.

Then there was a crowd come to this lady's house where we was took, and the fellow that carried Marie into the drug store was with 'em, and they talked a lot where we couldn't hear 'em, and whispered some, and looked at us like we was something in a cage at the zoo. I could tell they was cooking something up, and pretty soon they sprang it on us. They had fixed it up that they would give me and Marie a home there in the town with one of these hicks—the woman that first asked me was I hurt, it was—and we could stay there and everything would be lovely. I started to squawk, but Marie give me the eye to lay off, and she made 'em a speech and said how fine that would be, and how happy we would be there and everything like that.

The old lady that they had fixed it up for us to live with was all smoked up. She was a widow lady, and didn't have no children and not much sense, but quite a lot of money, and she was kind of nice at that. You'd think she was at a wedding or a funeral or something the way she acted. She cried a little bit, and said she had always wanted a couple of daughters, and she would do a lot for us, and we would be happy and everything like that.

So when me and Marie got alone together in the room they give us, I says to her, I says: "What's the idea?" I says, and she says to me I don't know when I'm well off. She says here we're going to have a good home and live like regular people and be somebody, and get away from all those cheap people like we had to be with when we was in the profession.

"Yes," I says to her. "That will be fine. We will live here a while, and when we feel like we want to have a party we will walk down town and back and maybe get an ice cream soda. It will be a wild life," I says to her.

She says to me I was born in the city and ain't got sense. She says I am just like a hop head because I got the habit of being with shows and having a party now and then and thinking I was having some fun. She says if I live there a while in a different kind of life pretty soon I will be happy, and I will wonder how did I ever live the way I did before. So we stayed there with the old lady, and her name was Mrs. Gavin.

The stage manager took charge of the show till another guy could come out from New York, and the manager we had the fight with got fined five hundred dollars and sent to the pen for six months, and his wife that was in the cast got a divorce and married one of the chorus men, and the last I heard of them they was in vaudeville doing small time out on the Coast some place, and the fellow that told me about 'em said that they was fighting like cats and dogs.

So we stayed on there at Blueville at Mrs. Gavin's, and every once in a while Marie says to me wasn't I getting happy, and I says no. It was all right for Marie, because the fellow that picked her up and took her into the drug store kept coming around for her a lot and taking her out in his car and treating her like a lady, and acting like he was going to marry her. His name was Jim Farnsworth, and for a hick he had a lot of money. He owned a lot of farms, and would rent them out to boobs who would work on 'em and give him money for it; and then he owned a lot of mortgages, too; and a coal and a lumber yard where they sold coal to burn and boards to build houses with; and then he owned part of a bank, and did something or other in the church. He wasn't a preacher, but he was one of the people that is just below the preacher. Of course he didn't get any money for what he did in the church, but he had plenty anyhow. He kept coming for Marie, and Marie would go out with him, and that was all right, but if I went out with anybody Mrs. Gavin threw a fit, and the whole town got out the frying pan and put me on the fire.

Nice people are funny that way. Just because they are nice themselves, they act like they think nobody else is. Every time I would look at a fellow everybody in town would be scared and say they guessed I was going back to my old ways.

Can you beat it? I had been running around with shows and having a good time

and taking care of myself all right for about six years without nobody to throw a fit if I had a couple of drinks or come in late or something like that, but if I walked down the street in broad daylight in this town, where they was all nice people, with a fellow, why, everybody that saw me guessed maybe it was in my blood and I would probably never be able to behave myself. I would talk to Marie about it, and she would say, never mind, I would get used to it soon and then I would love it.

Then there was a fellow who worked in the grocery store, and his name was Louie Shuster. He was a kind of a nice kid, and I used to talk to him a lot, because I would go into the grocery store and buy something for Mrs. Gavin, and I could stand there, while I was buying it from him and nobody could say anything. Louie had been born in Chicago, and had lived there for a while, so he was not so much of a hick as some of them, only he kept telling me that being a hick was a lot of fun. I would talk to him and say to him, don't you wish you was back in Chicago, and he would laugh at me and tell me he would not live in the city for nothing. He would say that as soon as I got used to it I would like it fine. I guess I would have gone away from the place and not stayed to find out if it was any fun if I got used to it, only I got liking Louie Shuster.

I used to go to the store and talk to him every day, and finally one day I went to talk to him and he was not there, and then the fellow that owned the store told me Louie was no good and he had fired him. So I got mad, and I bawled him out, and the fellow told me to get out of the store and stay out, because he said he always knew a girl like me was no good and never would be, and Mrs. Gavin was a fool to take me in and give me a home and a chance and everything.

So I went back to Mrs. Gavin's, and I was crying on account of Louie, and when I got there Marie was crying on account of Jim Farnsworth. Nobody had fired Jim Farnsworth or nothing like that, but he had asked Marie would she marry him, and she had said yes, and so she was crying.

So I says to her, "What are you crying about?" I says. "You'll get married and settle down here where you like to be, and have a home and a lot of money and everything."

"Oh, no!" she says. "Me and Jim are going to New York. I would like to live here," she says, "but I got my career to think about."

When a girl in the profession ain't got any money or ain't got any fellow that's got any money to back her up, and ain't doing anything, she says to herself, "My Gawd! Now I got to go look for a job!'

And the minute she gets some money or gets a fellow that has got money, and then gets tired loafing around doing nothing and wants to go get a job, she says to everybody that she has got a career. You would think a career was something like boils or weak feet or something like that, that a girl got when she got money!

So Marie says to me, "Yes, I got my career to think of." And then she says: "As soon as I study singing with some masters for a while, why Jim will make a lot of money, because as soon as my voice is all right, in a couple of months he'll buy a show and I will star in it for him and make him a lot of dough."

And I says, what about his business here and his farms and everything?

"Oh," she says. "Oh, he is going to sell that all out right away before we leave."

"Well," I says, "I guess that would be better, because if he did not sell it out himself before he leaves, maybe if he buys the show and you star in it for him he would not have enough money left to come back here and watch while some sheriff or somebody sold it out for him. And maybe they would cheat him."

"Oh, is that so?" Marie says.

And I says: "Yes, that's so! And that ain't the half of it," I says. "Jim Farnsworth is a nice fellow," I says. "Only he ain't got any sense, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself," I says. "A nice fellow like him taking him to New York and making a bonfire out of his bank roll all for nothing," I says.

"Is that so!" she says.

And I says: "Yes, that's so, and you know it!"

And then she says I was a mean, ungrateful, jealous girl to talk like that after all she'd done for me, and I says, "All you ever done for me was to get me stranded here in a tank town to keep you company while you hooked a fish!"

And then she went and told Mrs. Gavin a lot of lies about me, and they both got mad, and I got mad, and I packed up my stuff and went down the street, and I met Louie Shuster standing on the corner.

I told him about it, and then he told me about it, and then he says to me, "How much money you got?"

I told him I had one hundred and eighteen dollars, and he showed me his savings bank book, and he had eleven hundred and seventy-five saved up.

I says: "Gee, that's a lot of money, ain't it?"

And he says, "Well, it might be more. What do you say we go around to the courthouse and get a license and get married?"

I says to him, "Well, I ain't doing nothing."

So we went, and we got married. And when we come out from getting married, I says to him: "Well," I says, "what will we do now?"

He says: "Well," he says, "we'll go down to the station and we'll wait there until a train comes through going East, and then we'll get on it," he says, "and then we'll go on to New York," he says, "and see maybe can we look around and find a place and start a little delicatessen shop and maybe make some dough," he says.

"Listen Louie," I says to him, "ain't we going to live here in Blueville?"

"Did you think we was?" he says.

"Sure!" I says.

"Do you want to live here?" he says.

"Would you if I wanted to?" I says to him.

"Sure!" he says.

So I stopped and I kissed him right on the street, and I says to him, "Louie," I says, "I didn't know you loved me as much as that. Listen," I says. "Let's hurry, because maybe a train would go through before we got there and we would have to wait here until another one comes in."

So we come on back to New York, and we started a little place—a little delicatessen shop on Amsterdam Avenue up above Seventy-Ninth Street. We didn't do so bad for a while. We had pretty good customers and everything, only the shop was kind of little, and we was saving up to get a bigger place where we could make more money.

And then the baby come, and that cost a lot of dough, and after we paid for a doctor and a nurse and the hospital and everything we didn't have enough left to move into a bigger place across the street in the next block that we wanted to get. So Louie got a tip on a horse that couldn't lose from a friend of his and we talked it over, and we went out to the track and bet five hundred on the goat at eight to one so we could get enough to move into this other place and make some real dough.

The name of this horse was Pumphandle, and they had been waiting for a year to find a place they could put him in where he would be sure to win. I guess he had been waiting so long he must have got nervous, because when the horses started he got his ends mixed up and was pointed the wrong way. If he had won that race the way he was pointed, he would have had to do it backing up. He run fine when they got him pointed right, but the rest of the horses was halfway to the finish line before he started to run in the right direction.

So I give Louie a good bawling out for gambling, him with a wife and a baby. And he give me a good bawling out because he talked it over with me before, and I did not tell him not to, and we had a fight.

When we got home we made up, and we counted all the money we had, and what we owed and everything, and Louie says, "Well, we'll just stick here where we are until we make another stake, and by and by we can move into a real place and maybe make some dough."

And the next morning Marie du Claire come into the store to get a box of crackers and some cheese and some dill pickles, only of course she wasn't Marie du Claire any more, she was Mrs. Farnsworth.

I says to her, "Why, Marie!"

And she says to me, "Why, Evelyn!"

And I come out from behind the counter and we hugged each other and kissed each other, and I took her upstairs to where we was living over the store and showed her the baby.

And I says to her, I says, "Well, how's everything?"

She began to cry, and says everything was rotten. She says she and Jim Farnsworth come on to New York and she learned how to sing, and he got a show and starred her and went broke, and she says now they are living down in a room on Seventy-Eighth Street, and for a little while they have had just enough money to get enough to eat on. Only Jim had one farm left that he couldn't sell before, and he just sold it, and pretty soon they would have three thousand dollars.

Then she cried some more, and said her husband was a swell guy, and she was sorry she got him mixed up in the show business, and if she had just liked him as well when she met him as she did now she would never have learned to sing and he would have kept his money and they would have been happy.

So I says to bring Jim over to see us, and we would shut up the store early and set around and have a couple of drinks and have a good time.

So he come over, and he got to talking to Louie and Louie got to talking to him, and then when they got done talking they had fixed it up that Jim Farnsworth was going to put in the three thousand dollars that he was going to get and have a half interest in the business and we would move into the bigger place across the street in the next block and make a lot of dough.

So we did. And now we got three stores, and we are making a lot of dough, and we both got cars, and we hire people to stay in the stores and run them so we can get out and have a good time once in a while. And we got a place on the beach down on Staten Island where we go in the summer time. And I got another baby now, and Marie has got one too, and we have a lot of fun.

And sometimes I sit and think to myself ain't it queer? If Marie hadn't come up to me that time when we was rehearsing with the "Broadway Babe," maybe none of it might have happened. And why do you suppose she done it? It's queer, ain't it? It's Fate! That's what it is!

PLAY HITS FROM ARGOSY-ALLSTORY

FROM time to time we have told you of books that have been made from ARGOSY-ALLSTORY serials and movies that have been derived from the same source, but we have said little or nothing of the plays that owe their being to plots that first saw the light between the pages of this magazine. There is now running in New York, at a leading Broadway theater, a piece that is so highly successful as to inspire us with the desire to take our readers into our confidence with regard to this other by-product from our pages. "The Nervous Wreck," a farcical adventure in the Far West, by Owen Davis, was based on "The Wreck," by the late E. J. Rath, that ran in ARGOSY-ALLSTORY from December 3, 1921, to January 7, 1922. The critics were lavish in their praise, and so great is the demand for seats that it looks as if the play would stay at the Sam H. Harris Theater for a year's run at the very least, while other companies are being organized for Chicago and London. The theatrical version, which was made by the man who won the Pulitzer prize last spring with "Icebound" as the best play of the year, follows the story very closely and was summed up by one reviewer in these words—"The funniest play of the season, ably written, clean, and expertly played." The leading rôles are acted by Otto Kruger and June Walker, and the piece is the first producing venture of Lewis & Gordon.

"The Nervous Wreck" is not the only "best seller" drama to come out of our "literary shop." That shatterer of run records a season or two ago, "The Bat," by Mary Roberts Rinehart and Avery Hopwood, was founded on "The Circular Staircase," by Mrs. Rinehart, that ran its course in *The All-Story Magazine* from November, 1907, to March, 1908.

The Laughing Rider

By LAURIE YORK ERSKINE

Author of "The River Trail," "Renfrew of the Royal Mounted," etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RIDING SIGNS.

IF Staff Sergeant MacQuillan had visited a familiar ranch house and been told that his host was not at home but "somewhere about the place," he would have known immediately where the employment of the moment had led the man he sought, and followed him there. And, so familiar was he with the ranch life of his district, he could have followed him there in the dark.

To the same extent Smiling Billy Argent was familiar with the type of Samuel K. Menzies; and to Billy the open range was as a farm yard. Along the Rio Grande, cattle rustlers were neither rare nor exclusive; you had them for neighbors. Their ways were your ways, and it was as easy for a good range man to find the man who took his cattle as it is for a small boy to find the gang who has preceded him to the swimming hole. Finding the cattle, of course, was another matter.

MacQuillan had never come to speaking terms with Menzies, because the sergeant wore scarlet and looked for evidence. Billy, desiring conversation with the cattle thief, merely went into his quarry's stamping ground and "rode signs." He first examined the abandoned ranch house where he had met Mr. Menzies and his satellites.

Here he discovered from such obvious advertisements as the stove contained, and the disposition of the furniture provided, that no human being had occupied the place since the departure of Sergeant MacQuillan the week before. But outside the ranch house Billy derived information of the highest importance.

For instance, he was able to study the hoof prints of the animals which Menzies and his men had ridden on the night he met them first. Having himself taken those animals away from the cattle thieves, Billy

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 20.

knew that whenever he saw the mark of these three horses again he would be looking upon a trail at least a week old.

Also he discovered that Cree Thatcher toed in and that there was a vaguely triangular indentation in Flat Head Frank's left boot heel. He quite qualified for first place in sign reading, however, when he discerned and picked up a tiny crimson bit of glass which caused him to remember that Cree Thatcher had worn a hat band of red bead work, and it assured him that that vain adornment was slowly falling apart.

The gradual disintegration of Cree Thatcher's hat band served Billy as a very good scent for the better part of a day. He rode the Menzies trail to the border, and discovered various routes that the rustlers had used from time to time, almost solely by means of that hat band. His eye, ever alert for a break in the normality of trail or landscape, came to glance lightly over the recurrent confusion of horse and cattle hoof marks in its eagerness to pick out those telltale bits of glass.

Red beads began to loom up in Billy's life with the significance of empty pockets to a married man in the morning. They showed that some one had been there.

The trail of the red beads, however, was invariably accompanied by the hoof prints of the three horses which Billy knew his quarry no longer had, and invariably the charcoal of their camp fires was soft and rounded with age. So Billy knew that Menzies, wary of ways which a week before had brought him into such perilous proximity to the redcoats, was riding new trails.

But also Billy knew the country. He had been looking it over with a plainsman's thoroughness ever since he chose it for his playground. Had he been devoted to the graphic arts, he could have drawn a topographical map of it from memory. He knew that an advancing civilization had definitely limited the expanse of such wild country as could be safely used for games of hide and seek, and he knew that the profession of Mr. Menzies bound him rigidly to this specific area. So he clambered to the summit of the highest butte he could ascend and looked that country over.

"There's woods over there," he observed to himself, looking to the westward. "And a real pretty layout of hills. This Menzies can only preserve his scalp by tying it to his brains, and a man with brains and somebody else's cows to herd would most likely follow the bottoms of them hills."

When he climbed down he had a neat little map of the country in his head and an instinctive knowledge of about where Menzies was to be found. Carefully taking all convenient cover, and riding whenever possible on rocks, grass or loose sand so that his own trail might not be too clear, he went into the country of his choice.

There he wended his way in the valleys and divided his attention between the ground before him and the ears of the intelligent Concho. If there was another man or beast within a quarter of a mile he would see those ears pricked up.

As the veil of the distant hills deepened from pink to purple, and buttes behind him took on regal glory, he came to the ashes of a camp fire. Dismounting and throwing his reins, he pounced upon those ashes. They were not warm, but the charcoal was sharp edged and brittle.

Sweeping the camp site with his eyes, he fairly groveled upon the mess of hoof prints which scarred the grasses near the fire. He strained his eyes as the sun sank lower, and with swift, groping gestures measured and analyzed the marks. A shrill, keen wind swept down between the hills, and Billy shuddered, but his eyes did not leave the marks. He arose to his knees with a wide smile.

"No fire to-night, Concho," he murmured softly. "It's them."

For he had laboriously made out that the marks of the horses showed three, and they were not the same three as had marked the barn yard of the abandoned ranch. And to make assurance doubly sure, Billy sank back—and sat on the discarded hat band of Mr. Cree Thatcher.

Billy laughed, and his mirth was answered by an icy blast which struck his valley from the northwest, and gave him for the first time in his life an indefinable and ease destroying knowledge that there were places in the world where winter could be terrible with cold.

"Another one like that," said Billy, "and we pack a base burner."

Concho laughed; at least it sounded like a laugh, and Billy sought the shelter of a cut bank to dine.

"Cold air tights for supper," quoth he, "and a refrigerator to sleep in. This country ain't for me."

CHAPTER XXXII.

BILLY ACCEPTS AN INVITATION.

BY the earliest glimmer of dawn Billy inspected the camp site once more, and picked up from the earth a mangled willow leaf. He pondered for a moment on that, and, stopping only to devour a can of peaches, he mounted and wended his way onward.

He now seemed to have a definite destination in mind, for he serenely kept Concho at an easy lope and scantily regarded the ground. By noon he had cut the trail of the Menzies party three times, but had hardly halted to inspect it; for Billy was a shrewd judge of distance, and he knew that to reach his destination before dark would require steady travel.

"To-night," he informed Concho, "I'm sleepin' warm, like a human being ought to. So we'll just sashay over to the camp fire of this Menzies sport."

Later he drew rein before the ashes of a fire, slid off and kicked a tin can southward. He ran his hand over the ashes.

"Yesterday's dinner," he announced. "Beans, and then some beans."

He scanned the surrounding grasses, and his eye fell upon a sprig of willow which lay trampled by the way. He grinned broadly.

"We'll eat," he decided. "Here's hay and here's water; an' we got lots of time, Concho, because I know just where we sleep to-night. Them woods we saw from the butte are the only willow growths in sight, and what's plenty more, it's the only place where any rustler that hasn't et loco would make his camp this side of the border."

Blithely he ate cold beans and cold canned tomatoes. Complacently he looked to his hardware, and saw that Concho was refreshed. Then, humming softly to himself, he cantered toward the only place this side of the border where any self-respecting rustler would camp. He hoped that the Menzies fire would be a generous one. He hoped that one of the three was a competent cook. He hoped they wouldn't be seriously alarmed when he rode in to visit them.

On this score Billy was not deeply worried. He had marked the impression made upon Menzies by his gun play at the first time of meeting, and remembered the docility with which they had taken his decisions in the great can reading contest and his orders on the occasion of his collecting his just dues. Moreover, he shrewdly interpreted the caution which had prompted them to steal away in the darkness of that memorable night.

"They ain't in no ways sudden, nor happy about playing with guns," he confided to Concho. "They got a wide adornment of yellow thataway; and I'm layin' a whole stack of chips they came to Canada just because the Eskimose don't know which end of a gun the bullet comes out of."

He was now in a narrow valley, and the willow grove loomed above him. As he neared it he considered this matter of the attitude his quarry held toward blue steel, and it seemed good. He nodded to himself, appearing to bow to the ears of Concho.

"They're gun shy," he pronounced. And Concho, throwing up her head, pricked her ears and sniffed audibly. She smelled strangers.

So Billy, not slackening his pony's pace, began to sing. He sung with more volume than melody, and the tune he sang was a mournful wail.

"Oh, mu-oo-oo-ool, *army* mu-oo-oo-ool,
Yore years are so graceful and *long!*
Yoo were tru-oo-oo-oo to the fla-aih-aih-aihg,
So we'll praise you in stohree and sah-ah-ah-ahng!"

The horrific laudation rang out with all the inspiring effect of a funeral dirge bellowed by a professional mourner hired on a basis of quantity production guaranteed to reach heaven and shatter the pearly gates. Billy stopped after the first effort to take breath and scan the foreground.

Then he began again, conveying to the

nearer that the aforementioned professional was bent upon giving his money's worth, and that after this onslaught the pearly gates would in all probability stay open for good.

"Oh, *mu-oo-oo-ool,* army *mu-oo-oo-ool,*
Yore years are so graceful and *lah-ah-ah-ahng!*
Yoo were *tru-oo-oo-oo* to the *flaih—*"

At which point St. Peter might be said to have appeared in the person of Samuel K. Menzies, and proffered Billy the golden key in the substance of a gleaming blue steel forty-five. Mr. Menzies made his appearance waist deep in a willow bush, which combined with a worried expression upon his face to suggest that he was being burned alive in green fire.

"Hope I didn't scare you," said Billy commiseratingly. He drew Concho to a walk and continued forward with a smile.

"You did," said Menzies, not lowering the gun. "I thought they'd brought the artillery out ag'in' us."

"I can sing louder than that," Billy assured him, and he brought Concho to a halt with Mr. Menzies at the bridle rein.

"Don't," pleaded Menzies, keeping his visitor covered.

"Prob'ly you'd like something different. I know a lot of songs."

"Then sing out why you're snoopin' round where you ain't wanted."

"I don't know the tune."

"It goes with a sort of whinin' noise." Mr. Menzies tapped his gun.

Billy smiled down upon Mr. Menzies and spoke in a honeyed tone, which the glint in his eye belied.

"Play it for me," he coaxed. It was a daring thing to challenge the rustler's willingness to kill, but Billy suspected that he had read the man's character correctly, and when he saw the wavering light in Menzies's eyes he knew it. But he didn't force the issue. He knew that two others were in all probability watching every move he made.

"Sam," he said, "you shorely ain't been in Canada so long that you don't know manners? You and me, we got to ride together, Sam, because these vivid major generals have herded us into the same country.

"They take contracts to hang men up here for little disagreements with guns, and I'm long enough without being stretched any further. So I'm comin' to you to be all gregarious an' sociable, and you go talkin' of shootin' orf yore irons thataway. It's a real cautious play for you to make, Sam, but it ain't manners."

"You mean MacQuillan wants you for murder?" Menzies had not lowered the gun.

"How you talk. MacQuillan wants me for a necktie party."

"An' you want to ride with me?"

"Shucks! I *got* to ride with you. There ain't no other country hereabouts for me to ride in."

"Why don't you cross the border?"

Billy's grin widened without his gaze perceptibly softening.

"There ain't enough red wool in Canada to dress up the number of men it would take to drive me over the border."

The perturbation of Menzies's countenance thereupon twisted wryly.

"Last time we rode together, you went orf with our horses."

"Last time we rode together," corrected Billy, "I had to catch up with you. We'll just have to control our animal spirits after this."

"Seems to me we'd get along together a heap better if we stayed apart," suggested Menzies.

But Billy did not agree with this.

"Then we'd be passin' lead every time we cut trails. That would be a lot tiresome."

With inward pleasure he saw Menzies quail at this suggestion. The situation he had forced upon Menzies was peculiar. Menzies had him covered, but Billy had never hinted by so much as the twist of an eyelid that he felt required to throw up his hands. Therefore, his right hand was perilously near his revolver butt.

Menzies no doubt knew that he could slay Billy in this wild place with impunity, but he knew also that to try it he must slay with the first shot; otherwise he himself would die with the sound of his gun.

Also he knew that he could not be certain of making that first shot tell; and Billy knew he knew.

Therefore, while Billy was conscious that he played a desperate game, and that his first warning of trouble would be the searing pain of hot lead, he felt fairly certain that that warning would not come. In effect he was now deliberately daring Menzies to shoot him, and at the same time threatening that if Menzies did so that shot would be his last.

"It would be a lot tiresome," said Billy, "and an awful waste of lead."

Menzies gulped.

"I dunno," he said. "Just one cartridge." In spite of himself he bunched the words in quick gasps, for his breath came short. His finger trembled on the trigger.

Billy laughed aloud, startling Menzies immeasurably. He leaned from the saddle and spoke to the rustler in firm, low tones, piercing the man's eyes with his own.

"Yore finger's wigglin'," he said, "an' yo're shore foolin with death." By virtue of that long lean downward Billy's right hand had been brought within an inch of his revolver butt. His face was close to the face of Menzies. "Put up that gun!" ordered the low voice relentlessly.

Menzies's eyes widened like the eyes of a frightened child.

"I'll shoot you to hell!" he cried. But even as he said it, he knew it was too late. The Texan's body hovered over him, the Texan's left hand touched his arm. Too late the miserable rustler saw that Billy could in one movement draw his own weapon and displace the opposing gun. Too late he knew that against this man he stood no chance whatever.

"Put up yore gun," said Billy cheerfully, "and we'll all have a sort of reunion."

Menzies put up his gun.

"Slide orf and stay a while," he invited weakly; but the look he bestowed upon his guest was a look of profound and blackest hatred.

As it happened the two companions of Mr. Menzies had not been witnesses of the foregoing drama at all. They had been at camp quite half a mile away in the depth of the ragged woodland. When their chief appeared and revealed his guest to them, their emotion knew no bounds.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

UNWILLING FRIENDS.

THE hours of companionship which followed Billy's advent in the Menzies camp could hardly have been described as congenial, but they were in many ways peculiar. Not the least peculiar thing about them was that they were hours. It might be conceived as surprising that the three outlaws did not cut short the stay of their guest to a matter of minutes, and then see that he was carried away to a place where carrion would not pollute the atmosphere of their encampment. For they were in Canada on a delicate business, intent on recrossing the border with a profitable herd, and a potential profit sharer was not welcome.

The fact is that Billy's diagnosis of his chosen companions had been correct. They were outlaws all, but they all lacked that mental aberration which makes the true desperado. They were gun shy; reluctant to shoot, and even more reluctant to be shot at. Knowing the lethal potentialities of a man who had served with the rangers, you will understand why they at once hated Billy and let him strictly alone.

It was amazing how dark a cloud this attitude cast about the camp fire that evening. Billy was really the only member of the party whose bearing might have been described as, in the true sense, jovial. He was in remarkably high spirits and did not refrain from letting his companions know it.

"It's a lot good for you sports that I came along thisaway," he pointed out. "Because you seem to be sort of mournful and sad in the make-up of yore dispositions, and I'm fitted by nature to gladden things up."

This remark was received with marked reserve and a silence adequately termed complete.

"Down in Texas," continued Billy, "we look on such taciturnity as you-all indulge in as a lot frivolous and time wastin'.

Round a camp fire thisaway we'd sing songs or recite recitations. D'you know 'How Jim Slade Was Killed'?"

"Didn't know he was dead," said Mr. Menzies.

"You roped the wrong maverick that time," explained Billy. "This yere 'How Jim Slade Was Killed' is a poem. It was run orf by a writer sharp on the El Paso *News Reporter*, an' it deals with a little affair I was mixed up in myself. Only it exaggerates some of the details. It goes like this—"

Billy drew a deep breath, fixed his gaze intently upon a scar which detracted from the beauty of Mr. Cree Thatcher's right nostril, and without further encouragement took up his tale in a jaunty manner only slightly tempered with a regretful melancholy. He began:

"He reached too slow, an' I shot him dead in
the bar of the Rollin' Stone."

"Who?" interposed Flat Head Frank with abrupt curiosity.

"Jim Slade," answered Billy, with a tolerance that did him credit. "That comes out later. Now don't interrupt." Again he breathed deep. Again he began.

"He reached too slow, an' I shot him dead in
the bar of the Rollin' Stone.
The red blood gushed from his punctured
head, an' he died without a moan.
For he'd passed his word, an' he'd camped
with me, on the painted desert's sand—"

"It wasn't really the Painted Desert," Billy here explained parenthetically. "It happened in the Pecos country."

"An' he rode away with my top ponee, an'
crossed the Rio Grande.
"He rode away, an' he left me flat, countin'
on me to die,
But I found the camp of a desert rat—("It
was really a sheep herder.")—while the
star herd rode the sky.
For the Rio Grande I made by track, in the
blue of the desert night,
Considerin' which of my guns I'd pack, when
the moment came to fight."

Billy paused for a moment and regarded his hearers impressively.

"The next verse," he said, "is a way high up piece of poetry. I ain't sure but what I don't like the next verse better, almost, than any other verse in the poem. There's nineteen verses."

"How many?" asked Menzies.

"Don't interrupt," said Billy. "Just listen."

He continued his narrative:

"For he'd shared my grub, and I'd played
him well, an' he'd passed his word as my
pard.
So I says, Jim Slade, you can ride to hell,
but I'll ride just as hard.
An' I says, Jim Slade, you can buy complete,
the best guns ever made,
But my forty-five on the day we meet, will
take yore life, Jim Slade.
But many a day, and many a night, and many
a footsore mile,
Was to lay twixt me an' the bitter fight, that
tore—"

At that point Billy's narrative was rudely broken.

"Twixt?" roared Menzies. "In the name of Sand Blast Sam, what the hell d'yer mean by 'twixt'?"

"I don't know," admitted Billy. "Reckon it means 'on top of'; anyway:

"But many a day, an' many a night—"

Again the narrative was shattered.

"How many verses did you say?" asked Menzies.

"Nineteen."

"Well, if you got to unload the entire, complete history of that killin, s'pose you just tail it orf and throw what lays between in on the side."

"I'm right glad to hear you say that, because I couldn't contract to remember all the verses, anyway. After this sport that's tellin' the story sets out to track Jim Slade there's thirteen verses that show how he don't find it no lead pipe cinch to rope his man. The poem shows how he rambles around in the desert, real short of food an' such necessaries.

"It shows how he gets a hawse an' rides it to death in the Mexican desert an' lived orf horse flesh for two weeks; although that ain't true because I got the man who was the real Jim Slade two days after he lit out with my pony. An' I ain't eatin' horse flesh, for the simple reason that I ain't no cannibal.

"Anyway, it goes on to show how he finally comes into the town of Indian Head, Arizona, where the Rollin' Stone saloon was, with his clo'es all tore, an' starved an' feeble likewise, from havin' fallen orf a mountain, or somethin'. An' it ends up like this:

"My throat was parched, an' my feet they bled, an' my broken ribs was sore,
But when Jim rode into Indian Head, why, I was there before.
An' when he came to the Rollin' Stone, and ordered whisky, tight,
I says to him, 'Jim, I'm all alone, but I'll see yore blood to-night.'"

An' then, like the first:

"He reached too slow, an' I shot him dead in the bar of the Rollin' Stone,
An' the blood gushed forth from his punctured head, an' he died without a moan.
For he'd passed his word, an' he'd camped with me, on the Painted Desert's sand,
An' he rode away with my top ponee, and crossed the Rio Grande."

A brief silence trailed after Billy's voice as the steam trails after the hurrying engine.

"It's a good poem," said Billy, wistfully. "Ain't every man gets his actions written up that-a-way."

"No," granted Menzies. "Not like that."

"I know another," offered Billy.

At that Cree Thatcher became vigorously profane.

". . . We didn't ask yer to come," were among the things he said. "And we ain't trying to make yer stay, so for —— shut up!"

"It's called 'The Cattle Rustler's Grave.'" Billy continued. "It starts:

"'Mid the grama grass and glaring sand,
'Neath the brassy western skies,
Bound in the silent chains of death
The cattle rustler lies—"

"Tell us when to laugh," suggested Flat Head Frank, humorously.

". . . His sun bleached ribs all naked lie,
And the grinning skull gleams white"

—Billy stated, and was thereupon interrupted by the peculiar action of Mr. Menzies. Mr. Menzies got up and walked away.

"What's the matter now, Sam?" asked Billy.

"It's too sad," said Menzies. "I've got to go away and cry."

"Me, too," said Flat Head Frank, rising. "When you finished that there poetry, whistle and I'll come back." Thus speaking, he made a peculiar grimace in the direction of Cree Thatcher and, with uncanny suddenness, disappeared into the blackness which had swallowed his leader before him.

"Come right back," cried Billy, who noticed the grimace. "I've stopped."

"Back in a minute," came the voice of Menzies from the outer darkness.

"All right," said Billy.

He sat silent for a moment, regarding intently the form of Cree Thatcher which loomed before the fireplace. With a sudden movement then he leaped to his feet and jumped backward into the same blackness which had consumed his other two companions. From that blackness he addressed Cree Thatcher. In his voice was the metallic determination which Cree recognized as the tone which Billy used when he held the person addressed under the muzzle of his gun.

"Sit right still," snapped that low, metallic voice. "I wouldn't like to be right in front of the fire when they come back, so I'm going to wait here in the dark. If you move I'll have to act according."

Cree Thatcher, more frightened than even Billy suspected, froze into a rigid resolution to move no muscle. But he froze needlessly. Billy did not stay in the shadow at all. He followed Menzies and Flat Head further a-field.

Menzies ardently desired to be rid of Billy's company. This was not a surface prejudice on Menzies's part. He really and honestly felt that he could not maintain the iron nerve necessary to the pursuit of his calling under the companionship of Billy. To Menzies, Billy was an uncongenial soul; when Billy recited poetry he became something less than that.

Therefore, while Billy recited, Menzies had courted the eye of Flat Head Frank, and conveyed that he desired Flat Head to follow him into the woods. This Flat Head had achieved with the success al-

ready recorded, and with a nice understanding had done his best to pass the instruction on to Thatcher.

Menzies had made his way directly from the fire to the horses, and there informed Flat Head of his plan. It was amazingly simple, and consisted of placing a spike in Concho's foot in such manner as would cause Concho to drive it home after a few hours' ride with Billy in the saddle, thereby becoming lame, and thus permit them to leave Billy behind. They could place that spike in an instant, and guilelessly return to the fire.

Flat Head, pleased beyond measure at this strategy which would permit them to cook Billy's goose with impunity, gladly raised one of Concho's neat hoofs from the ground, and waited for Menzies to adjust the spike. He was bent in that position when Billy overtook them.

Billy entered the little clearing where the horses were hobbled, without drawing his weapon, and spoke quickly, to prevent them from drawing theirs. In the blackness he could only see the bent figure of Flat Head and the taller form of Menzies. He could not discern their occupation.

"I was afraid you might get lost," he said.

Menzies affected a laugh. Heard in the dark, it made Flat Head shudder. He dropped Concho's hoof.

"Just came to look at the hawses," explained Menzies. "One of 'em seemed to have a bad foot."

"Shore 'nuf," said Billy. "It's Concho."

"That so?" asked Menzies, in vast surprise. "I never did think it was Concho. Thought it was Cree's pony. Too dark to see plain."

"Shore is," lied Billy. "I only knew it was Concho, because she's been lame in that foot for three days."

The three men stood silently, like amorphous shadows in the night. Each of them was aware that an opportunity had come to decide definitely whether Billy should remain in that camp or not. Billy stood gracefully at ease and awaited action.

"We'd best be gettin' back to the fire," said Billy; his voice rang icily. "It's cold here."

That was the challenge. It would be answered with a shot or with assent.

"Yes," muttered Menzies. "It's cold."

"Hell!" swore Flat Head rebelliously. "What's the idea?"

"We could tell jokes," ventured Billy. "Or sing."

Flat Head fidgeted on one foot and the other. Menzies turned suddenly toward the camp fire. The opportunity was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BILLY OBLIGES.

THEY didn't tell jokes, and they didn't sing. A certain melancholy hung over the rustler's camp fire; and while Menzies struggled with a none too agile mind to conceive what Billy was aiming at, Billy gave no hint that he had anything in his mind whatever.

He sat at the camp fire in an attitude suggestive of solid comfort, serenely watching every movement of his three companions, and hummed softly to himself the plaintive song of "The Dying Cowboy." When he had finished that somewhat protracted lament he continued to gaze dreamily upon his comrades, and began to sing it all over again.

"Aw, shut up!" cried the agonized Mr. Thatcher.

"Do we sit up an' listen to that all night?" demanded Flat Head.

"What's the use?" protested Menzies, with great heat. "You can't trust us, and we hate you worse'n snakes. We can't go on like this forever."

Billy stopped his song, and spoke with the voice of aggrievement.

"Why how you talk," he murmured. "You mustn't be so hopeless thataway, Sam. We'll get used to each other. We're pards, we are."

He arose from his place and, taking up the coffee pot, strode to the near-by spring where he filled it with water. Returning to the fire he added coffee in plentiful handfuls, and set it on the fire. He then sank back to his place and, yielding to a suspicion that "The Dying Cowboy" had become monotonous, began to chant "The

Cattle Rustler's Grave," in a somewhat louder voice.

Poisonous glances concentrated upon him from about the fire, but he ignored them with devastating effect. Dreamily regarding the faces of his camp mates, he sang on and on, warming up to his subject as he proceeded and filling his dirge with fine feeling for its latent pathos. He had come to the point where, the rustler having been cornered and riddled with bullets, the vultures and coyotes descended upon their providential food supply, when Menzies arose to his feet and addressed the four winds with intense feeling.

"You come yere with yore guns and loud talkin'!" he cried, "an' make our lives hell on earth! You come yere. An' I can't stand for it! I can't! You come yere with yore guns! I can't say what I'm goin' to do! I can't stand it!"

Vindictively, he kicked at the glowing embers, scattering live coals wildly over the landscape. Only a lightning action on Billy's part saved the coffee pot from disaster.

"Why, Sam," reproved Billy. "Don't do that. You hang the kindlin's all over the scenery."

"I can't stand it!" cried Menzies wildly, and he sat down on a live coal.

Menzies cursed vividly, filling the air with his protests. He sprang to his feet and with his heels tore up the ground. But the coal had been a vigorous and enterprising coal, full of flaming life. Menzies cast himself upon his stomach and clawed at the seat of his trousers.

Flat Head and Cree, springing to their leader's aid, pounded lustily and flat handed upon the indicated region. They spanked Menzies with all their might until his howls, muffled by the earth into which Cree's knee enforced his head, protested against their zeal rather than against the burning coal.

Violently, he threw Thatcher from his shoulders, and twisted about to vent his wrath upon them both. He cursed them and libeled them in a fury from which all dignity was lost by virtue of the fact that he could not sit down, and did not try to stand. He writhed about on the ground like a puppy dog with a fresh cut tail, holding tenaciously to the seat of the trouble with both his hands.

When he finally settled himself into a comparatively comfortable position and set forth to tell Cree and Flat Head definitely what he thought of them, Billy was discovered to be settled luxuriously in his place, sipping a steaming cup of black coffee.

"Me," said Billy when the plaintive Menzies permitted him to speak. "I'm takin' a contract to stay awake to-night. This coffee is good."

Somberly, the three rustlers ceased their private feud to gaze upon him.

"If you've throwed out the rest of that coffee," said Menzies finally, "I s'pose you ain't objectin' to us usin' our own coffee pot, likewise."

"I didn't," said Billy. "I'm layin' to drink at least three cups. If you sports want to keep awake, too, there ain't nothin' to prevent you usin' it."

Menzies sat for a moment in bitter dignity, then, permitting reason to overcome his pride, he drew forth his tin cup and rudely took the coffee pot from Billy's side. He filled his cup, and Flat Head and Thatcher followed suit. In silence the four men sat about the fire and drank the steaming brew. Billy finished first.

"There ain't but one more drink left," sneered Menzies. "Better have it. We'll cook more, an' go on drinkin' all night."

Billy grinned broadly and finally gave voice to a laugh as Thatcher lifted up his cup to drain the contents.

"I ain't drinkin' any more," he smiled, and rose to his feet.

Menzies emptied his cup.

"Huh?" he said, surprised. For Billy had placed one hand on the butt of his gun.

"Not out of that pot," said Billy.

Flat Head threw down his empty cup.

"It tastes rotten," he announced.

"Shore," said Billy. "It's loaded."

Menzies automatically dropped his hand to his side, but Billy reminded him with a word.

"Don't!" advised Billy. And Menzies didn't.

"Knockout drops," Billy explained jovially. "The kid got 'em from Denker for his

mother's sick headaches. Leastwise, that's what I wrote. If Denker didn't make no mistake you sports are due to sleep to-night like you never slept before. It 'll do you good."

Profanity overwhelmed this last assurance, but Billy's solicitation for their welfare did not lag.

"You sports don't like me worth a cent," he pointed out, "so I thought I'd sort of fade out before morning. You'll lend your hawses, maybe?"

They sat silent, fascinated, feeling the drug overcome them.

"You—" Menzies and Cree Thatcher attempted a duet of villification, which Billy deprecated good naturedly.

"It's the dope," he assured them. "You don't know what you're sayin'. You'll be sorry for it later."

Flat Head rolled over and began to snore. Cree and Menzies muttered tenaciously and drowsily dark predictions as to Billy's future both here and hereafter. Menzies gave in first, and Billy very kindly tucked him up in a blanket, while Cree, half conscious, feebly endeavored to pull his gun from its holster.

"Let me," offered Billy helpfully, and taking the butt of the gun from Cree's hand, he drew it for him and laid it in the half-breed's lap. Cree tried to pick it up, drew a deep breath, and went to sleep like a baby playing with a toy. He muttered a drowsy curse as the drug overcame him, and Billy, all tenderness, pressed the gun gently into his hand for him. With a grunt of satisfaction, Cree hugged the weapon against his cheek, and slumbered.

"Now they're all a-bed," smiled Billy to himself, "I can have a quiet lil smoke all to myself."

Like a kindly father, he leaned against a tree and puffed his cigarette with the utmost serenity, gazing the while upon the peaceful scene of strong men fast asleep by the dying embers of their fire. He made no haste to leave that quiet spot, but renewed the fire ever and anon, to hug its grateful warmth until nearly daylight.

Then he made his way to the horses and, mounting Concho, rode away, leading Cree Thatcher's and Flat Head's horses beside him. Menzies's horse he left hobbled in its place, and he did not take the weapons from the sleepers.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN INNOCENT MAN.

"LIKE flame!" cried Annette Savardé.

She stood on the veranda of her father's house and looked out over the undulating prairie. The icy breezes which had disturbed Billy in the night were tempered on this bright morning by the sun, and the air touched Annette with a tang that that invigorated and uplifted her.

The icy breezes had also touched the countryside, however, and as a result every tuft of grass, quivering leaf, or lichen covered rock was "like a flame." A million fires seemed to burn upon the prairie with an alchemy which gave them varicolored lights; and the wind playing with the grasses sent a lambent yellow blaze flowing like liquid toward the house.

Then Annette noticed that among these brilliant fires one moved with limpid flamboyancy in a direct line down the trail. It was a steady flame, a large and predominating, and for Annette it was an old flame. It was Staff Sergeant MacQuillan.

She watched the translucent beauty of that scarlet tunic as it approached, and the glitter of the sunlight on the polished brasses. She noticed with approval the erect carriage of the horseman, thought instinctively of Billy, and felt a contraction of her throat as it occurred to her the sergeant might bring bad news.

When he approached closely enough for her to see his face MacQuillan's expression confirmed her deepest fears. She rushed down the pathway and cried out to him even before he had dismounted.

"What ees eet, sarjon? Why do you come?" she cried.

He dismounted with deliberation and turned to her with indescribable gravity.

"Annette," he said, "I've come upon a very difficult job—a very difficult job indeed."

His gravity convinced her.

"Billy!" she cried, and her voice was

calm, restrained. "Where ees he?" She asked it as a physician might have inquired the whereabouts of an urgent case.

MacQuillan's frown deepened painfully.

"Then you know?" he said.

"No. I know nothing. Tell me where he is. I weel go to heem." She was admirably cool.

MacQuillan ground one fist into the other and frowned upon his knuckles.

"That," he said, "I do not know."

"But he must not be alone!" she cried. "I must go to him!"

"Aye. And so must I go to him, too. But I'm domned if I know where." Suddenly he looked up from his hard clenched hands and spoke directly to her. "If I had only but known, Annette," he said, rebuking himself, "I would not have had this happen. I would not."

"But we must find him. Where is he?"

This, it appeared, was too much for Sergeant MacQuillan. A trace of resentment crept into his voice.

"Where is he? Have I not told ye, girly, that I dinna know? How can I tell where he rides? I'd as soon trace a prairie wolf."

"But you say he is hurt! Wounded!"

"Hurt? Wounded? Nothing of the sort. He's worse than that—he's innocent!"

Annette seemed visibly to expand. She drew herself up to a proud and trim little height. Her eyes dilated with happiness and pride. She spread her arms out a little from her body, seeming as though she were about to leave the earth. She was transformed by the sergeant's words into an epitome of gladness.

"He ees innocent! Oh, did I not know it? Did I not say so? Oh, sergeant, I knew that those news would come, but how I have feared it would not come too soon!" She meant soon enough.

Her joy vanquished the trouble which a meticulous sense of duty had aroused in the sergeant's breast. He had come to apologize with contumely and profoundly sincere regret, but her gladness forbade it.

"Go!" she cried. "Ride to heem and tell heem that he ees free! Eet was wan meestak'."

"I want to tell ye, Annette," he blurted out impulsively, "that ye canna be more glad o' this than me. I am sair sorry that I have spoken ye so sharply when I was on the chase. Ye must try to see that always it was the job I had to do."

He would have mounted then, but she stopped him.

"Wait!" she cried. "Before you go, you must tell me how you found this out!"

He fumbled in his breast then for a moment, and brought forth a bulky paper. It was a letter written with an indelible pencil so liberally moistened by the writer as to have well-nigh vanquished the advantage of indelibleness with the bane of illegibility. Annette took the letter from MacQuillan with a pretty gesture of impatience, and, running up the pathway, sat upon one of the steps to decipher it. It read:

DEAR BILL:

We got your letter O. K. and am making haste to answer it as per your instructions written in same. Well, Billy, I am shor sorry, but it is the fact that Jim Harkness was killed by a bullet in the dark on the very night of the morning after of which you rode away to Canada.

And they all of them knew that you wouldn't have done a thing like that, Billy, but yet there you was the only man who had been seen with Jim Harkness last time he was seen alive, and then we all knew that you had hit the trail to Canada and so what could we do? Anyway, Bud Halliwell, and he was the sheriff as you know, only he ain't since as he resigned afterward. Anyway, he sent out the word for you to be arrested and you are lucky you got to Canada. Bud shor did have a war on his hands then because we all told him that any murderer who could take to the gulf for South America in a fifty mile ride or across the Mex border in less than a hundred would shor be loco to ride to Canada. In addishun to this, anyway, the sheriff is now looking for a cross-eyed Mexican greaser who Bundy Carson says he heard him threaten to get Jim once over Jim's firing him from his ranch on account of eating sheep he was supposed to herd.

And, anyway, Billy, the case against this Mexican has been made better since then because this Mexican greaser was killed in a gun fight at a faro layout in Laredo after playing all evening with a lot of money he took from a pocketbook which since then has been spotted as a pocketbook which belonged to Jim Harkness and they ain't no doubt but what this Mexican is the one that killed poor Jim on the night when you rode to Canada on the following morning.

Everything is all right at the ranch and we got a lot of things to tell you, only this is enough for now and I am awaiting yor return with due regards.

GREGORY MATHEWS CONALTY.

P. S.—Of course you ain't wanted no longer for that killing which was done by a cross-eyed Mex greaser who Jim Harkness fired off his ranch as I have written above.

Annette held the letter in her hand and regarded it with brilliant eyes. It suddenly occurred to her that this was the happiest moment of her life. She had never known what real happiness was until the day of the hostile cow, and this happiness was a greater happiness than that.

"Go to heem quickly!" she urged Staff Sergeant MacQuillan. "Tell him of this, and tell him that I am glad!"

"That's the devil of it," quoth the sergeant.

"That I am glad?"

"That I don't know where to find him."

"Ride to the house of my aunt."

He smiled upon her.

"So it was you who placed him there," he said. "'Tis too late for that, however. I posted Craddock there, and how Argent knows it I canna tell, but he hasn't come near the place since."

"But he sent the Teeny in to you with the letter."

The sergeant's eye brightened perceptibly.

"Thot's so. Now how did the laddie get to see him?"

"The letter!" cried Annette with sudden inspiration. "That message he sent! He was to bring that Menzies in to you on—how did he say? What night was it he said?"

MacQuillan shook his head.

"Thursday night. But he'll no do it."

"Thursday night! That ees to-night! To-night you will see heem!"

"Nay, lassie. An' I only hope he doesna come to grief. That Menzies is a hempie rogue, an' he'll aye shoot to kill. Yet I dinna think that Argent will see enough of Menzies to shoot at. He's a wee bit eelusive."

"Oh!" she cried. "You are so stupid! Did he not bring you the cattle thees Menzies has stolen! Did he not bring you the horses they had used! I tell you if he has said as much, he will bring this Menzies in to you to-night." Her eyes brightened, her smile outdid the sunlight. "And you will see him then; and you will tell him! Oh, sarjon, you have made me this day most happy! Mos' ver', ver' happy!"

She threw her arms about his neck and kissed him. Emile Savardé came upon them from the house.

"Sergeant MacQuillan!" he exclaimed, "you exceed your duty!"

"Ah, papa!" cried Annette, "he ees innocent!"

Emile was horrified.

"You mean that you have made the proposal!" he wailed.

"No, no," she cried, laughing in his face. "But we will be married, and go to a land where there is no winter, and the flowers grow when—when in thees place we cut milk with hammers."

"Annette! Annette!" cried her parent. "I do not understand."

"He ees innocent, papa! He ees innocent!" And she ran up the steps to disappear happily through the doorway.

"He ees innocent. He ees innocent," muttered her father; and he turned upon Staff Sergeant MacQuillan. "Eef you cannot come to my house, Sergeant MacQuillan, without this innocence," he said, "pray do not come at all."

"Mon," said the sergeant, "dinna fash yerself about matters ye can never understand. Just tell yer wee bit lassie that if he comes to-night I shall tell him the truth of it. For ye must understand, Emile, that he is innocent."

And he mounted to ride away and leave Emile, distraught, behind him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BILLY IS OVERTAKEN.

THE rage of Samuel K. Menzies, when he awoke from his drug imposed slumbers, did not exceed his fear of Billy's gun play; but the fear of being afoot in a hostile land was a greater fear than that. Gun play or no gun play, he

must ride Billy down and regain those horses, else there would be no peace left for him.

By some strange oversight it appeared that Billy had left one horse behind him. For that Menzies was duly thankful, but it did not ease the painfulness of his predicament. If he deserted his comrades, two vengeful cattle thieves would be added to the forces who hunted him. If the three of them tried for the border with that one horse, the chances were that they would be overtaken before a day's journey was completed.

In short, Menzies could have no peace until he retrieved the animals Billy had taken, and although he had small heart for the job, he took the trail with a fair hope that riding alone he could soon overtake a man who led two horses. He made an ardent prayer that Billy would not have the opportunity of shooting first.

He noticed early that the fugitive had taken small pains to cover his tracks. No doubt urged by a desire to put as much ground as possible between himself and his pursuer, Billy had ridden recklessly on soft ground and sandy river beds, leaving a glaring trail behind him.

Menzies followed it at high speed, grinning thankfully at the indications of panic which the open hoof prints showed. He gave his horse its head, keeping it at a fast canter, and leaned far over his saddle horn, with his eyes far forward, avidly following after the man he hunted.

As the day wore on, the invigorating tang of the autumn air, the swift movement of his steed, and the reckless haste displayed by the trail he followed, heartened Menzies immeasurably as he rode. Frequently now his hand stole to his revolver butt, making sure it was ready for instant usefulness, and he gradually became even eager for the moment when, the quarry sighted, he could draw rein, and from a goodly distance and a steady seat shoot Billy through the back.

It would doubtless have spoiled his entire day if he had known that while he indulged in this amiable anticipation, Smiling Billy Argent was humorously watching him from an aspen thicket on the highly colored hillside half a mile in front of him to the left.

As the sun rose high, Menzies became aware that he approached dangerously near the end of the rugged and unsettled country which spread away to the southwest some nine or ten miles below Sleepy River. A few miles more would bring him close to a civilization which he made it a rule to visit seldom in the day time.

Had destiny permitted him a glimpse of her fair form in that moment, however, his worry would have been allayed by the dark foreknowledge that Billy wasn't going to allow him to proceed upon that precarious trail much farther. For if he had, Menzies would have arrived at a brush-filled gully where Billy had concealed the two purloined horses; and at that brush-covered gully Menzies would have found that Billy's trail doubled back, taking him into the hills to the left.

Billy had picked out among those hills the aspen screened height from which he now regarded his pursuer, and had with vast patience awaited several hours for Menzies's coming. He permitted the cattle thief to pass, and very considerately allowed him to disappear behind the shoulder of that hill. In this manner, reflected Billy, he could ride down upon the man without getting him all frightened and unhappy. Menzies having disappeared, Billy proceeded to do so.

He rode Concho down that hill, as a swallow, flying low, darts over the face of the turf. While Menzies would no doubt have failed to appreciate the sight, it is still to be regretted that there was no witness for that ride. Concho came down like a lambent flame, skimming over the brilliant carpet of the grasses, and Billy swung in the saddle like the torso of a centaur.

Leaping small coulees and frequent obstacles without a break in her pace, the little horse made the valley trail and swung into it, like a catboat turning into the wind. Around the shoulder of the hillside the horse and rider swept, and came bounding upon the heels of the unfortunate cattle thief with the same effect as lightning striking from the blue.

"Hands up!" yelled Billy, as they bore

down upon the ardent tracker; and he blazed away joyfully over the quarry's head.

White as death, Menzies turned in the saddle to see Nemesis ride him down, and he shrunk to the leather as the bullets whistled over him.

He swore despairingly, and threw his hands aloft. His pony reared as the reins slapped loose upon her neck, and, conceiving the hour of liberty to have come, dug her hoofs into the earth and flew. Menzies would have grabbed the reins again, but Billy blazed away above him.

"Hold 'em up!" shrieked Billy; and he laughed as he took up the chase.

Up the trail rode Menzies, borne by his agitated pony directly toward the country he would have avoided. Swiftly behind him rode Billy, gleefully intent upon keeping the cattle rustler's hands off his reins, and himself just far enough behind the fleeing bronco to cover its rider without interfering with its speed.

"Yip, yip, yip!" yelled Billy. "Ride her, Sam! Ride her like you was stickin' plaster!"

The little bronco flew, stretching herself, and flinging her head high.

"Whoa!" shouted Menzies. "Come down, you little fool! Come down!"

"Keep 'em up, Sam! Hold 'em high!" bawled Billy from behind.

"Stop her! Stop the dam' little dobie!" yelled Menzies.

"Now, you stop!" Billy gleefully addressed the flying pony.

With the sounds of the pursuing Concho, Menzies's frantic mount doubled her efforts. Had she been fleeing from an equine devil she could not have been more intent upon making distance, and her rider most unhappy. And Concho kept pace behind.

Billy did more in this ride than merely keep his place and Menzies's hands aloft. He skillfully herded the fleeing pony along the way he desired her to go; and that way brought them nearer and nearer to the edge of the wild country; nearer and nearer to civilization; nearer and nearer to the police post at Sleepy River.

In a moment of silent racing, Billy slipped four fresh cartridges into his gun.

"Up! Up! Keep 'em up!" he yelled at the demoralized Menzies, as the wild ride surged on. "You should enter that pony at the rodeo. She's fairst!"

"Come down!" bawled Menzies.

"Up! Keep 'em up!" yelled Billy, and he blazed away to emphasize his words.

The racing broncho at that moment decided that the ride had been going too far in one direction. She turned her wicked little head to the left and rolled one eye to find her pursuer's place. Then definitely, and with swift decision, she whisked about to go the other way.

Menzies, taken unawares, clutched frantically at his saddle horn, missed it, and sailed into the air. He turned twice in the open spaces and landed firmly upon his head. He thereupon lost interest in the conclusion of these mad events.

Billy, assured with a glance that Menzies was going to remain unconscious for yet a little while, swung Concho about with the same upstanding whirl as the broncho had made, and was off in an earnest pursuit. The little broncho was swift, after the manner of her kind, which permitted short spurts and interminable loping; but Concho could boast the blood of thoroughbreds, and, when the occasion demanded it, she could outrun many a swifter pony.

So the chase was short, and Billy brought the pony back, fighting at the bridle end. He vigorously dispensed first aid to the fallen rustler.

"What the hell?" asked Menzies, coming to.

"You got a load of hay on the brain," explained Billy.

"What's these?" further requested Menzies. He referred to lashed strands of rope which firmly bound his hands to his sides.

"Them?" said Billy. "I just put them on in case you was delirious."

Menzies extensively revised the vocabulary of a conservative man.

"That's all right," Billy consoled him. "You'll be a lot better in the morning."

Menzies abruptly stopped swearing.

"What morning?" he bawled.

"It's yore head," explained Billy. "You lit on yore head."

"I don't want to know where I hit," said

the ungrateful invalid. "Why in hell you got me all roped up?"

"So's you won't bust a blood vessel or somethin'. You might wild up if you found out where you was goin'."

"Where am I goin'?"

"To see the sergeant."

The agitation of Mr. Menzies thereupon passed all control. Billy couldn't get a word in edgewise. Menzies sat with his legs outspread and hung talk all over the scenery, making shrugging signs to render his meaning clear. He exhausted the profanity of the range, skimmed over a speaking acquaintance with the gutters of the city, fell back upon the argot of the docks, and tried what he could do with the language of the range once more.

Inasmuch as almost all his experiments were concentrated upon an endeavor to tell Billy what he thought of him, all this language notably palled upon the listener. But it was no use reasoning with Menzies.

He was mad clean through. He wanted Billy to know it, and he wanted the world to know it.

"You was all the time a—not sufficiently elegant to be recorded—spy!" he yelled.

Billy arose at this and, bending over Menzies from the rear, grasped him strongly about the torso. He then swung him, with legs widely thrashing, over one shoulder, and controlled the flow of conversation by pressing the rustler's head forcefully against his breast.

Carrying Menzies in this manner to his pony, Billy slung his burden across the saddle, and by dint of tying the rustler's wrists to his ankles under the pony's belly, made him fast in this position.

"That's for throwin' too much talk," he informed Menzies with regret. "If you'd been cheerful you could of rode these ten miles in comfort and in peace."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BILLY COMES AND GOES.

IT was the custom of Staff Sergeant MacQuillan to sup at leisure in the dining room of the Royal Arms. Afterward he would indulge in a bitter criticism of that establishment's cuisine, and having thus proved to himself for an incomputable number of times that the blond youth at the desk would listen to his complaints with respectful solicitude and do nothing whatever about it, Staff Sergeant MacQuillan would light his pipe and reflectively smoke it in the hotel's musty lobby.

On this Thursday night, however, the Sergeant finished his meal with unwonted haste, and, foregoing his critical review of what he had eaten, walked briskly back to the post. He was divided in mind between a serious doubt of Billy's ability to bring in an outlaw who had so long defied the Royal Mounted, and a sincere desire to meet with Billy and inform him of his innocence.

MacQuillan was of that sterling quality which tenders a worthy opponent the tribute of sincere respect; and the eternal jester in Billy appealed more strongly to the soul of the staid policeman than MacQuillan knew. Also, there was Annette. MacQuillan would like to be of service to Annette.

So he felt a hopeful sense of anticipation as he walked back to the post that evening, and he dismissed Supernumerary Flynn with a geniality bordering upon actual kindliness.

"Ye can get yerself gone for the evening," he instructed him. "But I wouldn't advise yer to tire yerself, for I misdoubt but what we'll have a prisoner to guard the night."

The eyes of Supernumerary Constable Flynn dilated.

"Argent?" he asked.

"De'il take the man! Hasn't he gone yet?" answered the sergeant affably. But Supernumerary Constable Flynn did not depart.

"But if it's Argent, sergeant—surely you ain't—"

Sergeant MacQuillan found the words of his assistant irksome.

"'If it's Argent, sergeant,'" he mimicked. "What's the man up to? Are ye singing a song?"

"But hadn't I better be at hand?"

The sergeant gazed upon him with cold disparagement.

"Is there anything ye have done in the past to make it desirable for you to be here if Argent comes?" he asked.

All for the best, Supernumerary Constable Flynn would have warned his superior. But he did it tactlessly.

"But out at the Savardé place," he protested, "there were three of you!"

Although the expression of the sergeant's face did not alter, Flynn perceived with dismay that he had not put the thing tactfully.

"I mean he always gets the best of it," he faltered.

The cold gaze of the sergeant did not waver.

"Go on," he urged ominously. "Go on. Say what ye have in yer mind."

"I mean that if he's coming to-night—I thought you'd maybe like me to be near and—"

"To be near!" thundered the sergeant then. "To be near? What for do I want ye near? To hold my hand, is it? To see that I come to no harm? You who let go the man out of the palm of yer hand, as a bairn would drop a lizard when it moves. I tell ye when I have important things on foot I'd as lief have a zany about as you!"

"But two are better than one," observed Flynn miserably. He yearned for the courage to remind MacQuillan again of the great cushion fight, but he was not equal to it. "I might just stand by," he concluded.

"Ye'd best stand off, laddie," advised the sergeant. "Get you into the settlement and enjoy yerself. For ye'll need all yer faculties if we have to do guard this night. I have ample means for taking care of any visitors that may come."

Inasmuch as the sergeant had by this time ushered him to the door and now awaited his exit to pass through himself, Supernumerary Constable Flynn felt constrained to go. MacQuillan followed him out and stood complacently upon the porch watching the youthful policeman walk away to the settlement.

"It 'll be a great surprise for the laddie if Argent brings the man in," he assured himself. And, somehow, in the light of the autumn afterglow, it seemed more probable that the Texan might fulfill his boast. MacQuillan was suddenly amazed at his unreasonable optimism.

"A great surprise for me, if it comes to that," he reminded himself. For out of a wide experience he knew that it was one thing to bring in the cattle that the thief had stolen; it was another to bring in the thief himself.

Still, Billy had done wonders at the Savardé homestead—Staff Sergeant MacQuillan blushed. "The young devil!" he referred warmly to the departed Flynn. "'There were three of us,' indeed! What's the force coming to when a feckless bairn can talk to a sergeant like that!"

He turned and strode into the orderly room, where he partook of fine cut tobacco and sat in his armchair to chew it. The afterglow faded and, with it, the hopes of Staff Sergeant MacQuillan.

"It's improbable," he informed himself. "Highly improbable." Whereupon the door opened and Smiling Billy Argent appeared.

Billy was to all appearances stripped for action. He was hatless and coatless. His trim flannel shirt was open at the throat, and otherwise so clung to his torso as to show the fine, useful lines of his chest and shoulders to great advantage. His sleeves, rolled up above the elbow, displayed a pair of strong and straight forearms that endowed their owner with a remarkable atmosphere of physical readiness.

Also, the absence of coat, and the tight gathering of shirt, notably emphasized the fact that Billy carried a gun. It hung upon one hip, and Billy's right hand, at rest, hovered just below the butt of it. He presented an admirable and handsome spectacle, and MacQuillan felt glad that he no longer had to regard this man as a quarry.

Billy, having entered without warning, stood in the doorway and regarded the sergeant with a wide and animated grin.

"Good evenin', admiral," he said.

The sergeant stood up.

"Good evening," he replied.

"I drew in through the back," Billy informed him. "Thought you'd like to have this visit sort of quiet and informal."

"That was thoughtful of ye," acknowl-

edged MacQuillan. "Have ye no got him?"

Billy's grin broadened.

"I'll no say I have," he remarked. Striding to the window beside the door, he threw it open. "Wait at that window," he said; and without another word he had passed through the door again.

Sergeant MacQuillan walked to the window, and had hardly reached it when, propelled by an unseen but violent force, the body of a man shot through the open casement and fell with a thud to the floor. MacQuillan thereupon leaned forward and discovered at his feet the form of Samuel K. Menzies, neatly lashed from head to foot, gagged with a bandanna handkerchief, and labeled with a tag which bore the address of "Staff Sergeant Baldy MacQuillan, Sleepy River, Alberta, Canada."

"The devil!" exclaimed the sergeant feelingly.

"That's him," said Billy's voice at his elbow. "And now where's that nickel?"

Sergeant MacQuillan turned upon him with a smile of unwonted warmth. Apparently incapable of words, he drew from his pocket a Canadian five-cent piece and balanced it upon his thumbnail.

"Wait a minute," adjured Billy. "I said a nickel."

"That's what it is."

"It is not. In God's country we call things like that a crime, and put the people who make them in jail."

MacQuillan frowned.

"Yer talkin' of the king's coin," he warned. "Don't blether about it!"

"I'm talkin' about nickels. I said we'd flip nickels, and you invite me to play with a chip orf a tin can."

MacQuillan ground the fine cut tobacco between his teeth.

"Ye'll remember the agreement," he said. "'Twas to be my nickel."

"When I play cards," reasoned Billy, "I don't deal shingles, I deal cards."

"We use this coin, or we use none," replied the sergeant.

It was one of those little disagreements which rankle in the minds of the most reasonable men. The sergeant had anticipated meeting Billy with the most benevolent intentions, but in the matter of this nickel he would not give way. Anyhow, argued the sergeant, Billy was too domned arrogant.

In moments of deepest misunderstanding, the minds of men are most akin. Billy's attitude was precisely that of the sergeant. He had come to deliver Menzies, determined to deal with MacQuillan in the most sportsmanlike manner. But he couldn't let this matter of the nickel pass without a protest. Anyway, the sergeant was plumb stuck up, and real irritating.

"We don't use anything but a full weight nickel out of God's own United States," quoth Billy.

"Ye mean that ye have such a coin as will come up the way ye want it?" suggested the sergeant icily.

Billy smiled immediately, and the tinkle of steel sounded in his voice.

"You talk like you needed the money, Baldy," he said.

MacQuillan leaned back against the table and addressed Billy with a masklike countenance.

"Ye have done me a service, Argent," he said, "and I'm willing to toss for the gains, but I cannot permit ye to talk so big in this house."

But Billy had a point in mind.

"Yore remark was that I wanted to pitch a fixed nickel," he recalled. "If you had a gun, we'd talk about it. As it is, I'm goin' to call orf this parley, and take Menzies with me."

The sergeant straightened like a steel spring, and Billy's gun flashed forth like lightning.

"Stand still!" snapped Billy.

How well the sergeant knew that urgent voice! He stood still.

Billy, covering the sergeant, backed away until he had the form of Menzies at his feet. Then, still covering the sergeant, he withdrew from a hip pocket his clasp knife and proceeded to open it with his teeth. Speechless with chagrin and self reproach, but unwilling to make the abject apology which he well knew was his only loophole, MacQuillan bethought himself in that moment of Annette. She would never forgive him for this.

"Ye fool!" he bellowed. "Dinna ye

know that I'll have ye both down before ye can leave the town!"

Billy took the opened knife from between his lips.

"Try it," he mocked, and thereupon essayed the difficult job of kneeling to his task, and continuing to cover the sergeant. With his eyes upon MacQuillan, and a steady gun in his right hand, he felt with the knife in his left for the lashings which held Menzies down.

"Don't cut 'em!" roared the sergeant suddenly. "Don't cut 'em!"

He gulped on the horns of his dilemma, striving to overcome the pride which sealed his lips.

Still Billy groped with his knife, but he was obviously impressed by the empurpled countenance which indicated the conflict that possessed the sergeant's soul.

"Don't bust," he adjured him, and catching one of the rustler's lashings in his knife, he began to saw it through.

"Stop!" bawled the sergeant. "I tell ye I have news will make ye a free man!"

Billy stopped his sawing.

"What's that?" he cried.

"Hands up!" barked a voice at the door. And there stood the dutiful Flynn who, having returned to give the sergeant his rejected services, was pleased beyond words to find them so obviously needed.

"My God!" cried the sergeant.

Billy pierced him with a glance full of disillusionment and eloquent contempt. He instantly perceived the trap. MacQuillan had been playing for time—awaiting Flynn's arrival.

"Sergeant!" cried Billy, "yore a low down, double-distilled, snake-blooded coyote. I never thought it!"

He made as if to swing his gun upon Flynn, and immediately collapsed to the floor as Flynn's bullet sang above his head. He then picked himself up, and at the same time picked up the form of Samuel K. Menzies by its lashings, and slung the rustler's body at the constable.

The force of the impact as Menzies hit Flynn on the chest, hurled the constable through the door, and backward down the steps outside, with Menzies on top of him. Menzies, the gag torn loose, started to say what he thought of being used as a missile, and the sergeant dashed to the window in a futile effort to stop Billy, who had vaulted through it. MacQuillan nearly paid for that effort with his life, for Billy, in the saddle, fired backward, and the sergeant's coat sleeve was badly wounded.

Speechless, Staff Sergeant MacQuillan heard the retreating sound of Concho's hoof beats. Speechless, he rushed down the steps to untangle Menzies and Supernumerary Constable Flynn. Speechless he dragged the rustler into the house like a bale of hay, and speechless he saw Flynn follow.

"I did my best," faltered Supernumerary Constable Flynn.

Whereupon Staff Sergeant MacQuillan recovered speech.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BREAKING HOME TIES.

ONCE more Billy approached the rim of the MacKreagh cañon and carefully surveyed the ranch below him. With a warm thrill of pleasure he observed that the industrious Smedley had so vigorously plied his whitewash brush that the better part of the corral fence was a chaste and shining white. Gladly he rejoined Concho, tethered some distance below the cañon rim. Blithely he mounted her, and discordantly humming the strain of "The Cowboy's Lament," he cantered down the rocky wall of the cañon until he had achieved the pass that admitted him to the rolling grasslands which surrounded the farm yard. Smedley ran to greet him.

"Where's he gone?" queried Billy.

"Dunno. He got mail from Sleepy River and he left."

The motherly Mrs. MacKreagh emerged from the kitchen.

"I'm right glad you've come home!" she cried warmly. "Get right off and come in to eat. Constable Craddock went away yesterday morning, and Smedley's been whitewashing the corral ever since."

"Yes," remarked Smedley. "It was a fine job, too." So Billy spanked him for his unbecoming discontent.

"You ought to be happy," he pointed out, "that I can come back an' play with you."

"All right," assented Smedley, "only don't play so rough."

Billy halted his attack upon the boy and turned it against the dinner table.

"It's right nice to open air tights in yore own ranch," he murmured through a mouthful of canned apricots. "But I'm stackin' all my chips that the sergeant's layin' a trap. Smed, you get out and keep an eye peeled for anything that looks like red."

"Nonsense," declared Mrs. MacKreagh. "Let the boy eat his dinner. The sergeant couldn't lay a trap for you. He hasn't got the brains. He's as simple as my poor dear husband, which is why Smedley has to do the work of three men and get his schooling into the bargain. Eat your food, child! Must the boy listen to every word I say?"

"Yes," said Billy. "He's simple, the sergeant is. Simple as a piebald broncho, which is the meanest animal there is."

"What nonsense!" cried Mrs. MacKreagh. "How often have I said, if I've said it once, that Balwhider MacQuillan wouldn't break faith with the devil himself. He's straight as a blade."

"Probably. But he can all the same play more aces to a deck than was ever meant there should be in it. He's straight as a grass snake with the colic."

"Young man, don't tell me you've been playing cards with Staff Sergeant MacQuillan! I won't believe it!"

"If I had I wouldn't have enough clo's left to come visitin' in. No. I've been pitchin' nickels with him."

"And he won?"

"I lost."

"You don't mean to sit there and tell me that Balwhider MacQuillan cheated!"

"Well, he didn't exactly play straight." And Billy proceeded to tell the events of the night before.

"Therefore," he concluded, "I calculate the simple-minded old range cow is takin' a contract to get me if he busts his reputation doin' it. Therefore, I imagine it would be a way high up play if Smedley was to earn my everlastin' gratitude by keepin' one eye peeled for the appearance of red on the horizon. And I'm sleepin' out."

"The nights are cold," she said.

"The tracks are hot," he replied.

Mrs. MacKreagh arose, and with sweeping grace gathered up dishes.

"You, Smedley," she said, "did you hear what Billy said? I should think you'd have been outside and keeping watch before this. You don't want to see him trapped like a prairie dog, do you?"

But the better part of her remarks were lost inasmuch as Smedley had gone from the house with the first words she spoke. He was a devoted soul, was Smedley, and was amply repaid for his devotion by the appreciative grin which Billy shot to him as he departed.

After the boy left, Mrs. MacKreagh set down her dishes and turned to Billy with a gravity he had not seen in her before.

"Billy," she said, "I'm scared."

"How, scared, ma'am?"

"There's no use beating about the bush, and I think you know well enough, Billy Argent, that anything I can't say to the face of a man I shall never say at all, for it's little enough we get out of this world without making ourselves miserable with the thought of offenses we have done toward others. And I don't mind telling you, Billy, that I'm scared."

"Ma'am, I guessed it."

"This game of hare and hounds has gone on too long, Billy. Too long for your good health. It's getting dangerous."

"Now, ma'am—"

"No, you must listen to me. In the beginning it was a fine thing to see you riding the trail as free as a breeze and pulling wool over MacQuillan's eyes; but the thing is getting perilous and ugly. You say MacQuillan has taken to cheating and lying; that's a terrible change to come over a man as good as he is. And then there's the boy. Can't you see, Billy, what it means that Smedley should be helping an outlaw to evade the authority of the police?"

Billy stiffened, and a look of hurt came into his eyes which distressed the widow.

"There!" she cried. "I've hurt you! I knew it! I was afraid of it! But what can we do? It's a problem, Billy. And you can see how it stands. You don't need my word to know that this home is your home, and if it comes to that, Smedley is just a brother to you, that's all. But you wouldn't have your little brother started wrong, would you? And here is MacQuillan after you by hook or crook, so that by helping you the boy is no more than an outlaw himself. Do you see?"

"Ma'am," said Billy with extraordinary soberness, "you speak a lot, but what you say is right."

"I wouldn't hurt you for the world!" she cried.

"Nor me you," said Billy. "I'm ridin', now. An' that Smedley, he'd better stop pesterin' me, or he'll plumb lose the seat of his overalls." He made this last assurance with a grin.

"Good-by, ma," he said, and stooped to brush her forehead with his lips. "It's for good."

Smedley burst in upon them.

"There's a red coat ridin' up the cañon!" he cried.

"My land!" exclaimed his mother, dismayed. "They've got you now!"

"Nothing extra!" laughed Billy. "Watch Concho!" And he left the room through the window.

He made Concho in three bounds, put her to the gate at the back of the house, which she neatly hurdled, and was off up the grassy hills, which rose to the rocky barrier of the cañon. Constable Craddock, who had come bearing overtures from the sergeant, saw that brown streak flit up above the roof of the house toward which he rode, and put his own mount to the hillside, riding to cut Billy off.

Before the police charger had clambered up the steep bank which parted the trail from the ascending hills, Concho had wellnigh made the foot of the barrier, and Billy turned her, riding along the base of the towering rock, on ground which fell away to his side. Few horses could have kept fast pace on that uneven ground, and Concho struggled to keep her feet as she cantered along. She stumbled now and then, but she did not fall, and Billy watched the scarlet rider scrambling up the hill to cut him off.

Craddock did not quite make it. Too late he saw that Billy was bound to pass the point at which he aimed to intercept him, and he turned his mount on the hillside to take the chase close on Concho's heels.

As he rode by the ascending redcoat Billy whipped out his gun and fired over the constable's head. To his disgust, Craddock made no attempt to draw and return the fire. Instead the constable merely waved a paper high over his head and shouted.

"What does this mean?" Billy bawled back in disgust.

The ground beneath Concho's feet was rough, and the slope was here and there dissected by washouts and fallen rock. Concho leaped one, stumbled, regained her footing, and leaped another. She fell, and Billy rolled some way down the hill before he was up to rejoin her.

Into the saddle he sprang once more and urged her on, but Craddock had made an appreciable gain. The rock barrier was now much lower, tapering away to a point some distance before them, where it disappeared altogether and gave way to the rounded grassy brow of hills which opened to the cañon's mouth.

As Concho sailed over the next obstacle —which was a heap of broken rocks—Billy heard the hoofs of the redcoat's horse strike the earth close behind him, and he felt a thrill which was half regret as he heard Craddock cry out and his mount go down beneath him. A backward glance assured him that neither the policeman nor his mount were seriously hurt, and also that the rider and the horse as well had rolled for a considerable distance down the slope. So he urged Concho on, and appraised the height of the barrier which he now could easily overlook.

As Concho, gasping and stumbling, raced onward, the barrier rapidly fell away, but Craddock, once more in the saddle, was close at her gallant heels. Well Billy knew that once at the end of the barrier with Craddock so close behind him, the hard ridden Concho, that for days had had little rest, would stand no chance against the fresh and well groomed police horse.

And with that thought there rose before him a shoulder of the slope which jutted a comparatively flat surface forth some fifty yards under the barrier which rose like a shelf full six feet high. It was Billy's chance, and, while he knew that if Concho failed him a back breaking fall for horse and man would follow, he took it.

He turned out upon the shoulder of the land, put Concho squarely to the barrier, and urged her forward. Craddock reined in with a gasp to prevent a collision with the mad horseman, and Concho, passing him, sailed into the air like a cat, caught the top of the barrier with her forelegs, scrambled mightily with her hind legs, and was up!

Craddock, hopeless of his mount emulating that courageous leap, and not inclined to encourage that sort of thing anyway, continued his ride to the point where the barrier fell to an estate low enough to permit his loping over it, but by then Billy and his mare were out of sight.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE WOMAN'S PART.

"I'VE given the news to all the force," said Staff Sergeant MacQuillan, "and Craddock is the only one that has even seen the man. He rode away from Craddock like a devil, and fired at him into the bargain."

"But he will come back to the house of my aunt."

"He will not, for she has made him promise to keep away for the boy's sake. It's a nice mess."

"But yes! A nice mess! And you stand there and say it. Oh, how stupid you are!"

This was the third of a little series of interviews with which Annette had cheapened the sergeant's life since the fiasco of Thursday night. The sergeant would now have put aside his mortal coil for the briefest bar of the shortest song extant.

"Have I not made it plain—" He harked back to his earliest explanation of the wretched incident.

But Annette was relentless.

"You make it plain that you are so stupid!" she pointed out. "Of course your Craddock could not approach heem! Do you suppose that he will ever appear again while a redcoat ees in sight? Unless he desires to play weeth wan?"

"But, Annette, you cannot be more interested in this thing than I am meself. Ye can understand that, can ye no?"

His fine gray eyes were eloquent of the self-reproach which seared him.

"But how am I to know? There ees nothing that you do!"

"It's aye worse than that. There is nothing I *can* do. Do ye not see my position? The man is innocent. I cannot send out men for him to shoot at in the face of that. Ye see we cannot shoot back. I misdoubt but what it will come to me riding the country in mufti, hunting for him like a needle in the hay."

Annette brightened visibly at that.

"That ees wan good thought!" she cried. "But of course! You weel ride out in the plain clothing, and you weel com' upon heem when he does not know."

MacQuillan regarded her gloomily.

"And what of me work in the meantime? Not to mention the fact that he will more than likely shoot me on sight." He mentioned this quite impersonally as one of the obstacles in his way.

"He will shoot? But no!"

"But yes. He has the love for me that a shepherd has for a rattlesnake, since Thursday night. Flynn is a fool!"

She reflected on this.

"He will shoot you!" She considered the impersonal tone in which the sergeant had mentioned this. "Are you not afraid?" she asked him.

"I'd no thought of that," he confessed. "I was thinking it would mean hanging for him."

It seemed unreasonable to Annette that with the proof of Billy's innocence the situation should have taken this darker, uglier aspect.

"But eet ees too *terrible!*" she protested earnestly, "that two good men should in thees way disagree!"

"It's a braw jest!" he admitted sardonically.

"Eef you had not been so stupid!"

There was a certain monotony about this theme which was beginning to grate upon MacQuillan's nerves.

"Ye have remarked on that before," he said grimly.

"But you do not understan'. Eet ees not you, I mean. Eet ees Billee as well, and my fathair, and that police shereef in Texas. Eet ees that you are men. Men are all so stupid."

"Aye," he said. "But I'd remind ye that nothing has come from the woman's side of this affair.

She tilted her head and looked upon him quizzically.

"You theenk not, eh?" she smiled.

Vaguely the sergeant suspected mockery. "I can recall nothing ye have done to solve it," he admitted bluntly.

She replied to that in soft and silken accents which should have warned him.

"But can you recall what my aunt has done to keep him riding free? Can you remember eef I have done som'theen to make heem hard for you to catch? The woman's side of this affair, my friend, has been against you all the time."

But he did not heed the warning.

"And a pretty mess you've made of it," he remarked.

So she made him regret it.

"A man's mess, Sarjon MacQuillan. You weel never get thees Billee, because you are a stupid man. Only the woman can tell you what it is that will surely bring heem in."

"And what's that?"

"A woman!" She proudly tilted back her head and regarded him with brilliant eyes. "Let it spread about the settlements that you seek a—w'at you call—warran', for me to be arrest'. He will com' here then!"

Gradually, with a warmth that increased as the rising sunlight spreads, MacQuillan smiled.

"'Tis fine!" He almost whispered in his admiration. "Fine, lassie!" he cried. "'Tis fine. We'll aye do as ye suggest!"

"As I tell you!" she corrected him.

Magnanimity prompted the sergeant to submit to her commands without protest, but an honest doubt assailed him.

"I misdoubt the man will be aye timid of the settlements," he warned her. "There is a chance that he'll not even hear of yer trick."

"You do not know how the gossip spreads," she assured him.

"None better. But the man will hear no gossip. I tell ye he's run wild."

She tilted her head, regarding the mutineer with a little frown that was half a smile.

"You men cannot see these things," she said hopelessly. "Have I not told you the thing that will bring him in. If the gossip does not reach him, you need not be afraid that he will not know—if I am in danger!"

"But how?"

Her smile was the ancient smile which woman ever keeps to baffle man.

"I will send a letter to him," she said.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

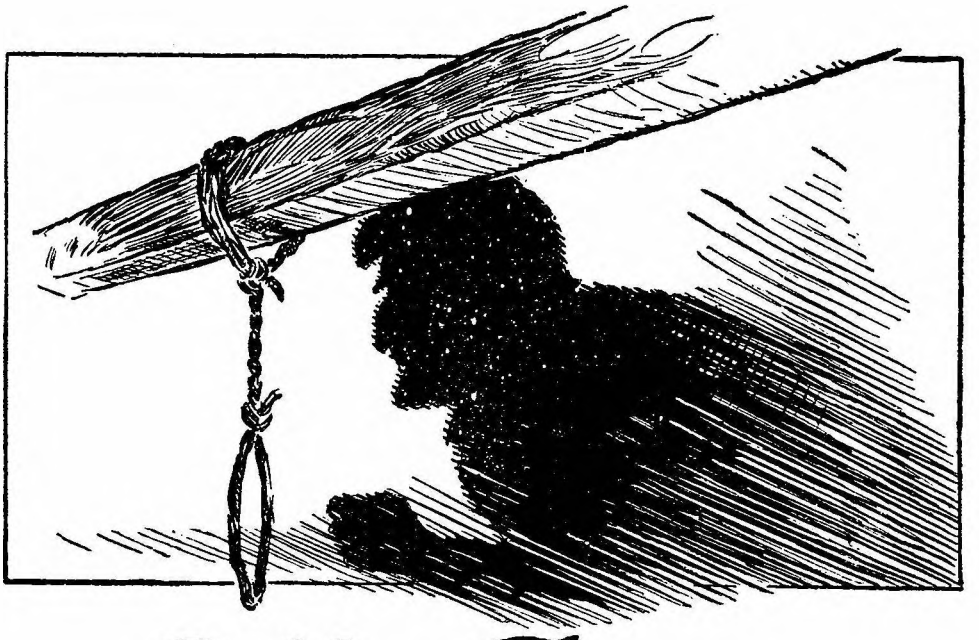
ʊ ʊ ʊ

REGRET

ONCE, to another, you gave your hand;
Signal of kindly, courteous thought:
But I, sitting by, allowed resentful,
Jealous hurt to grip with glacial cold
My heart. Then—

You turned; in graceful, loving gesture
Two seeking hands you offered me; and I—
Brute of the moment—held back.
Now, sad regret is mine. Dear—
Give me your hands.

Leslie Ramón.



The Beam

By L. PATRICK GREENE

AS far as Oom Piet van Slyke was concerned, the war of 1899-1902 had never ceased, and he chose to ignore the fact that Boer and Briton were living together in peace, prospering, creating a new land and a new nationality; he gave no credence to the fact that the words Boer and Briton were passing out of the language, giving place to a new word—Africander—embracing both peoples. Oom Piet believed that a Boer was a Boer—and the chosen of God; a *Rooinek* was a *Rooinek*—and a *verdoemte* lying hypocrite to be shot on sight like aasvogels, hyenas and other vermin.

He was one of the old " irreconcilables." Narrow, bigoted, he hated with a grim implacability. Had he been allowed to follow his inclinations, Oom Piet would have gone with Kruger into exile and there have died with that much maligned four times President of the Transvaal.

But Oom Piet was not allowed to go with the aged Kruger, neither was he able to carry on a warfare against the " invaders " single-handed—though for a time he essayed to do just that.

But lack of food and ammunition, the number of enemies opposed to him, and advancing old age drove Oom Piet to seek the seclusion of his farm. There he was forced to confine his hatred to the curses and maledictions which he daily called down upon the heads of such English as had taken up land in the neighborhood. Once one of them, a newcomer, lost on the veldt, sought refuge at Oom Piet's homestead. Him Oom Piet stripped of his clothes, gave him accurate directions for reaching his own farm, and drove from the place.

That incident would have seen the end of Oom Piet had not some of his own people succeeded in persuading the Englishman to

keep the matter dark, on the grounds that Oom Piet was a little mad. But after that the English settlers gave the homestead at the foot of the *kopjes* a wide berth.

It was this affair which prompted the local *predikant* to visit Oom Piet and attempt to convert the old man to a gospel of forbearance.

"Love your enemies; be kind to those who persecute you," said the *predikant*. "To hate as you hate, Oom Piet, is to live in sin."

"Almighty!" the other exploded. "Come with me and I will show you what no man else has seen these many years. I myself will tell you things and quote you words, also, from the Good Book."

He led the minister to a large barn and, pushing back the heavy bars, slowly opened the ponderous doors. The barn—it was a big, gloomy place—was empty, and the rafters were covered with cobwebs and the dust of years.

"There," said Oom Piet, and the *predikant* winced at the pent-up hate expressed in the old man's voice. "There, *predikant!* Shall I cease to hate while that remains?"

He pointed to a large, hand-hewn beam from which hung a rope, rotting with age; at the end of the rope was a noose—a hangman's noose.

"I—I don't understand, Oom Piet. What is this?" the *predikant* stammered.

"Almighty! You don't understand! Then I will tell you. From that beam the Englishers hung my grandfather—after Slagter's Nek, that was. And what had he done? Nothing. Nothing save to deny that any man could take his Kaffirs away from him. For that they hung him."

"But this is no cause to harbor hatred, Oom Piet. That was long ago—ninety years and more—and the judge who condemned him was a Hollander."

"A Hollander—*Ach Gott!* A lickspittle! Even so the law was the *Rooinek's;* the hangman an Englisher. And long ago, you say. Then again listen. You remember the war of 1881, the war of independence, not?" The old man spat his sarcasm. "You fought then like a good burgher. Not so long ago, no. Was not my nephew shot by those cursed liars and hypocrites—shot before war was declared? And in this last war—fought because that son of Belial, Rhodes, wanted more gold—they hung my son on that beam. He had fired on them, they said. Almighty! Was it not war? And my *vrouw, ach!* the good *vrouw,* they sent to their cursed pestilence camps, and there she died. Shall I forget, then, to hate? No, I tell you. 'An eye for an eye,' the Good Book says. 'A tooth for a tooth.'"

"Your son had taken the oath of allegiance," the *predikant* said mildly, "and in times of war many mistakes are made. Our burghers were not altogether blameless, as you well know. And the good Vrouw van Slyke—she was old, Oom Piet; her time was very near. Had the English not taken her to the concentration camp she would have died of starvation. Even so, it is the better part to forgive."

Oom Piet, trembling with rage, raised his clenched fist above his head and his faded blue eyes blazed as they must have blazed in the days of his youth. He took a step toward the *predikant,* towered over him as if meaning to strike him, then, laughing harshly as the other shrank from him, let his hand fall to his side.

"You're like a licked hound," he said finally in dangerously quiet tones. "You have been with these Englishers too long; you have listened to them and read into the words of the Good Book such meaning as they would have you read.

"Listen. I had a chair—a strong chair. I made it myself out of good, hard wood, thinking it would seat my grandchildren's children. But the ants, the white ants—the *verdoemte skellums*—got to it, and, but yesterday it was, when I sat on it, it fell to pieces; it was but dust. And so the Englishers have got to you. Unseen, and you knowing nothing of it, they have got to you as the ants got to my chair; they have taken all the good burgher blood, mind and heart from you. There is nothing left of the man who was. Outward seeming you are the same man who fought with me at Spion Kop and starved with me after Colenso; but you are not the same. No. You— But go! Go, before I think you are an Englisher and kill you."

"But—" the *predikant* began.

"Go!" screamed Oom Piet.

Sensing that the old man had reached the limit of his patience, and would not be responsible for his acts, the *predikant* left and rode hastily away.

Yes, there was something magnificent about the way Oom Piet hated. Magnificent—but pitiful, too, for, as time passed, his own people, impatient at his perverse fanaticism, visited him no longer. They were too busy adapting themselves to new conditions and cementing new friendships, to listen to fiery words calculated to fan the fires of an old hate.

And so Oom Piet was left alone with his six Hottentot servants—they were devoted to him, for he had been a wonderful hunter and an understanding master—until his granddaughter, Katje, came to visit him.

Katje! Oom Piet disapproved of her—of the way she dressed and the way she acted; he disapproved of everything she did. Katje belonged to the new generation, and had no share in the bitterness of the old toward the English. She had been to a school in Durban, spoke English as well as she spoke the *Taal,* and had the splendid contempt of youth for the old customs and conventions which were an integral part of her grandfather's religion—which were his gods.

And so Oom Piet disapproved of her and constantly endeavored to dictate to her the way she should go, flying into a terrible rage when she calmly ignored his commands. But it only needed her to threaten to leave him and he instantly smothered his anger and begged her to forgive him—and wouldn't she please make him some "*veld-bricks!*" No one could bake as well as Katje!

Oom Piet loved the girl with the same fierce intensity he hated the *Rooineks.* He felt young again—and very old—when he looked at her. She was so very like that other Katje—the good *vrouw* who had died at the concentration camp. And twice a week, in the old days, he had swum a river swarming with crocodiles in order to visit that first Katje, and thought the look in her grave, gray eyes sufficient reward.

She was small boned; a creature of melting curves and softness; there her Huguenot blood showed; totally unlike the angular awkwardness of so many of the Boer women. Strong, able to hold her own at riding or shooting with any man, Katje could be all femininity.

She was extremely attached to the old man and respected his unswerving hatred—even if she could not share it—for the race he judged had wronged him; concerned herself chiefly with his material wants, and in a very little while the bleak old farmhouse blossomed with many comforts Oom Piet had not dreamed possible. Hardened hunter and warrior though he was, he found that he could appreciate fully the soft luxuries Katje procured for him—bed linen, for instance, and well cooked, tastefully served meals. Out of the chaos created by the Hottentot houseboy she brought order. It became once again possible—if one pulled aside the gayly colored curtains—to see through the windows; the *dagha* floors were cleaned and new skins put down.

Although Oom Piet grumbled that it was no longer possible for him to spit when and where he wished, he was secretly pleased with the new order of things and made no great objections when Katje insisted on cutting his hair and trimming his beard.

Because it angered him she never spoke English, or of the English, in his hearing, and every evening shortly after sundown she went with him to the barn, watched him open the big doors with solemn ritual, and heard him tell the story of the beam. She humored him in this, believing that it was a safe outlet for his emotions, not realizing that the nightly recounting of his grievances added fuel to his hate. She was very young and—after a while—in love.

So far she humored him, but no further. She refused to allow him to order her life as he wished to do. She wore what she pleased—and her taste was good, though shocking to the old man; she worked or played as the fancy took her.

II.

"WHERE are you going, Katje?" Oom Piet asked, looking askance at her riding

habit—khaki riding breeches, brown polo boots, and soft, white shirt opened wide at the neck.

She laughed a little nervously. Her full red lips quivered slightly.

"Every day you ask me that, Grandfather van Slyke."

She rose and went slowly down the steps as Jan, the stable boy, led up her horse.

"I should think you'd get tired of asking every day."

"I always want to know where you are going, and what you are doing, Katje."

"I'm going for a ride. Where?" She shrugged her shoulders. "Who knows? To the *dorp*, perhaps."

"And you will not see any *verdoemte* Englishers?"

"How can I help it, grandfather, unless I close my eyes?"

"Almighty! Yes—they are everywhere. Once a man could stand on his *stoep* and look north, south, east and west, and know that all he saw was his. But now—I look and see nothing but the *fumes* from some cursed *Rooinek's* chimney."

He pointed to the west where, just above the horizon, a thin wisp of smoke floated lazily upward.

The girl laughed.

"You have better eyes than I have, grandfather. I see only the veldt."

She walked over to the horse and let him nibble at her fingers. She seemed to be waiting for her grandfather to say something else.

"Katje," he said presently, "will you promise me not to speak to an Englisher?"

She shook her head vehemently so that her hair, ripe corn colored, threatened to tumble down about her shoulders.

"No," she said sharply; "I shall not promise. I shall speak to one—perhaps to many. It is silly of you to act like this every day."

"*Ach sis!* Silly, you say," roared Oom Piet. "Almighty! Does the girl say I'm a fool? Is there no respect for gray hairs? You will promise not to speak to a *Rooinek*, or—or you will stay here."

He caught her firmly by the wrist.

She looked at him steadily, a little sorrowfully, but with no hint of capitulation.

"I am going for a ride, grandfather, and I shall not make any promise."

He tightened his hold on her slender wrist, his eyes contracted to pin points, then suddenly he flung her from him with a half choked animal cry of rage.

"Almighty!" he shouted. "Go, then, and never come back."

"Do you mean that?" she asked gravely.

His temper passed instantly.

"Almighty! No. You know I did not mean it. You will come back, Katie? Promise me you will come back—and—and bake me some *veld-bricks!*"

"Of course I'll come back. But why—" She shook her head mournfully. "Oh, well, never mind. Going to help me mount?"

He picked her up easily, without effort—in his youth they had called him the elephant because of his strength—and placed her in the saddle. Then he held up his face for his reward.

She bent over and kissed him on the forehead, struck her horse gently with a sjambok, and galloped swiftly away.

As always, Oom Piet gazed after her until she was swallowed up by distance and the red cloud of dust created by her horse's hoofs, then he slowly seated himself on the steps and buried his face in his hands, his attitude one of supreme dejection.

He had not changed his position when Katje returned—four hours later.

She dismounted swiftly, giving her horse over to the grinning Jan, and sat down beside Oom Piet.

Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkled, and her lips were parted ever so slightly. Clasping her brown hands about her knees, she leaned back and indulged in happy reveries.

"*Ach!* So you're back."

The rasping voice of Oom Piet broke in upon her consciousness, and she stared at him as one awakening from a heavy sleep.

"Yes, I'm back—grandfather," she said softly; and her voice had a new, deeper note in it. By some strange alchemy of nature she had blossomed into womanhood during the four short hours she had been away.

Oom Piet looked at her wonderingly.

"Don't stare so," she said happily, a

trifle embarrassed. "Oh—I believe you know."

"Know? Know what, Katje? What talk is this?"

"I believe you know how happy I am—but you can't know. Listen, Grandfather van Slyke." She snuggled up closely to him. "I am going to be married."

"Married! Almighty! This child? But no one has *opsit* with you yet."

"Oh that—*opsit*." She became the child again for a brief moment, and stuck out a pink, provocative little tongue. "We're not going to *opsit*."

He seemed about to burst into one of his rages, but, with an effort, restrained himself.

"The old Boer ways—they are not good enough for you, little Katje?"

She did not answer, and they sat for a while in silence, engrossed with their thoughts. Then:

"The man—who is it, Katje? It is not"—his face clouded—"the *predikant's* son?"

She made a little moue of distaste.

"Cornelius du Toit? No. He—"

"I'm glad of that. He and his father—the white-livered curs—are no true burghers. They were among the first to join hands with the *Rooineks*. Then who is the man? I must see him and tell him to take no notice of the whims of a foolish girl who says she will not *opsit*. Who is he?"

"He"—she hesitated as if reluctant to give the name—"he is coming to see you to-night when the moon is up."

"So-a! But his name, Katje, his name,"

"John"—she cowered in fear before his intense, burning gaze—"John Hamilton, grandfather. He—don't—"

But she could say no more.

Oom Piet's arms shot out with the rapidity of striking snakes, and his big hands closed around her throat.

She gurgled incoherently and struggled courageously for a few moments—kicking, clawing, and then she fainted.

"Almighty," Oom Piet said dully, and stood regarding her with eyes red-rimmed with anger, his matted eyebrows twitching spasmodically, his big chest heaving and falling with his long, labored breaths.

Resting his shaggy head on her bosom he listened apprehensively to the beating of her heart, and, satisfied at length that she had only swooned, he picked her up and carried her into the house, up the narrow stairs into her room. There he placed her gently on the bed and sat down beside her—thinking, planning, cursing the *Rooinek* who was the cause of all this.

Suddenly deciding to follow some well-defined course, he tore up the sheets, and, with the strips, bound the girl hand and foot; he also fashioned a gag which he forced into her mouth.

"She will forgive by and by," he said, as with heavy tread he slowly descended the stairs. "Old Oom Piet knows what is best for her. Almighty—yes."

A few minutes later he was giving orders to his native servants.

III.

THE moon was high above the horizon when John Hamilton rode up to the Van Slyke homestead. There was no one to take his horse when he dismounted, the house was in darkness, and after waiting for a while for some one to appear, he called softly—

"Katje," and started at the grotesque shadow which appeared suddenly on the ground beside his own.

He turned and looked up into the face of Oom Piet and his hand dropped instinctively to his revolver holster.

But the other's words and the tone of his voice reassured him.

"You are Jan Hamilton, yes? Do you speak the *Taal?*"

"*Ja, mynheer.*"

"That is good—so we can talk. You called Katje?"

"Yes—I—we—"

He stopped, confused. Then, overcoming his embarrassment, he recommenced:

"I have heard, Oom Piet, that you hate all English—and perhaps you have good cause. But can't we be friends? Won't you forget the mistakes of yesterday?"

He held out his hand.

"*Ja,*" Oom Piet said stolidly, ignoring the other's outstretched hand. "Katje told me about you. So you are going to take

her away from me, not? You would see the old man all alone again."

"No," Hamilton interposed hastily. "You shall come and live with us."

Oom Piet waved his hand impatiently.

"Maybe, yes. But we will talk of that later. Now you will want to see Katje. She is down at the barn—her horse is sick. Come! Bring your horse, too, if he will not stand."

"He will stand," Hamilton said cheerfully—the old chap wasn't such a fire-eater after all—as he followed the Dutchman.

They came presently to a barn, the large doors of which were slightly ajar.

"Come," said Oom Piet impatiently. "She is in here."

But Hamilton hesitated, and his hand hovered about his revolver holster.

"I don't think—" he began.

Then four dark forms seemed to materialize out of the shadows and leaped upon him. They were naked, their bodies were well greased, so that Hamilton found it impossible to secure a hold on them; neither could he extricate himself from their slimy embrace.

The struggle was a very short one. Taken unaware, and outnumbered five to one—for Oom Piet assisted his natives—Hamilton had no chance. Quickly they gagged and trussed him, then lifting him to their shoulders, the four Hottentots carried him into the barn and there unceremoniously dropped him to the floor.

"Now, go—you black dogs," Oom Piet ordered harshly, "and see that you do not return. This is a white man's *indaba.*"

They departed quickly, silently, and Oom Piet, squatting on the ground near his prisoner, a half-mad light in his eyes, gazed fixedly at the bound man.

He chuckled softly in answer to the questioning look of horror in Hamilton's face, knowing that that man had seen the beam and the new rope which was thrown over it. And at one end of the rope was a noose—a hangman's noose—which dangled just above Hamilton's head.

A shaft of moonlight coming through a large hole in the roof of the barn focused like a spotlight upon the beam and the rope, casting horrible, grotesque shadows.

"It is good," said Oom Piet softly, rubbing his hands briskly together. "You have heard the story of the beam—Katje has told you, not?"

Hamilton nodded.

"Almighty! Then it is now time. 'An eye for an eye,' says the Good Book; 'A tooth for a tooth.'"

He adjusted the noose around Hamilton's neck, and then, his face grim, took the other end of the rope in his hands and pulled steadily on it.

"That is for my grandfather the *verdoemte Rooineks* hung," Oom Piet said as Hamilton struggled to a sitting position, seeking relief from the terrible, choking strain.

Hamilton got to his knees, forced up by the pressure of the rope.

"That for my nephew the *Rooineks* shot," continued Oom Piet.

Hamilton stumbled to his feet and had great difficulty in standing—bound as he was. The rope was taut.

"That for my son they hanged from this beam." Oom Piet's voice was the voice of a judge pronouncing the death sentence—and he pulled steadily on the rope.

Hamilton was standing on tiptoes, now, his feet were almost off the ground; they were no longer supporting his weight, and there was nothing else he could do to ease the torturing, choking strain on his neck.

"My good *vrouw* died slowly," mocked Oom Piet. "It is well, then, that you should wait so for a little while."

He breathed deeply, calling upon the last ounce of his strength which would enable him to hoist Hamilton high into the air.

"And this for Katje," he screamed suddenly, and heaved on the rope with all his weight, with all the strength that was in him.

There was a dull, smothered explosion. The beam, the apparently solid beam crumbled, vanished in a cloud of dust.

Hamilton fell to the ground in a shapeless, huddled heap; Oom Piet toppled over backward, speechless, greatly frightened.

"Almighty!" he whispered in awed tones as the realization of the cause of things

came to him. "It is a miracle. The white ants! I am nothing—my hate is less than nothing. The white ants—they have been sent by the Almighty to teach me a lesson; a true lesson—not the one I tried to teach the *predikant*."

He crawled over to Hamilton, and cutting away the noose, gently rubbed his throat. The Englishman's heart was beating strongly, and Oom Piet rejoiced. He had erred—but not beyond the possibility of making amends. He took the gag from Hamilton's mouth and cut the ropes which bound his hands and feet.

"Almighty," he said thankfully when Hamilton at last opened his eyes. "Forgive me, Englisher. I have been a fool. But the Lord of Hosts kept me from sinning the great sin. He refused the sacrifice I offered to my hate."

And Hamilton, sensing that the old man was completely broken and no longer harbored hatred, did not upbraid him. Oom Piet was Katje's grandfather, and very old—he was young and could with wisdom ignore the whole matter. Save for a very sore and burning throat, he was unharmed. He would forget—for Katje's sake.

"What happened?" he asked hoarsely.

"Almighty! And you can talk! The white ants"—Oom Piet's tone was shrill and excited—"got to the beam. While I slept, aye, while I hated, they got to the beam. They ate it up; they rotted away its heart. To outward seeming it was as it always was. Under no strain it would have remained there—who knows how long? But it could not stand the weight of your body and my body; it could not stand the weight of my hate."

Hamilton rose to his feet.

"And so your hate has gone, Oom Piet?" he said slowly.

"*Ja*," the old man nodded emphatically.

"Then shall not all be forgotten?"

Hamilton held out his hand, and this time Oom Piet did not ignore it, but grasped it eagerly.

"Almighty," he breathed softly. "And you will never tell Katje?"

He anxiously scrutinized the other's face.

"Never," Hamilton answered gravely.

Oom Piet breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"Then let us go to the house—she is waiting for you."

IV.

In silence they made their way back to the house. At the foot of the steps leading up to the *stoep*, Oom Piet said pathetically:

"And you will *opsit* with her?"

"Yes, Oom Piet."

Entering the house the old man lighted an oil lamp, and bidding Hamilton to be seated, went slowly up the stairs to Katje's room.

Her eyes dilated with terror as he came toward her, but the terror gave way to wonder as she noticed how his face had softened. He seemed to have become suddenly very gentle.

As he swiftly unloosed her from her bonds, he said softly:

"All is well, Katje. A man—a fine man has come asking to *opsit* with you. You will say 'yes' and forget an old fool's folly?"

She nodded, her eyes were brimming with tears.

Rising stiffly from the bed, she took a new candle from a shelf and went downstairs very slowly.

Oom Piet followed her a few steps, saw her silently seat herself opposite John Hamilton, saw her light the candle and place it between them on the table. Then, smiling happily, Oom Piet tiptoed back upstairs and entered his own room.

For an hour or more there was silence, then Oom Piet called out:

"Katje! I will settle my farm and cattle on your kinder."

They smiled into each other's eyes.

It was nearly daybreak. The gray clouds of night were swiftly passing; the sky was tinted with rose, lavender and gold.

The candle's pale yellow flame flickered unsteadily in the dawn-bringing wind.

"John," Katje whispered. "What did you and grandfather do last night?"

"We broke the beam," he answered gravely.

And like an echo, Oom Piet's voice floated down the stairway:

"*Ja!* The beam is broken, Katje."

Out of the World for a While

By CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS

Author of "Ten Thousand Dollars Reward," etc.

CHAPTER XI *(continued.)*

MRS. SEAGRAVE'S DEAL.

THEY stood in silence till the operative came out. The latter seemed to be all out of enthusiasm. He cast a scornful look at Miller.

"Get out of here before I take a poke at you for general results," he said.

With a sneering, triumphant smile for Seagrave, Miller set off down the street.

"Why did you let him go?" Seagrave asked. "Didn't you get the goods on him?"

"Goods, hell!" the operative spat out. "You go in and you'll see how I got the goods. I wouldn't cheat that pretty lady out of breaking the news to you herself. I'll say one thing, though; I'm sorry for all the business men in this section."

He followed Miller, and Seagrave, bewildered, turned into the office again. Blair announced him and showed him into Ruth's sanctum. Ruth turned to him with a more serious mien than was necessary.

"Did you see the policeman after he left?" she asked.

"I saw him, but I shouldn't say that he was especially communicative," Seagrave answered. "Why did he let Miller go?"

"Nothing happened here that would enable him to hold Miller," Ruth said. "You see, I've known for a long time that the

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 27.

Allison stock was worthless. I couldn't buy it because I have no money to squander and because I suppose I would be compounding a felony if I did. I don't know about that. Maybe it's a fine point in law. You might ask Thornton Holmes."

Seagrave, uninvited, sat down. He felt the need of support.

"You needn't rub it in, Ruth," he said. "I've been a blundering chump as usual. But I was only trying to protect you. Let's have the details. What was Miller's business with you?"

"His business with me was to sell me stock in the Allison company," Ruth said. "My business with him was to buy Allison's lease on the building Allison is using. You see, I'm going to need more foundry space when our new stove is ready for manufacture. There isn't another building in town suitable for my purpose. Maybe you know what building costs are to-day. I can save fifteen thousand dollars by taking over Allison's lease, because I know I can buy the building at a ridiculously low figure. That was my business with Miller. That has been my business with Allison right along, though he didn't know it. Pshaw, Arthur, Allison's company was doomed to fail. I saw that as soon as Allison tried to interest me in it. He wanted to get hold of my money. Why, he offered to sell me three hundred thousand dollars' worth of stock for a hundred thousand. I was afraid he was too generous."

"Is Allison going to close up his business?"

"I think he has closed it up. I believe he is ready to leave town."

"He'll get away," Seagrave said. "The Federal authorities haven't enough on him to hold him."

"I know of three distinct transactions conducted through the mail, on any one of which Allison could be held," Ruth said. "Allison was inclined to be confidential in his eagerness to sell me stock."

"The Federal authorities ought to be notified about your information before Allison clears out. May I use your phone? Federal men are discreet. They can handle your information without bringing you into the case."

"Allison had a notion, shared by a good many other people, that a woman in business would be an easy mark, as the phrase is," Ruth said. "He made me angry by his attitude. I've been waiting to get that lease before I acted. I telephoned just a moment ago to Thornton Holmes and told him everything I know. I imagine Allison won't run very far."

Seagrave sat staring at his wife for a few minutes. Her eyes had dropped to a paper lying on her desk. It was a transfer of Allison's lease to herself.

"If my hat wasn't already off, I'd take it off to you, Ruth," Seagrave said. "You're a wonder."

"All right," said Ruth with a gesture of dismissal of the whole subject. She lifted her head with sudden briskness in her manner. "How about your going to work for the Seagrave company?" she asked.

"I'm here," Seagrave said. "I'd be glad to learn the stove business and business generally under the present head of the Seagrave company."

CHAPTER XII.

SEAGRAVE TAKES OFF HIS COAT.

"YOU will want to go into the sales department of course," Ruth said.

"Of course not," Seagrave retorted. "I want to go into the foundry."

"What do you want to do in the foundry?" Ruth asked in some surprise.

"Whatever there is to do," he answered. "You don't seem to remember that my training wasn't confined to selling stoves. I know how to *make* stoves."

"You may have known how to make stoves five years ago," Ruth said. "You'll find when we get our new stove ready for manufacture that you are somewhat behind the times. We have a model completed, and Olney is making a test this morning."

"I have plans for a new stove of my own," said Seagrave. "I'd like to carry on a few experiments in the foundry. I've borrowed some money from Holmes and he will be in on my profits. I'll share with the Seagrave company, too, if anything comes of it."

"You think you have a good idea?" she questioned.

"It 'll be a better stove than my father used to make," Seagrave said. "How it will compare with Olney's, of course, I don't know. It might be as good. It might conceivably be better. If it was as good or better, you'd want it, wouldn't you?"

"Certainly," Ruth agreed, "but if you want capital to proceed by yourself I'll furnish it."

"Would you make that proposal to any one else?" he asked.

"No," she said, a flush rising in her cheeks, "but I feel that you should not be shut out from the fortune your father left."

"My father made his decision," Seagrave said. "I'll abide by it. I don't say that in any spirit of animosity toward him, either. He was quite right in what he did. Logically you should have inherited the estate."

"But if your father were here now, he would doubtless change his mind."

"He isn't here," Seagrave said in brief dismissal of the subject.

He spoke the truth when he said he felt no animosity toward his father. He had progressed far enough to recognize the justice of what his father had done. He felt no bitterness toward any one. He was satisfied to have got back into the game. He had no handicap and he realized a power in himself to make good. He wanted to show Ruth that he could make good.

"I'll have Olney come in and we'll see how he's getting along," Ruth said. "I expected to hear from him before this."

She touched a button and ordered Blair to send for Olney. Olney came in in a few minutes. He was grimy and was dressed in overalls and jumper. When he saw Seagrave he stopped just inside the door. He looked at Ruth rather bleakly.

"What is it?" Ruth asked quickly. "Has something gone wrong?"

"I've been trying to get up my courage to come in for the last half hour," Olney said. "I—I—"

He was looking at Seagrave and Ruth noticed the look.

"You may talk before Mr. Seagrave," Ruth said. "He has left Radcliffe and has come here to go to work."

Olney's eyes clouded and he continued to look at Seagrave. There was a look of suspicion on his face.

"What is it, Olney?" Seagrave asked quietly. "If you've got any doubts about me, let's hear them."

"Well, you've been associating with Radcliffe," Olney said. "I told you before that he was a crook."

"And you think I'm a crook," Seagrave said. "You think I've come here to try to learn something about your new stove. You seem to forget that I had a chance to look at your plans and didn't take it."

"You've been with Radcliffe a good deal since then," Olney said.

"Your suspicions are absurd, Olney," Ruth interposed. "Mr. Seagrave has left Radcliffe's employ. I know they are not on good terms now. Besides he wouldn't *steal* anything. That's too silly to consider."

Seagrave gave his wife a sidelong glance which held a smile. She caught the glance and again she flushed. The flush seemed slightly to anger her. She bit her lip and then she said to Olney with a certain crisp authority in her tone:

"We'll just regard Mr. Seagrave as having established himself with us. What is the matter with the new stove?"

"It doesn't work," Olney confessed. "It ought to, but it doesn't. It has been made right to my plans, but there is a little defect in it somewhere."

"You can remedy that, can't you?" Ruth asked.

"I can't say now that I can remedy it," Olney answered.

He ran a hand over his forehead and then he looked at his employer with a kind of hopelessness in his eyes.

"Doggone it, Mrs. Seagrave," he broke out boyishly, "I'll have to confess that I'm stumped. The stove ought to work, but it just won't. I don't know what the flaw in it is. It's a little thing, but it might as well be as big as all outdoors."

Ruth paled and her hand moved nervously among some papers on her desk. It was the first serious setback of her business career and it was hitting her hard.

"I wish I had known this a little bit

earlier," she said. "I'd at least have saved what I've tied up in that lease with Allison. The foundry here is big enough for our present output. In fact, the way things look now in the trade we won't need more room for some time to come."

"You've signed the lease, have you?" Olney asked miserably. "Signed it because of what you expected from me! Well, I guess I bragged too much. Pride goeth just before destruction."

Ruth had felt Seagrave's eyes on her while she had spoken and Olney had made his comment. She wondered whether Seagrave would have some feeling of triumph over her failure. She had had her moment when she had disclosed that Allison and Miller could not cheat her. She had let him go on thinking that she was to be Allison's financial victim. He could even the score by gloating a little now.

But when she looked at him she found only sympathy in his eyes. She saw that he had been waiting for her to turn to him before he offered anything. He seemed not to wish to intrude.

"Well," she said with a little catch in her voice, "we seem to be in difficulties. So long as you've gone to work for us, I'd appreciate any suggestions you have."

"Just what seems to be the trouble with the stove, Olney?" Seagrave asked.

"It won't draw," Olney answered. "There's something wrong with the arrangement of the drafts. If I could fix that I'd have just exactly what I've been working for."

"Mind if I take a look at it?" Seagrave asked.

Olney hesitated. His new stove was to him as much a work of art as a picture or a story would be to another man. He hated to accept help. But a glance at Ruth's downcast face decided him.

"All right," he said. "Come out to the foundry."

They left Ruth sitting at her desk.

"I'll have to have some overalls," Seagrave said.

"I've got an extra pair," Olney said.

Seagrave put on the overalls and went to an unused room in the foundry where Olney's stove was set up. A couple of mechanics were standing beside it, looking at it dolefully. Smoke was issuing from beneath the covers.

Olney and Seagrave bent over the stove.

Ruth spent an anxious day in her office. She had a good deal to lose if Olney could not remedy the defect in his invention. Olney's experiments had cost her considerable and the story of what he was trying to do had got abroad in the trade. She would be laughed at if Olney failed. It would be one more proof that a woman was not fit to manage a big business.

She was tempted several times to go back into the foundry or to telephone to ask how the experiments were coming along. But she refrained. She had a feeling that that would be a feminine thing to do. Quitting time came and still there was no word from Olney or Seagrave. The people in the office left for the night and through the window she could see the men from the foundry leaving.

She decided to go to dinner. Olney or Seagrave would call her on the telephone if they had anything to report. If neither of them called her, she would know they had made no progress. She put on her hat.

As she moved toward the door it was flung open. Olney stood on the threshold. He was rather breathless, as if he had been running.

"It's all right," he said.

"You've got it?" Ruth asked, a kind of breathlessness coming to her, too.

"Well, Seagrave really got it," Olney said. "At least he started us on the path to the remedy. It was a simple thing, just as I said. Seagrave took off his coat and went to work and he got the first idea of what was wrong. After that it was easy enough. Seagrave is the first office man I ever saw that wasn't afraid to take off his coat and dirty his hands."

"Where is he now?" Ruth asked.

She was looking at Olney with delight in her eyes. Olney stared at her and for a moment his jaw went slack. Then it tightened.

"Why," he said in a strange, low tone, "he's gone home. I wanted him to come and tell you. But he said he would leave that to me. He changed his clothes and went to his hotel.

"Well, he's proved his value to us," Ruth said.

"Yes," Olney said, still in that strange voice, "he has. If he had remained with Radcliffe he might have worked out plans for himself. I'm afraid I'd have been permanently hung up. I—Mrs. Seagrave, what do you think my patents would be worth to you? You know we could have used some of my work even if I hadn't got the results I looked for. We'd have been able to improve your product greatly. I—I want to sell out."

"You're not going to leave, are you?" Ruth asked.

"Yes, I want to get back home. Seagrave can carry this thing along now. You won't need me. I—I haven't been home for a long time."

"Has something happened?" Ruth asked.

He looked at her squarely and he forced himself to smile.

"Why, no," he said. "I just want to get back home. I'll take whatever you think is right and I can use it to study for a while. I've some other ideas that I want to work out."

"Well, what do you think would be right?" Ruth asked.

"I'll close out for ten thousand dollars," Olney said. "I ought to have fifteen, but I believe Seagrave should share in this. You can pay him the extra five thousand or whatever you and he agree on. Will that be satisfactory?"

"I'll pay you the fifteen," Ruth said. "You have earned it. What Mr. Seagrave has done is another matter. I can settle with him later. Shall I give you a check now?"

"Well, if you will," Olney said.

Ruth reopened her desk and wrote the check.

"I'll be leaving to-night," Olney said. "I want to run over to New York after a bit, when I've been home, and I won't get this cashed till then."

"Haven't you taken a rather sudden decision?" Ruth asked.

"I've been thinking about it for some time."

Again their eyes met. A speculative look came into Ruth's.

"Olney," she said, "is there anything personal about me in your decision to leave at this time?"

"Nothing in the world," Olney assured her. "I—only hope you will be happy, Mrs. Seagrave."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

"Well, your business ought to prosper now and your husband has come back."

Ruth's cheeks burned. She had invited the statement, but still it made her uncomfortable.

"Seagrave's a good man," Olney said, and since she was not looking at him he watched her. "I think in some ways he's the best kind of man there is. He's been through the mill. He'll be a better man than the common run for that. I know what I'm talking about, for I've been through the mill myself. I'm only thirty, but five years ago I was nearly a bum. Too much dreaming and not enough action. I never seemed to get started right till I came here. You've encouraged me a lot. You gave me a chance to translate into action what I had been dreaming of. I'm grateful to you."

"Having the money you will have won't get you started again, will it?" Ruth asked.

"No," he said, and his eyes unseen by her, shone with that devotion which Holmes had spoken of. "I'm safe. I'm safe forever. And Seagrave is. Well, good-by, Mrs. Seagrave."

He put out his hand and Ruth took a forward step and laid hers in it. She looked into his eyes then. He was smiling inscrutably.

"Good-by and good luck," she said.

On the threshold he turned back.

"Business is all right," he said, "but there are better things. Maybe I'm going too far, but I'd like to know if you're going to give Seagrave his chance."

Ruth only shook her head. Olney did not seem to accept it as a sign of negation. Ruth had a queer feeling that this strange fellow with his rare chivalries, could read her heart better than she could herself. She had a sudden impulse of kindliness toward him.

"Is there anything like that waiting for you?" she asked. "You know, I've always felt an interest in you. I should like to know that you are going to be happy."

"Sure!" Olney said. "I've got a girl waiting for me in Chicago. I'm starting for there to-night. I only needed a little money to be able to go back—to show that I had made good. Well, good-by!"

He swung out of the door and closed it smartly behind him. Ruth had a sensation of unreality. There seemed to be something counterfeit in Olney's manner.

For a moment she stood looking down at the hand which he had just clasped. It was stained with the dust which had been on his own hand. She brushed off the dust and sat down at the telephone. Even when she had taken down the receiver she kept the connection closed for a moment. She was trying to decide what the emotion was that was stirring her. She wanted to congratulate Seagrave and express her thanks to him—but was that all? If it was not, hadn't she better wait a while?

Her business instinct told her that postponement would be safer, but she didn't yield to the prompting of that instinct. It was a fact that she wanted to hear Seagrave's voice.

She had to wait while they hunted him up at the hotel, and when he answered she said in a voice which she tried to make cool:

"Olney has just told me that you and he have succeeded. I'd like to see you. I want to make a settlement with you."

"There's no hurry about it, Ruth," he said.

"You might drop over after dinner."

"Very well," he agreed, and she hung up.

He came promptly and she assumed a businesslike air.

"I hope you won't have any silly scruples about accepting payment for helping Olney out," she said.

"None in the world," he rejoined. "In fact, I think I have something coming to me. You see, Olney and I were working inevitably along the same lines. In helping him out I used the plans I've been formulating. I've got nothing now."

"What do I owe you, then?" Ruth asked.

"What do you think?"

"I paid Olney fifteen thousand dollars," she said. "He mentioned five thousand for you. Would that be satisfactory?"

"Entirely," he said. "It's rather more than I expected, but Olney let you off cheaply."

"He gave you as much credit as he could," she said. "Shall I give you a check now?"

There was a strange vibration in her voice. Seagrave looked at her curiously. The color had fled from her cheeks and she was breathing a little fast.

"You are wondering what I would do with that much money, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered.

"You are thinking that it would carry me to French Canada or to Cuba and sustain me there for quite a while?"

She nodded.

"How long, Ruth, is it going to take me to convince you?" he asked in a strained voice.

She sat down and leaned her head on her hand.

"It's been a confusing day," she said.

Seagrave looked at her intently. She seemed cast down in the face of success. He yearned to try to console her for something whose cause was hidden from him, but he refrained. He would not press her. He would do nothing to try to break her will.

"Never mind, Ruth," he said. "A trip like that has no attraction for me. That is the plain and simple truth. If it had, I'd probably take this money and go."

She flung out her arms on the table in front of her and rested her face on them. Her shoulders shook.

Seagrave sat with clenched hands. His face was white from fighting back the longing that surged through him. When she continued in her position, he rose and went out on the porch. He would give her time to regain her self-control.

He stood out there for ten minutes and then she came out.

"I'm glad," she said with fierce intensity. "I'm proud, too. I am almost sure that you are safe now, unless something should come up to hurt you. *I'll* try not to hurt you. What are you going to do with your money?"

"Well," he said, and he forced gayety

into his tone, "I have been wondering out here if you'd sell a little stock in the Seagrave company. I don't know of anything that would have more steadying influence on me than knowing that I was a stockholder in the company my father had built up."

"Why, yes," she said. "I'd be glad to sell you stock. We'll arrange it to-morrow. Would you also like to take Olney's place in the foundry? He was a sort of mechanical superintendent."

"What's Olney going to do?"

"Oh, he has a girl in Chicago," Ruth said. "He's going back to her. He seemed to feel that his work here was done."

"Why, I thought—Holmes thought—"

"No, he didn't care for me in that way," Ruth said. "You were all mistaken."

"There's one girl in Chicago that will get a good man," Seagrave said. "Well, good night, Ruth. We workingmen must get our rest."

He laughed.

"Arthur," Ruth said, "you make me think more and more of the boy you used to be."

Then she fled indoors. Seagrave went down the street with a light step.

At that same time Olney was entering the railroad station. There was a look of grim resignation on his face.

"New York, one way," he told the ticket seller.

And so he went into the East, taking his love for Ruth Seagrave with him.

CHAPTER XIII.

A JOLT FOR ALLISON.

ON the next Thursday night Allison, Miller, and those two other precious henchmen of Allison's, Brown and Horton, were sitting in a room in an apartment just off Tenth Street.

Allison had always prided himself on his ability to get away if the police, as they had once or twice, threw a net out for him. One of his favorite tricks was to have two places of residence. In Hartwell he had lived openly at the leading hotel and had kept this apartment, unknown to any one except those immediately associated with him. It was one of the oldest apartment houses in town and it had an indifferent janitor service and no elevator. There was no one to notice the comings and goings of the gentleman in suite five. So long as he paid his rent, no one cared what he did.

From Miller Allison had learned that a Federal operative had been ready to place Miller under arrest if Ruth had completed the deal which Allison and the police and the Federal authorities had expected her to complete. When Miller had reported, Allison had seen that his open career in Hartwell was ended. In order to attract Ruth he had taken her into his confidence. He saw that she had been playing with him, waiting shrewdly to get the lease that she wanted. Now that she had the lease, she would expose him to the authorities.

Allison had been dumfounded when Miller had returned from his errand. He had berated Miller for having given the lease, but Miller had pointed out to him that it had been better to take what they could get. Miller had used his judgment and had exercised the power of attorney which Allison had given him and he thought he had exercised it intelligently. He knew when to stand from under if Allison didn't, he said.

"Why, that woman is the biggest crook I ever had any dealings with," Allison fumed.

"I don't see it," Miller sneered. "She merely said, as politely as you please, that she was not interested in rubber stock, but that she would buy our lease. I couldn't even present any of our pet arguments to her. She knew as much about the company as I did. I gathered that she had taken everything you had told her and had put her own construction on it. I think she was laughing at you, Allison, for having tried to hook her for a sucker. Anyway, she's smart and if she knows anything you better duck to cover while you can."

So Allison, mad with rage, had fled to his other residence. Miller had come there in the night and Brown and Horton had showed up at daylight next morning. They had been to Cleveland in a fast automobile and had called up the district attorney to

find out if Allison was wanted. They had offered, as a feeler, to bring him in. The only information they gathered was that Allison could come in or not, just as he liked.

"That means that there is a warrant out for me," Allison had said.

"Sure, that's what it means," Brown said, and Brown had a sixth sense about warrants.

"Things look pretty nasty for us, boys," Allison said. "You fellows lie low to-day and let me think."

He had spent his time that day, pacing up and down the little sitting room or lying on a davenport with his hands flung up over his head and a cigar clamped between his teeth. Once in a while he took a drink from a bottle on the table.

His colleagues did not bother him. While they were not sleeping they spent their time around the dining room table, playing cards. All of them were inclined to sneer at Allison for some of his manners, but they had learned in the past that he could be relied upon when a pinch came. They were relying on him now to get them out of a tight place.

They knew that the place was equally tight for all. All had sold stock in the rubber company. All had used the mails to defraud, as the district attorney would point out to an unfriendly jury.

Toward evening Allison had telephoned to Radcliffe to come and see him. Radcliffe had demurred. He had learned from a flying visit which Miller had paid him, that Ruth was "wise" to what they had been doing. He had reported that Ruth had taken over the lease and Radcliffe had known from that that the Seagrave stove was a success.

The dregs of cowardice which were always at the bottom of Radcliffe's soul had been stirred up. He, too, was interested in the rubber company, though the books didn't show it. He had put in more money than he could well afford. On top of that he was about to face devastating competition. He might conceivably be on the highway to financial ruin. He didn't know just what that damned, dreaming Olney had put over on him.

"What is Allison going to do about it?" he asked Miller.

"You'll hear from him," Miller answered. "Don't you be scared that you won't. But I'll tell you something: Don't you think for a minute that you can lie back and expect us to pull you and ourselves out of this hole. We've all got to work together and we've got to do some mighty brisk work. You're in bad shape."

Miller had thereupon proceeded to draw upon his imagination for details as to what might happen to Radcliffe. Brown and Horton might turn on him to save themselves. The Seagrave company was up to something big. That company was going to dominate the stove market. If Radcliffe didn't believe it just let him wait and see.

Miller was a fairly good judge of men, especially of men of the Radcliffe kind; and he was a past master at "throwing a scare" into that kind. He would stoop to any form of deception to make the scare effective. Before he was done he had made Radcliffe insistent upon seeing Allison at once.

"You'll have to wait till Allison sends for you," Miller said. "Don't get excited."

"Well, you tell him to hurry," Radcliffe said.

All morning he had worried because he had not heard from Allison. All afternoon he was afraid that he would hear. He was afraid of having to meet Allison when the latter called him on the telephone. The apartment house was in what was to Radcliffe a disreputable part of town. He was not averse to a crooked business deal, but he did not fancy going to a place like that in the night to meet a man like Allison.

"Suit yourself," Allison said sharply. "You can sink alone if you want to."

His tone had indicated that he was about to hang up and Radcliffe had held him on the wire with a quick plea.

"Well?" Allison said in that cold tone; and Radcliffe had promised to come after dinner.

The four men in the apartment were now waiting for him to come. The three had no idea what Allison planned to do, but he could offer nothing which they would reject because of its recklessness. Miller

had the courage of his kind, and Brown and Horton were practically strong-arm men. An act of violence was not beyond them.

Those two had to smile at Radcliffe when he put in an appearance. They guessed Radcliffe would do what the boss wanted him to do. He looked, Brown said, like a wet dishrag.

"Well," Radcliffe asked, "what's up?"

"Sit down," said Allison.

Radcliffe looked at him with a flush coming into his pale cheeks. He didn't like Allison's tone.

"I'll stand," he said. "What do you want?"

Allison knew from past experiences with the authorities that any plans he made suddenly to recoup himself must have ample ramifications. He couldn't permit himself to get into a panic and jump at some hair-brained scheme which would lay him wide open. He thought now that he had spun a fine and strong web, and he wanted Radcliffe to act as the fly. He knew Radcliffe pretty well; he had studied him, feeling out his weaknesses. He had long ago discovered that at bottom Radcliffe was an arrant coward.

"Your business is about to go flooey, Radcliffe," he said.

Radcliffe sank into the nearest chair, dropping his pose of aloofness.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I've found out about this new stove that the Seagrave company has," Allison said. "It will sell for twenty per cent less than anything you can produce, and it has your best stove beaten a city block. What're you going to do about it?"

"It's ruin for me," Radcliffe breathed.

"It is unless you let me help you," Allison insinuated.

"What's your plan?"

Radcliffe was pallid and shaking. He rubbed his forehead as if he were bewildered, too. Allison enjoyed an inward smile. He hadn't been mistaken about Radcliffe.

"The thing for you to do is to sell out to the Seagrave company, isn't it?" he asked.

"Would Mrs. Seagrave buy?" Radcliffe asked. "What good would my foundry do her?"

"She's got to have more room," Allison said. "She proves that by the fact that she grabbed at my lease. It will cost her something to equip a new foundry. She could let the lease lapse and still make money if she could get your foundry at a reasonable figure."

"She wouldn't give me fifty per cent of what it's worth," Radcliffe objected. "I can't make that sacrifice. I put up some paper at the bank to raise money for you. How about that money, anyhow? Are you in a position to do anything for me?"

"The Allison company is bankrupt," Allison said in a smooth voice.

"By God—" Radcliffe began.

Allison raised a silencing hand.

"There isn't a thing you can do about it, Radcliffe," he said. "You can't have me pinched, you know. You went into my company with your eyes wide open. Have me arrested, and where will you be? If I should go over the road, you would follow me. You can see that, can't you?"

Radcliffe could see it. He had thought about it a good deal since he had risen to Allison's bait in the hope of cleaning up some of the easy money which everybody was trying for, since the wave of speculation had swept across the country. Radcliffe saw himself hemmed in on every side.

"Have you a definite plan?" he asked nervously.

"Now you're talking sense," Allison approved. "Yes, I have a plan. What its details are I guess you don't need to know, do you?"

"I won't go it blind," Radcliffe said with a sudden picking up of his nerve.

"Don't trust me, eh?" Allison sneered. "Very well. I'll tell you what the plan is. You go to Mrs. Seagrave and accept any offer she will make you. Get all you can, of course. Have her pay you with a check. I'll take care of the rest of it."

Radcliffe looked at the gross face which Allison had thrust toward him. He saw what Allison meant.

"You'd raise the check?" he asked. "Well, you couldn't. How could you change the perforations?"

" Raise nothing, change nothing," Allison said. " You put the deal through. I'll take care of the check. Or at least Horton will."

Radcliffe looked at Horton. He had been drumming on the table top with his fingers. Radcliffe noticed now, as he had often noticed before, that those fingers were long and supple.

" Horton's a forger?" he asked. " You merely want to get Mrs. Seagrave's signature so that Horton will know what it is like?"

" I have Mrs. Seagrave's signature," Allison said. " She gave Miller a check for the lease. But I can't do anything with that. We've got to have a deal such as the sale of your foundry would represent. The bank must know about it through Mrs. Seagrave. That will require a little preliminary action. You can get her to give you a check for part of the amount right away. We'll get that cashed, and you can have the bank find out from Mrs. Seagrave what the first check is for. It's a hundred to one shot that she will not name the total price. Then you rush the papers to her the next day and get the check for the balance. We'll have another check ready. You can hurry it to the bank and get it cashed, and we will be up and away before anything is discovered. It's a trick to be turned just before the bank closes for the day."

" Do you mean that you would have me present a bogus check, get the money, and flee?" Radcliffe gasped. " Why, I'd be a fugitive from justice."

Allison could not keep a gleam of satisfaction out of his eyes. Radcliffe, in his agitation, did not see it.

" I didn't expect you to go that far, Radcliffe," he said. " So here's the plan. I'll bring a man out here from Cleveland. You will take him up to the bank and introduce him. You'll say that you're expecting a call from the East—a business call. You've got a big deal on, and you must go when you're summoned. This man will be a lawyer. You will give him power of attorney to wind up your affairs. That will enable him to cash the check. To make everything more certain, he will catch you at Cleveland and have you indorse the check. He'll come back here and get the money, and we will turn your share over to you."

" My share?" Radcliffe asked.

" It 'll be seventy-five thousand dollars," Allison said.

" And when the investigation begins they'll be looking for me to arrest me for having indorsed a check which will be for a sum much greater than the original check," Radcliffe said.

" But the lawyer won't really see you in Cleveland," Allison sneered. " Don't be altogether a chump. You will be in Buffalo or Schenectady, or any other place you like. You can prove you were not in Cleveland. We'll take care of your signature on the new check."

" My God, Allison, you're a criminal!" Radcliffe gasped.

" As if you didn't know it," Allison said. " You knew what we were going to do with this rubber stock, and that didn't make your gorge rise. Well, what do you say?"

Radcliffe sat plunged in thought for a long time. The plan seemed to render him immune from prosecution. He didn't really care about the criminality of it if he could escape the results. And he was so involved that he saw no other way out.

" Well, I'll go up to see Mrs. Seagrave," he said. " I'll take that first step, and see how things pan out. I won't commit myself definitely till I see her. I don't know that I can go through with it."

" Just keep your nerve and you can," Allison said.

" How do I know that you will divide with me after you get the money?" Radcliffe asked with sudden suspicion.

Allison had foreseen the question. He had been surprised that Radcliffe had not asked it sooner.

" As soon as everything is set, you and I will leave Cleveland in a high powered motor car," he said. " Before we go you can search me to make sure that I have no weapons. You can take a gun along. I'll stick to you closer than a brother. We'll get a suite of rooms in a hotel in Buffalo. I'll keep under cover and you can establish your alibi. Will that satisfy you?"

Radcliffe felt a little lift of his spirits. The plan looked feasible, and the danger

to himself would not be great. He might escape the ruin which threatened him.

"I'll go to see Mrs. Seagrave," he said. "Do I have to come back here?"

"I guess you do," Allison said. "I can't stir out, and you want to be mighty careful how you show yourself. Make sure that you're not followed."

Radcliffe left, and the four men took a drink to celebrate.

"Poor cheese," said Miller. "We'll take you away from him wherever you are, Allison. We'll be on our way with the money, and he'll never dare peep."

"How long will it take him to get up there and back?" Horton asked.

"Not more than an hour," Allison said. "In an hour we will have things moving, gentlemen. You have to leave these little tangles to the old man, don't you?"

But the hour passed, and Radcliffe did not return. Thirty minutes more dragged by. Even Allison began to fret, though he had always prided himself on keeping cool in a crisis. He waited fifteen minutes more, and then he said to Miller, with an oath:

"Call up that poor chump's house and see if he is there."

Miller obeyed, and found that Radcliffe had not been at home all evening.

"Shall I call Mrs. Seagrave's?" Miller asked.

"The last thing in the world you want to do," Allison said. "That lady is sharp, let me tell you. She might smell a mouse."

But he was almost on the point of calling the Seagrave home when forty-five minutes more had passed. Before he yielded to the impulse, however, there was a ring from the vestibule.

Allison spoke through the tube, and turned about to the others with a sigh of relief.

"He's coming," he said. "Maybe he had to use a little persuasion."

He stepped to the door and opened it, and stood back when Radcliffe appeared before it. Radcliffe stepped into the room. There was a mixture of relief and concern in his face.

"What is it?" Allison asked sharply. "Did it pan?"

"It didn't pan," he said. "Hell, that woman has the best business head on any shoulders in this town. She knows what she's doing, let me tell you. She wouldn't look at my foundry at any price. She's been looking ahead to this situation for a long time, apparently. She said she had bought machinery to outfit the factory she took over from you, Allison, as long as six months ago. She bought the complete mechanical plant of a Detroit foundry that was going out of the stove business and into something else in iron. I couldn't have named her a figure that she would have touched.

"She's got your number, Allison. She had only a smile when I mentioned that I had heard she had bought the lease on your building and that I supposed she would want machinery for it. She said she had been planning for a long time to get that building and outfit it—just as soon as you decided to quit. I guess she's been expecting you to quit. You had a fat chance of selling her any stock in your rubber company."

Allison's face had gone a pasty gray. He seemed to suffer more from the fact that Mrs. Seagrave had read through his scheme than from the fact that Radcliffe had failed.

He got up heavily and began to pace the room, mouthing bitter oaths. After ten minutes of this he poured a generous drink and tossed it down. Then he sat and faced Radcliffe. Radcliffe shrank from the glitter in the man's eyes. Allison had his mask off now. He had played a slow, hard game in this town, and he was not going to be cheated out of everything.

"What are you thinking of now, Allison?" Radcliffe asked.

"I'm thinking that you are going to help me out of a hole," Allison ground out. "We'll come right down to cases. Will you do what I say peacefully or shall we have to persuade you?"

"Persuade me? What do you mean?"

Allison flipped his hand toward Miller. Miller produced an automatic pistol from the side pocket of his coat. He held it loosely in his palm, but it was pointed at Radcliffe.

"Call up Seagrave," Allison ordered. "Tell him you want to see him. Say that

it is a matter of the utmost importance to him and to you. Have him meet you in some lonely place. Make it any place—I don't care where."

"And then what?" Radcliffe asked.

"You can leave that to us," Allison said.

"Do you contemplate violence?" Radcliffe asked.

"You'll find out if you don't call Seagrave at once," Allison said. "Miller is extremely handy with a gun."

Radcliffe looked at Miller. A sardonic smile was wreathing Miller's lips. Radcliffe saw that he stood in the presence of a gang of men who would stop at nothing. Allison was not only a smooth and plausible business buccaneer; he was a thug, and had stooped to a thug's methods.

With cold sweat breaking out on his body Radcliffe rose and went to the telephone. There was no sound in the room save his own heavy breathing as he spoke the hotel telephone number into the transmitter.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WELL, GENTLEMEN?"

WHILE he waited for Seagrave to be brought to the telephone in the hotel, Allison cautioned him: "Get yourself in hand, Radcliffe. You're shaky as hell. Make it plausible to that fellow. You've got to go through with this, or we'll make you pay up."

Radcliffe couldn't get himself in hand, and it was for that reason that what he told Seagrave was convincing. His voice shook, and it held a tense earnestness which made Seagrave understand that there was something in the wind.

"Seagrave," Radcliffe said, "I've got to see you right away. Something that concerns you has broken. I can't tell you over the phone what it is. Can you meet me in the park at the head of Eleventh Street right away?"

"Are you in trouble?" Seagrave asked.

"Not exactly. Well, I am in a way, at that. But I don't want you to do anything for me. Not directly, anyhow. Perhaps I can do you a turn."

There was a brief silence at Seagrave's end of the wire.

"What's it got to do with, Radcliffe?" he then asked.

"I can't talk about it over the phone," Radcliffe repeated. "Will you meet me?"

"Why can't you come up to the hotel?"

"It's best for me not to be seen."

"Is it something about our mutual friend?"

Radcliffe knew he referred to Allison.

"It's about him, and I don't want him to see me talking to you," Radcliffe said. "You know they're after him."

Seagrave supposed Radcliffe was afraid of Allison. Better than Allison, Seagrave knew what a fundamental coward Radcliffe was. Doubtless Radcliffe wanted to turn against Allison, and he was afraid to do it in the open. Well, Seagrave was not afraid, either of Allison or of Radcliffe. The life he had lived for five years had at least hardened him to fear. Apprehension hadn't bothered him in a long time. For days he had had a sense of security. He wasn't afraid to venture from his snug harbor into open water.

"All right," he said. "I'll be right down."

"In a car?" Radcliffe asked.

"No; I'll walk. It isn't far. You'll be there?"

"I'll be there."

Radcliffe hung up and turned from the telephone, wiping sweat from his face.

"He says he'll meet me," he announced. "I'll go right down."

Allison again favored him with his sardonic grin.

"You'll stay right here," he said. "Miller and Brown will meet Mr. Seagrave. Why, you damn chump, Seagrave would take one look at you and know that something was amiss. You couldn't go through with the thing. You couldn't go through with anything."

Radcliffe was disappointed and glad all at once. He was disappointed because he was not going to get away from Allison and his pals, and glad that he didn't have to confront Seagrave. He was as much afraid of Seagrave now as he was of Allison. He knew that Seagrave had hardened

swiftly in the brief time he had been back home. Seagrave might go on a rampage if he grew suspicious.

"You better hike, boys," Allison said. "Bring him in as fast as you can."

The two men left. Radcliffe turned to Allison.

"May I go home?" he asked. "I'll keep my mouth shut."

"You'll keep your mouth shut all right, but you won't go home," Allison retorted. "Sit down and be still."

Thirty minutes passed, and then there was a ring from downstairs. Allison opened the street door. There was at once the sound of mounting feet on the stairway, and Miller flung the hall door open. He stepped back and ushered Seagrave into the room. Then he and Brown entered.

Allison had risen from his chair and he confronted Seagrave. Seagrave looked at him with cold insolence in his eyes. Allison waited for him to speak, but Seagrave did not open his mouth. He seemed satisfied to take in the situation in ironical humor.

"Seagrave," Radcliffe broke out, "I had nothing to do with this. They made me call you up."

"I guessed as much when these two men came out from the trees and put a gun on me," Seagrave said. "Have they got you in a box, Radcliffe?"

"I guess they've got you in a box," Radcliffe said.

"Well, I don't know," Seagrave retorted. "We'll have to find out about that. You've got into bad company, Radcliffe. You see what happens to a man when he drifts into bad company."

Seagrave spoke lightly, his smile still on his lips. The smile seemed to infuriate Allison.

"You're a humorist, aren't you?" he ground out. "Hell, you're a great one to be talking about bad companions, a gutter-snipe like you!"

"I'm talking out of experience," Seagrave said. "The man who knows is the man who can give the best advice."

"Well, aren't you curious as to why we have brought you here?" Allison asked.

"Not a bit. I guess that will come out in due time. You haven't any time to waste, you fellows. This town is getting mighty hot for you."

"Cut in, Miller," Allison ordered.

Miller "cut in" by producing his gun, as he had produced it against Radcliffe.

Seagrave tossed a contemptuous look at him.

"What 're you going to do with that, Miller?" Seagrave asked.

"Shoot you, if you don't do what the boss orders," Miller said.

"You haven't got the nerve," Seagrave stated.

"Haven't I? Just try me."

"Never mind the argument," Allison broke in. "Miller will shoot if he has to. Now, Seagrave, I'll tell you what I want. You go to the phone and call up your wife."

"Yes?" Seagrave said.

"Tell her you are in trouble. Ask her to meet you where Miller and Brown met you. We'll do the rest."

Seagrave's eyes darkened, but his lips still held their smile.

"You're a fool, Allison," he said. "She wouldn't come."

"Why wouldn't she?"

"Because she would know that there was something wrong somewhere and because I couldn't tell her any story that would bring her to meet me."

"You'll try anyhow. Go up to the phone and get her number. You're clever. Use your wits. Get her down to the park. Do it now, or Miller will attend to your case."

Seagrave half turned to the telephone. The look in his eyes became a cold glitter of hate for Allison. He did not believe that Miller would shoot. These fellows couldn't afford to murder him. But even if he had believed Miller would shoot, he wouldn't have called Ruth. What did they think he was? Did they think because he had had a long lapse that there was no good in him? Did they think he cared enough about his own safety to imperil his wife to insure that safety?

Behind him, as he stood looking at the telephone, he heard Allison move. He glanced over his shoulder as if he would speak, and saw that Allison had stepped

around the table which had been between them. Allison was not more than four feet from him. Seagrave suddenly swung his body around and leaped, all in one movement.

His fist shot out and crashed into Allison's face. He saw a spurt of blood from Allison's mouth. He struck out again with more precision, and caught Allison on the point of the jaw. Allison flopped down. Seagrave wheeled about to face Miller and Brown. A glance showed him that Radcliffe had retreated to the door. There he stood, fearing to flee, fascinated by the scene.

Seagrave saw that Miller would not shoot. He hadn't brute courage enough to brave the electric chair, but he had clubbed his gun, and it was a dangerous weapon.

It was the more dangerous because Miller stood back and let Brown bear the brunt of the attack. Seagrave understood that Miller was going to wait till he could bring his gun down on Seagrave's head while Seagrave struggled with Brown.

The odds were all against Seagrave, for Horton was still in reserve. He had bent over Allison and was helping him into a chair.

"Get in on this, Radcliffe," Seagrave shouted, as he closed with the muscular Brown.

But Radcliffe refused to get in. He just stood there by the door, his staring eyes fixed on the struggling men.

Seagrave could have borne Brown backward, but he was afraid to do it. That would bring him close to Miller, and Miller was waiting with his gun poised. He had to let Brown bear him back. He succeeded, however, in getting his fingers into Brown's throat, and he sank them deep and shook Brown's head from side to side in his great rage.

Allison was reviving and he raised dull eyes to the two men.

"Shoot him, Miller!" he gasped. "Shoot him, I tell you! What are you waiting for? Can't you see that he's choking Brown?"

He managed to get to his feet and he staggered around the two men and gained Miller's side. He tried to snatch the gun from Miller's hand. Miller pushed him away, and he was too dazed to struggle for the weapon.

"Don't be a chump," Miller said. "A shot would rouse the whole building. If this racket keeps up it 'll be roused anyway. Keep back, Allison. You're only interfering with me. You're only gumming things up."

"Get him, then," Allison said hoarsely. "Get him. The police will be on top of us first thing we know."

Seagrave and Brown had struggled to the wall. Brown was flailing out with his fists, but Seagrave's fingers still dug into his throat. Brown's tongue was protruding and his face was purple.

Miller ran to them, pushing the entreating Allison aside. Seagrave saw him coming, suddenly let go his hold of Brown, and leaped for Miller.

He dodged the clubbed gun and his fist shot into Miller's stomach. Miller uttered a grunt and the gun came down. But there was no speed behind the blow, and Seagrave dodged it. He knocked Miller down with a blow to the jaw, a companion blow to the one with which he had felled Allison.

Seagrave stood a moment then, breathing hard. His heart was thumping dully in his breast and he had a moment of dizziness. But he shook his head to clear it as if he had suddenly come up from beneath water. His clearing gaze showed him Allison advancing on him. He tensed his muscles to spring joyfully on Allison, but he did not spring.

Behind him Horton dealt him a terrific blow on the head with a blackjack which he had taken from his pocket. Seagrave's arms dropped to his sides as if his fists were lead. His head jerked back in a reflex from the blow. As he began to sink to the floor he wondered why Horton did not strike him again.

He lay on the floor with closed eyes, barely conscious. He could feel his muscles twitch. Then he was aware that he was being picked up and borne to the davenport at the side of the room.

"Finished him?" Allison asked; and Seagrave could feel his breath on his face.

"Well, you wanted him killed," he heard

Miller say cynically. "Damn it, you do lose your head sometimes."

"Shut up," said Allison. "Is he going to die?"

"Let me see," Horton said. "You fellows are in a panic."

"Somebody look out the window and see if any one is in the street," Allison said. "We may have to blow in a hurry."

There was the sound of some one moving across the room. Then Miller said:

"It's as quiet as a graveyard down there."

"Keep your ears open," Allison ordered. "The people below us heard the racket if they were at home. They may phone to the police."

"Oh, I guess there have been rackets in this joint before," Miller said.

"How is he, Horton?" Allison asked.

"Oh, he'll be all right, beyond a sore head," Horton reported.

He had been exploring the wound on Seagrave's head with his long, forger's fingers, and had felt the pulse, too.

"His heart seems to be pumping right along, though sort of heavy," Horton went on. "I can't see that his skull is fractured. I tried not to fracture it. I didn't put all I had in the blow. Somebody pour some liquor into him. When he wakes up and finds he's had a drink maybe he'll think the law of compensation is at work."

Seagrave heard Miller laugh and there was a gurgle as whisky was poured from the bottle into a glass. Seagrave somehow got to a sitting position. He could scarcely see, and when he tried to speak his stiff lips refused to form the words. However, he was just able to strike out at the glass which Miller was carrying toward his lips. It fell from Miller's hand.

"You pup," Miller said, and he made a menacing gesture.

"Stop it," Allison ordered. "We've got to move lively. No time for monkeying now. Watch him, Horton."

Brown had got to his feet and he wavered over toward Seagrave.

"I'll—" he choked in a blaze of wrath.

"No, you won't," Allison interposed. "Keep still, all of you. Radcliffe, come here."

Radcliffe came over to them. His face was like chalk. His eyes were as a dead man's.

"Shoot a drink into you and get on your feet," Allison ordered. "I've got another job for you."

Radcliffe's shaking hand spilled the drink as he carried it to his lips, but it steadied him when he had got it down.

"Call up Mrs. Seagrave," Allison ordered. "Tell her that Seagrave has been hurt. Tell her to come to the park and you will meet her and bring her to where Seagrave is. Get hold of yourself again and hurry."

"She won't come to meet Seagrave," Radcliffe said. "What does she care about him?"

"Oh, you fool!" Allison raged. "She has never stopped caring about him. "Haven't I talked to her? Don't I know the signs? She'd give her life to help him."

Seagrave, lying back on the davenport, felt a warm thrill go through him. It gave him strength. He would have to fight on. He would have to prevent Ruth's falling into the hands of these ruffians.

"I'll do the best I can," Radcliffe said.

He went to the telephone and called Ruth's number. Seagrave waited till he heard Radcliffe say: "Mrs. Seagrave?" Then he shouted "Ruth—" He had intended to follow that up with another shout: "Don't come!" in the hope that his voice would carry through the transmitter. But Miller, standing above him, clapped his hand over his mouth. Brown and Horton seized his hands. Seagrave moved his head from side to side in an effort to escape Miller's clutch, but he had not the strength.

He heard Radcliffe click the receiver on the hook.

"She says she'll go right down there," Radcliffe said.

Any emotion which Seagrave might have felt because of the blind devotion for him which the woman he loved was displaying was crowded out by the cold terror that gripped him at the thought of Ruth's falling into the hands of these men.

He began to struggle again, harder than before. He opened his eyes and, though his sight was still blurred, he saw that Miller

was menacing him with the butt of the gun again.

"Want some more of it?" Miller asked.

Seagrave saw that he could not hope to serve Ruth when she was brought here if he lay unconscious on the davenport. He ceased to struggle and Miller took his hand from his mouth and the other men stood back from him.

"I'll watch this freak," Allison said. "You two go and get the lady. Tell her that you will take her to Seagrave. If she won't come, put a gun on her. Hurry up now. Bring her at any cost!"

Miller and Brown hastened from the room. Allison stood over Seagrave with another gun in his hand.

"One peep out of you now and I'll bat you!" he said. "You've caused enough trouble."

"May I sit up?" Seagrave asked.

"Sit up," Allison agreed.

He stepped back, holding the gun in his hand. "You're just ripe for my purpose," he sneered. "You're well beaten up as it is, and I guess I can make your lady see that you're in danger of some more of the same treatment. Will you advise her to do what I say?"

"What are you going to say?" Seagrave asked.

"You'll find out when she gets here," Allison retorted. "I'm going to get my pay out of her. I'm going to use Radcliffe and you to get it. I've got a piker's crumbs in this town and I'm not going to stand for it. Your wife may think she's clever—and I don't say she isn't—but I think I can break her now. You'd better tell her to do what I say. I'm in so deep now that it doesn't make much difference what I do. What do you say?"

"I say," said Seagrave, "that if I get a chance I'll kill you."

"If it comes to killing," Allison said, "I'll be right there. This play has got to go through."

Seagrave dropped his head on his chest and said no more. Even when Allison repeated his demand from time to time he would not answer. He would not even look at the thug.

He tried to formulate a plan, but there seemed to be no plan to formulate. He had been the innocent means of getting Ruth into this trap and he could think of no way to get her out.

One thing he resolved on and that was that he would fight for her. That seemed to be futile and yet he could do no less. They would overbear him and then what would happen to Ruth? He groaned at what appeared to be his inadequacy in the emergency.

He did not know how many minutes passed. His head ached terribly and his brain turned in slow, painful revolutions. He was only half alive.

Then suddenly he felt as if he had been touched by a live wire. The bell had rung and the sound of it sent a shiver through him. He looked expectantly at Allison. Allison was releasing the catch of the street door. Seagrave started to get to his feet, but he sank back beneath the wave of dizziness that swept over him.

There was again the sound of ascending feet, and when they came outside the door Allison threw it open. Seagrave, turning his head, dimly saw Ruth enter the room. Miller and Brown followed her inside.

Her eyes went at once to Seagrave. She swept across the room, ignoring the other men. She knelt before Seagrave and put her arms about his neck.

"You *are* hurt," she said as if the fact astonished her.

"Never mind, dear," Seagrave said. "Never mind about me. This is a trap. I did what I could, but my best was no good. These men have brought you here to rob you."

Ruth got to her feet and her eyes went from one face to the other.

"You seem to have done very well so far as two of them are concerned, Arthur," she said. "Allison and this other man seem to have got as good as they sent."

They were puzzled by her serenity. Allison, experienced as he was, didn't think any woman could have faced the situation as Ruth was facing it.

Ruth's hand dropped toward Seagrave's. Her fingers moved, inviting his clasp. He took her hand in his and got painfully to his feet. They confronted the other men.

"Well, gentlemen," said Ruth in a light, hard tone, "what is it?"

CHAPTER XV.

FROM THE DEAD.

"HOW much is your balance in the bank, Mrs. Seagrave?" Allison asked.

"I have a very small balance," Ruth answered.

"I refer to the balance of the Seagrave company."

"Oh! Why, that's considerable. Something over a hundred thousand dollars."

"You will write a check for ninety thousand dollars," Allison said. "I hate not to take the remaining ten thousand or so, but we mustn't let it seem that you are withdrawing your account. Make it payable to Radcliffe."

"How will he get it cashed?" Ruth asked. "I can stop payment on it before the bank is open in the morning. I can have Radcliffe arrested."

"You won't be in a position to do either of these things," Allison said, indulging in a sly grin. "You will be right here till the transaction is carried out."

"And if I don't give you the check, what will you do?"

Allison shrugged his shoulders and stood looking at her for a moment.

"Is it necessary for me to put it into words?" he asked then.

"No; it isn't," Ruth said. "I can see that you are capable of anything."

Allison drew out a chair from the table and laid a fountain pen on it. He indicated by a gesture that she should be seated.

Seagrave took a forward step.

"Allison," he said grimly, "you'll have to travel fast if you carry out this plan. I don't think any of you have the courage to murder me. If you do this thing and I continue to live, I'll follow you over the world till I find you. Then I'll kill you."

"I'm trying to carry it off smoothly," Allison said. "You insist on injecting melodrama. But, my dear fellow, can't you see that you are powerless just now, no matter what you do in future? I have an idea that you are stubborn enough and foolish enough to fight till you drop, but—"

"And brave enough," Ruth softly offered.

"Brave enough, Mrs. Seagrave, if you insist," Allison agreed, "but Seagrave ought to see that if he opposes us any longer it will not be he, but you, who will suffer."

Ruth smiled up at her husband.

"I'm afraid we'll have to recognize that as the big fact, won't we?" she asked.

Seagrave stood looking at Allison. He saw that force would avail nothing now. These men had the upper hand in that respect. He would have at least to let Ruth make out the check. Then he would have to hope that good fortune would aid him in frustrating them before the check was cashed.

"I guess we'll have to yield temporarily, Ruth," he said.

Ruth seated herself at the table and looked up at Allison. He didn't understand how she could be so bright and cheerful. She looked, as he phrased it, as if she had an ace in the hole.

"You've courage, anyhow, Mrs. Seagrave," he said.

"I may have courage, but I don't happen to have a blank check," Ruth said with a subdued laugh.

"I have," Allison said.

He drew a checkbook from his pocket and laid it before her.

"Do you remember the number of the last check you wrote?" he asked. "That's a little thing, but it's the little things that catch a man up in cases like this. I'd like to have that check properly numbered."

"I remember the number all right," Ruth answered, "but this check is perfectly blank, Mr. Allison. Our checks have the name of the company printed on them. Won't that make a difference? The check we use is larger than these packet checks also."

Allison frowned. Ruth was thinking of little things which he himself would not have noticed.

"Don't you have a pocket checkbook?" he asked.

"I do, but I have never written a business check on one of those blanks. I've al-

ways been very particular about that. I've been careful to keep the business of the company separate from my personal business. I'm afraid the cashier would turn this check over several times before he cashed it. You can see him standing there in the bank, turning it over in his hand, can't you, Mr. Allison? Then he'd take it into Mr. Adams's office and ask Mr. Adams how about it and Mr. Adams would say it was peculiar. And then they'd phone to my office and find I wasn't there and—"

She shook her head slowly as if she despaired of what Adams, president of the bank, might do.

"Well, we'll have to get hold of one of the regular checks of the Seagrave company," Allison said. "Nothing simpler than that. Have you a key to the office with you?"

"No; it's at home."

Allison paced the floor for a moment, his head bent.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," he said. "You telephone to your home and tell the servant there to have that key ready when it is sent for. I'll send one of the men for it. Then you phone to the office to the watchman and tell him to take the key from whoever brings it and get a blank check from your desk. That will fix it. I'm obliged to you for thinking of this, Mrs. Seagrave. It might have been a fatal slip."

"Oh, don't thank me," Ruth said. "Shall I use the telephone now?"

Allison nodded. Ruth got to her feet and started for the telephone. Allison laid a hand on her arm. Seagrave sprang and pushed Allison back.

"If you so much as put a finger on my wife," he said, "we'll stop where we are, no matter what happens."

Allison shrank a little from Seagrave's blazing eyes. He didn't want another row. The neighbors might think that they had had enough and telephone to the police.

"I was merely going to say that Mrs. Seagrave was remarkably cool considering the situation she finds herself in," Allison said.

"Well, don't touch her," Seagrave warned.

"There, Arthur," Ruth said, still in her light, cool tone. "Will you please see if you can get the house on the telephone? We may as well get this over with."

He was as astonished at her coolness as Allison was. He shot a glance at her and found she was looking at him, urging him with her eyes to do what she said. She seemed to say, in that glance, that the next move in order was to use the phone. Without understanding, he moved over to the instrument.

The telephone was just beyond the door which led into the hall. As Seagrave passed the door, it occurred to him that if he had been alone he could turn the knob and leap into the hall, taking a chance on flight. As the door was now it was locked from the outside, but a turn of the knob would open it from the inside. He dismissed the notion at once, for he could not hope to help Ruth to escape in that way.

He took down the receiver and spoke the number of the house into the transmitter. There was a considerable wait before the old servant answered.

"Just a moment," Seagrave said.

Ruth walked over to the telephone. Seagrave stepped back. As she took the receiver from his hand she whispered:

"Stand back so that the door will screen us when I open it."

He thought suddenly that some one was standing beyond the door and he had an explanation of Ruth's coolness.

"You stand so that you will be nearest the wall," he whispered back. "I'll open the door."

She put the receiver to her ear and began to speak into the telephone. Seagrave waited five seconds till he saw her lean against the wall. Then he turned as if to walk back to the center of the room. When he was directly opposite the door, he suddenly reached out, turned the knob, and jerked the door open.

There was an oath from Allison and startled cries from the other men. Seagrave refused to screen himself with the door. He had intense curiosity to see what was going to happen.

He saw Allison bring up his hand with a gun in it. The gun was pointed in Seagrave's direction. But Allison did not pull

the trigger. Instead his hand dropped. An expression of amazement came into his eyes. He hadn't the courage to add murder to his list of crimes in the face of so many witnesses.

For five men were crowding into the room through the door. Holmes was in the lead. Behind him were the Federal operatives who had been in court when Allison was arraigned and the one who had called on Ruth afterward. Seagrave judged the fifth man was a plainclothes policeman.

The raiders were all armed and their guns covered the other men in the room.

" Up with your hands, all of you," one of the Federal agents commanded.

" Up, boys," Allison said, fearing some of his companions might be betrayed into the folly of shooting.

Those who had weapons dropped them to the floor. Their hands went aloft. One of the men by the door advanced and picked up the pistols and quickly and efficiently searched the prisoners for others.

" All clear," he said, finding none.

Holmes turned to Seagrave with fear in his eyes.

" Where's Ruth?" he asked.

" I'm right here," Ruth said, coming from behind the door.

She was at Seagrave's side and her hand lingered on his arm.

" Oh, I see," said Holmes, and he looked as if he saw a good deal. " Did you write the check for Allison, Mrs. Seagrave?"

" I didn't," Ruth said. " I'm afraid you won't have that as evidence. Also I was afraid you were not outside the door. I thought there would be a little sound to let me know you were there. It was stupid of me not to bring a blank check, but I forgot all about it."

" How did you know that Allison would try to force her to write a check?" Seagrave wondered.

" Oh, we didn't know," Holmes answered. " We guessed it. It seemed logical."

" How did you happen to come here?" Seagrave asked.

" We didn't happen," Holmes said. " We came on purpose. After Radcliffe left Mrs. Seagrave's house this evening, she phoned me. Her suspicions were aroused. I told her to let me know if anything further developed. Then she got the phone message ostensibly about you. We knew there was something in the wind. I didn't want her to come down to meet these fellows, but she insisted. She said for the good of the business community we ought to trap Allison if we could. Quite a business woman, she is.

" Well, she delayed leaving the house long enough to let me phone to these men and have them stationed in the park. We saw her leave with those crooks and followed. That's about all there was to it."

" What charge have you against me, gentlemen?" Allison asked.

" Enough," Holmes said shortly. " Your Uncle Sam will tell you all about it in due time." He turned to Seagrave. " There is no further use of your staying here—you and your wife," he said.

" It's unpleasant enough for her," Seagrave said. He looked at Ruth. " Shall we go?" he asked.

Ruth nodded. Seagrave stepped through the door. Ruth passed Holmes on her way out. She put out her hand quickly and Holmes took it.

Seagrave and Ruth descended slowly to the street. They walked apart, in silence, till they came to the old home.

Often, in the dead days, they had sat on the steps of the front porch. Ruth, without a word, sat down there now and Seagrave sank down beside her.

It was quite dark where they were. The leaves had come out on the elm trees and their drooping branches intensified the shadows of the night.

" You will take over your father's business to-morrow, Arthur," she said.

" I?" he said in utter astonishment. " I take over father's business? Ah, I can't do that, Ruth. My father can't revoke the thing he did. That was final. It must forever go unchanged. It was what I deserved."

" There was a verbal codicil to your father's will, Arthur," she said in a low voice.

She sat staring into the gloom for a time, and then she went on as if it cost her an effort:

"An hour before he died, he opened his eyes and looked at me. I bent to him, for his lips were moving.

"'Ruth,' he said, 'I wish my son were here.'

"I held his hand, still bending over him to gather whatever poor, weak words might come.

"'Ruth,' he went on, 'if he ever comes back, right and sane, give him the business. Give him the business, if your faith in him is completely restored.'

"He didn't speak again."

Seagrave sat there on the steps of his old home much as if he had been turned to stone. He sat there for a long time. At first his brain did not grasp the significance of what his wife had said. The thing that overwhelmed him, in those first few moments, was that his father had turned back to him a little at the very end. Life was robbed of a good deal of its power to haunt him by that fact. His father, stern old man, must have had at least hope of him. That was, in the smallest measure, what his slight relenting meant. In its fullest measure it might mean that his father had never lost faith in him entirely. He might have foreseen what had happened.

That disposed of, his mind grasped the bigger thing as if there had been a sudden illumination in it from a great white light. His father had said:

"Give him the business if your faith in him is completely restored."

And Ruth was obeying the injunction in the terms in which his father had issued it. She would do no less.

Seagrave turned round to her. She was sitting in an attitude of waiting. That seemed to him suddenly to typify what her attitude had been all through the years. She had simply been waiting—for him and for this hour.

He put an arm about her with a kind of timidity in the caress. She leaned to him and his other arm closed about her. He felt the sweet pressure of her lips once more.

"Ah," she said at last, "it's good to lay my armor off!"

THE END

ʊ ʊ ʊ ʊ

I AM MEMORY

I AM the blossoms of a bygone spring,
Pressed in the book of time, a lonely thing.
The hunger of an unfulfilled desire,
The ashes in the bed of last year's fire.

I am the balm that softens all life's scars,
The heights, the depths, the anguish and the stars,
Into my cooling dark your minutes cast,
I am the temple of the living past.

I am the days you joyed, the days you wept,
In my vast vault of silence safely kept,
I am your laughter, I your sobbing cry,
The echo of a voice that cannot die.

I am the link that bridges night and dawn,
I am the soul that lives when all is gone,
The yesterday, where this to-day shall dwell,
I am your life, your death—your heaven, your hell.

I am Memory.

Edna Jacques.

Cashier's Checks

By BENJAMIN R. SHER

BELIEVE it if you will about all those birds you read of in the magazines who become Presidents and millionaires by comin' down to work regularly, in the same place, for fifty years before the whistle blows, not eatin' lunch and sayin' "yes, sir" with a great salaam to the boss every time they get a cut in salary. But all of 'em that I ever knew that never looked at a clock either couldn't tell time or there was no clock in the place where they worked. And those fellers that came down before sunrise and waited for the janitor to sweep them out did so to be in a warm place while dodgin' collectors. Every feller that I know that now owns tenement houses changed jobs every few weeks and took with him at least a list of the firm's best customers.

The Southern Motor Company of New Orleans handled flivvers exclusively. Trucks, sedans, touring cars and coupés, and in those days a salesman got twenty-five dollars a sale regardless — and I'll tell the world sellin' was a tough job. Every man who wanted a car either had a friend who was a flivver salesman or knew of one who was facin' the sheriff, and nothing but a sale could save him. There were ten authorized dealers in the town and all hungry for business. The factory kept us strictly to one price and it meant the can for any one caught tryin' to get around it in any way. It was a case of survival of the fleetest as they say in highbrow circles. Any man who could speak any language and who could finance himself until he sold a car could get a job as a flivver salesman. A feller that worked in the post office sellin' stamps was considered a regular humdinger for sales experience.

The front half of the ground floor of the company's building was occupied by the sales force. About a dozen were seated in

the open space before small desks so that from a distance through the window it looked like a schoolroom. Every man had to report before going out in the morning and come back before leaving for the night. I was in charge of that bunch for a couple of years.

It was just after the war and khaki shirts were still going big with those boys who were lucky enough to be able to dig up a dependent. There was no talk of bonus yet and not much worry about the tax, so in those days doughboys were still getting a ninety-ten call on any jobs that were open.

We were all seated waiting for the get-away hour when the latch clicked and the door knob turned. That was a signal for the weariest to get on their toes, for you never could tell when a customer might blow in and "finding was keepin's" with that hungry bunch. But one look through the door was enough to convince those eagle eyes that the bird comin' in was no prospect. He wore a khaki shirt, blue pants that were all grease stained and a checkered cap. Well—I figured to myself—he might be wantin' to buy a truck. At any rate I had nothin' to lose but shoe leather and little of that as he was comin' at me at a pretty good gait.

"My name is Sandy O'Malley and I'm lookin' fer a job," he came right out, nary another word.

"The entrance to the repair department is in the rear," I answered just as blunt, figurin' him to be a mechanic.

"That don't interest me a little bit," he snapped back; not fresh, but just snappy like.

"I'm lookin' for a salesman's job."

I looked at his square jaw stickin' out and his blue eyes cocked and I figured that the boss himself had better give this baby the razz.

"Come with me," I said, leading him into Bowling's office, leaving the glass door open as I went out so that I might hear the fireworks as well as see them.

Bowling looked at the khaki shirt and that helped the Irishman a bit anyway. "Well, what's up, my boy?" he asked O'Malley. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, we both kin do somethin' fer one another," the kid backfired.

"I'm lookin' fer a job as a flivver salesman."

"You are, eh?" I could see Bowling studyin' the youngster all the time and tryin' to get his wits together, as this Mick is too quick for him at the tail end of a saleless day.

"Got more salesmen now than I know what to do with," Bowling drawled, watching this cuckoo out of the corner of his eye, his feet still cocked up on the desk.

"They can't be the right kind or you wouldn't be sayin' that. Salesmen to a business are just like home runs to a ball team. You never can git enough of them," he came back quick as a flash.

That made old grouch sit up and take notice and he acted kind of civil to the boy. "What made you come in here?" he asked, wheelin' around in his chair and taking his feet off the desk.

"Well, I was passin' by and I seen all them desks in front and I thought it must be a reform school or something with all them fellers sittin' there lookin' like they was punished. Then I see that sign hangin' there," and he pointed to the notice in the outside office reading:

> Salesmen who sell eight automobiles during a month will receive a $100 bonus in addition to the regular twenty-five-dollar commission. Ten automobiles, $150. Fifteen, $200. Twenty, $300. Twenty-five, $500.
>
> **THIRTY AUTOMOBILES—$1,000**
>
> **GO TO IT, BOYS!**

"And let me tell you, boss, that's just what I need, a thousand dollars. There's a good payin' garage I can buy with that. A thousand dollars is just what I need."

He talked so earnestly that not one of us out there as much as smiled. Well, you couldn't help liking the kid, he came out so honest with it. All of us when we first came there silently dreamed of that thousand berries, but none of us ever spilled it; and after hittin' the pavement for a couple

of weeks a pipeful of hop couldn't make us look at that sign again.

This was the first time, though, that I heard any one of 'em come out cold and say that he was shooting after the grand. I think Bowling felt just like we did, for he looked right up at O'Malley and said, "Well, you can have a try at it, but no drawing account."

"Don't make any difference," the feller came right back, "I'm only stayin' here long enough to get that thousand. I ain't lookin' to be workin' fer anybody else. Workin' fer anybody else is just like turnin' somersaults; ye're just usin' yourself up without gettin' no place. Besides a drawin' account only keeps a salesman from keepin' the boss in his place."

This line of chatter was entirely new to the big mogul and I can see he don't know how to take it. Most of the clowns that ever drifted in for a job always gave him a spiel about wanting a position with a future regardless of present salary and would wind up tryin' to jack a drawin' account out of the old man. This no-drawing-account—comes as such a shock to him that he got kind of wary and said, "Where'd you work last?"

"Well, I'm workin' in a garage now, but I'm quittin' in the morning. The last job I had as a salesman was sellin' meters for the Excelsior Gas Company of New York," he snapped back, always on the quick.

"Any references?"

"Didn't think you'd need any in a place like this where you don't get no salary and the lightest thing you could carry off weighs nearly a ton, unless you're afraid of me kidnapin' one of them sleepin' beauties out there," pointing to the sales force outside.

"Well, I'll write for references; come in in about a week," Bowling said, tryin' to get O'Malley out. I could see that he liked the kid, but he's too fast for the old man's thinker and the boss wanted to get by himself.

But O'Malley crowded him all the harder.

"Write?" he said. "You don't mean to tell me they're still writin' in this town. I'll say you're behind the times. Write nothin'. Got a telegram blank here?"

He worked so fast at the old man that he took him off his feet and Bowling actually turned around, went to his desk and pulled out a pad of blanks and handed it to the Irishman, who took it out of his hand and read as he wrote—"Excelsior Gas Company, New York. O'Malley applying for job. What kind of salesman is he? Southern Motor Company, New Orleans, La."

"How's that?" he asked.

"All right, I guess" said the old man, taking the telegram and still playin' for time.

O'Malley reached for the messenger call box and turned the switch. That got the old man dizzy.

"You certainly have got speed, boy," he said.

"Yes, and what's more, I got direction too. I know where I'm goin'." And before the old man could answer he stuck out his mitt and said: "Well, I start in to-morrow, don't I?"

"If the reference of your former employers is satisfactory," the boss answered, taking his hand.

The kid seemed to give Bowling the fever, for he actually got frisky enough to get up and come out to us. He'd seen all of us listenin'.

"I don't know whether this man is going to sell any cars or not, but if he injects any of that pep into you fellows I'll be satisfied." Not a sale in two days and fifty cars stored upstairs." And he left us lookin' like we needed a weepin' mat.

"He's just one of those nuts walking around loose," Ferdinand, the star salesman of the shebang, said, referrin' to O'Malley after the old man got back in his office. "You probably won't see him again. You know anybody that thinks he can sell thirty cars in a month isn't in his right senses. The most I ever sold was twelve."

II.

WELL, Ferdinand was wrong, for O'Malley blew in early the next morning, brushed up and clean shaven though wearin' the same outfit. I told him to sit down and wait for the boss.

As soon as Bowling came in he pushed the button for me.

"This kid may be all right after all," he said to me, handin' over the telegram that was on his desk.

SOUTHERN MOTOR COMPANY,
New Orleans, La.:
If O'Malley sells as many automobiles as he did gas meters you'll have to dig new oil wells to feed them.
EXCELSIOR GAS COMPANY.

"Pretty stuff," I said, handing back the telegram.

"Now call up that garage he worked for and if it's O. K. put him on and give him a little schooling," Bowling told me.

O'Malley gave me the address and I called up the garage, and got the man's spiel. "I can't tell you much about O'Malley. He only worked here for three days, though he's a good mechanic all right and I'm sorry to lose him. I guess he's a little bit off like all the good mechanics I ever had. Last night he heard me tell somebody that I wanted to sell my garage for a thousand dollars and that I wanted to move to the country with my family. Well, this morning he come in and asked for his pay and a thirty day option on the garage. I gave him twenty five dollars for a half a week's pay and the option. I figure he's trying to sell the option because when he came to work he told me he needed a job as he only had five dollars in the whole world."

There wasn't much I could school O'Malley in but the contract, and he said he had heard all about that from different salesmen that came into the garage. Being a mechanic, he knew as much as I did about flivvers. He was just rarin' to get out and sell.

"Thirty days is just enough time to sell those thirty cars and I better be startin' out after that thousand dollars," he said, kind of impatient as I explained to him to try to get a deposit if he could when he sold a car. "Is that all you're gonna give me?" he asked as I handed him three contract blanks. "You may as well give me the thirty right now and I won't have to bother you again. I'm gonna need 'em."

"All right" I said, giving them to him, "and good luck to you, old man."

"Thanks" he said and out he shot.

III.

IF nothing else, he had the boys worried. They piled in ahead of time that afternoon.

"How did the new man do?" they all asked.

"Hasn't come in yet," I kept answerin' them.

"He's working all right," Ferdinand, the long legged Frenchman, said, referring to O'Malley, "I ran across him in Marks Cohn's trying to get to see old man Marks. I'll hand it to him for trying. He sure picked a hard boiled to start on."

"Working, he is," put in Joey Hirsch. "I saw him in Abel's shoe store."

"A fine place that is to try and sell a car," came back Foster, one of the oldest salesmen on the job. "I once went in there trying to sell Abel a car and he sold me a pair of shoes before I left."

"Yeh," I said, doubtin' that any of 'em really saw him, "I guess the rest of you would 'a' seen him, too, if he happened to stumble into a moving picture show for the afternoon."

Finally O'Malley came in, hands in his pockets, hat on the side of his head.

"Any luck?" I asked.

"Selling these things is a tough job," he answered, and before he could say another word the Anvil Chorus started.

"Ahem, ahem," went the Frenchman.

"So say we all of us," interjected Joey Hirsch.

"You ain't discovered nothing new," added Foster.

"And the further you go the tougher it gets," Ferdinand came back for another soak.

"That'll be all," I put in. "Some of you fellows have been here for five years and you also came in empty handed today."

"Well, I didn't," O'Malley spoke up again, pulling his hands out of his pockets and a contract with it. "Yeh, it's a tough job all right, but I sold one anyway. And if only I'd 'a' worked in that garage the rest

of the week I'd 'a' sure sold another one, but I'll sell it to-morrow all right."

"Well, you haven't got much further to go for the grand prize," piped the Frenchman. "Only twenty-nine more."

"Whom did he sell?" asked Foster, before I had a chance to look at the contract.

"Abel's shoe store," came back O'Malley.

The fleet started to whistle in surprise.

"Any deposit?" Foster asked.

"No," came back O'Malley. "It's a mighty poor salesman that gets a deposit. When you ask a man for a deposit don't you know you're showin' a sign of weakness?"

"That's a good line of stuff you got," chirped Ferdinand.

"Oh, wait a minute! I forgot!" O'Malley exclaimed, and he went into his pocket again and pulled out a check, which he handed over to me. "It's a cashier's check for the full amount of the car," he explained.

"How did you come to get it made good for you," I replied.

"Well, I didn't want to get the check he gimme certified; thought it might make him mad afterwards when he saw it, so I just got a cashier's check, which is just as good," he answered.

"It sure is," I assured him.

"That's *my* idea of a deposit," he said, going over and slappin' the Frenchman on the back.

"Put it there," said Foster. "Any fellow that can sell Abel a car and get paid on the spot: I'm for him—hook, line and sinker."

"Thirty little contracts sitting in a row, one's signed up, there's twenty-nine to go; chickadee, chickadee, happy and gay," O'Malley hummed.

"You're all right," Bowling came out and said to O'Malley after I told him about the sale, cashier's check and all. "That's what I call a clean cut sale. I knew you could sell by the way you sold yourself to me. I hope you'll sell many more."

"If I figure right there's twenty-five dollars commission comin' to me," is all the answer O'Malley gave him.

"There is."

"Well, I sure can use it. This drawing account business works two ways. If I ain't gonna have any of your money there ain't any use of your havin' mine."

Bowling looked at the check again and called to the cashier, telling him to give O'Malley twenty-five dollars.

"If I only would 'a' worked at that garage the rest of the week I sure could have sold another car to-day," he said to himself as he put the money into his pocket.

The old man was gettin' used to him and just passed up the remark.

"Good sale if he didn't have it under his hat before he came here," I said to Bowling after O'Malley left.

"Well, that's one car gone out anyway," muttered the old man, not listenin' to me.

The next day he blew with another contract and check for the full amount. "I could 'a' sold another if—"

"If somebody would buy," broke in Ferdinand to me. "I didn't think you'd bite on that old one."

"If I'd only worked in that garage another week that's the *if*" said O'Malley. "Twenty-nine contracts all in a row, one more gone and there's twenty-eight to go, chickadee, chickadee—" he hummed on his way out again.

He brought in another contract with a cashier's check in full again the next day signed by Marks Cohn & Company.

"I could have sold another maybe if—" he said again.

"If what?" I came back once more.

"If I'd worked in that garage the rest of the week. Twenty-eight contracts sittin' pretty in a row, to-morrow one more will go. Chickadee, chickadee, happy and gay—"

"That fellow is bugs I'll tell you. He must have come out of an asylum," spouted Hirsch when O'Malley left.

"If he did I'd like to get some more men out of the same asylum," I answered, quietin' him down.

That was three days in succession he had sold a car.

The next day he sold Abe Kempner, the toughest egg in town, a man who always wanted the best car in the shop and three extra sets of tools, to say nothing of a couple of jacks. "I could 'ave sold another car if—"

"What's all this *if* business?" I asked good naturedly. For even if I hadn't taken a liking to him it was my business to humor a fellow who sold a car a day.

"Gee, you got a short memory, the answer's the same to-day as yesterday. If I'd only worked in that garage the rest of the week. Twenty-seven contracts in my pocket, one flew away; I hope the other twenty-six will follow. Chickadee, chickadee, happy and gay."

Well the next four days he came in with a contract signed each day and a check in full, always muttering; "I could 'ave sold another one if I'd only worked in that garage the rest of the week." He never spoke much to the other men and they never riled him any more.

Hirsch started to wear a khaki shirt. "Maybe they'll think I'm a war hero too," he said.

Some of 'em bought checkered caps for luck, but it did no good. And O'Malley kept up his good work. He had never missed a sale a day but just the same never made more than one.

Most of my men would chew over a sale every time they made one, tellin' how they'd put it over and all that bunk, but O'Malley was always mum. One afternoon the old man came outside and said to the Irishman, "Mr. O'Malley, will you give these men a pointer or two. Tell them how you do it."

"Sure," he answered all willing. And he got up before the boys and they're all set for an earful when he said: "Workin' three days in that garage makes it possible for me to sell a car a day and if I'da worked there much longer I'da sold more'n a hundred by now. Three measly little contracts sittin' in a row three measly contracts please don't fail to go. Chickadee, chickadee, happy and gay." And he walked to the door and went out.

"Gone, clean gone," said the Frenchman.

"Gone nothing!" bellowed Bowling. "That fellow don't talk as much as the rest of you, but if you'll use your brains you'll take the hint he's giving you. He worked three days in a garage and probably saw enough broken and dilapidated cars and went to the owners and sold them new ones. It wouldn't hurt you fellows to hang around a garage and pick up a few prospects that way, instead of hanging out at picture shows."

The thirtieth day O'Malley came in with his thirtieth contract. Bowling came out front with the speech that he had prepared and the thousand dollars in money, as O'Malley had asked that he be given the bonus in cash before leaving that morning.

"Mr. O'Malley," Bowling began very dramatically, "from the inception of this business I have had to cope with many a salesman and many a sales problem. When you came here there were fifty cars stored upstairs, now there are but ten. You have helped me out splendidly. I take great pleasure in presenting you with this thousand dollars." And he counted out ten new crisp one hundred dollar bills and handed them to the boy.

"Now then," he went on "think of what it has meant to you. A thousand dollar bonus and seven hundred and fifty dollars in commission. Twenty-five dollars a day, a hundred and twenty-five dollars a week. That is nothing to be sneezed at. Why not consider the advisability of staying here and abandon the idea of purchasing the garage or better still you might purchase it and put some one in charge and in that way you could pick up a world of prospects. You yourself have repeatedly stated if you had worked longer in that garage you would have sold the cars more rapidly." The old man stopped to get a rise out of O'Malley.

"I couldn't just work for the commissions," he came right out. "If the same bonus proposition goes I'm on."

The old man is standin' there thinkin' and about to speak when the Frenchman got up.

"Please don't disturb me, Mr. Ferdinand," Bowling orders.

"Well, what I've got to say is very, very important and I think you should hear it before making any promises to O'Malley. I can tell you just how he sold these cars and if you let him stay on with the bonus proposition you have a good chance of losing the agency."

That threw a sure enough scare into the old man. "Well, go on, Mr. Ferdinand," he said.

"That man has been rebating," the Frenchman hollered. "He gave his commission back to all of the men he sold cars to."

"I never give any man my commission. Don't you think I know that's against the law," O'Malley hollered back.

"Please let Mr. Ferdinand finish what he has to say," Bowling answered, pretty much scared by the accusation, as two companies before had lost their agencies for trying to get around some way of selling under the fixed price.

"I could have told you this," went on Frenchy, "before you handed over the money to him but I figured as long as he was quitting to-day he might as well get away with it. But when it comes to him staying here any longer and making it tougher for any one of us to sell a car, then I'm thinking of something besides the company. I thought it kind of funny that he could sell old man Cohn a car when I couldn't, so I went up to the old man and asked him how he came to buy a car from O'Malley, a stranger, when he turned me down after knowing me all of my life. 'I can't tell you what he said to me' the old man said 'but if you'll sell me a car for six hundred and seventy-five dollars I can use another one now.' 'I can't do that' I said to him. 'Why, I could sell fifty cars a day if they would allow me to cut the fixed price.' 'Well, that's what he sold it to me for.' Cohn came back, and I'll show you the check I gave him for six hundred and seventy five dollars.'"

"That's not so," I called at the Frenchman. Mr. O'Malley brought me a cashier's check for seven hundred dollars for that sale, Mr. Ferdinand. Mr. Cohn isn't tellin' you the truth."

"He is not, eh!" spouts the Frenchman. "Let me finish. Well, Cohn went into his safe and took out a bunch of canceled checks and showed me a canceled check made payable to the company for six hundred and seventy five dollars. We both look on the back and there's nothing but a lot of red rubber bank stamps there. No signature. Cohn called up the bank and the teller told him that a man came in there and handed him this check and twenty five dollars in cash and asks for a seven hundred dollar cashier's check made payable to the Southern Motor Company. The payee was the same as the original check and the amount larger so the teller said there certainly couldn't be any harm in granting his request. 'There was nothing wrong about it' he said. I went to a few of the other people he sold cars to and I got the same explanation."

The old man stood there befuddled.

"Don't you see what he did?" went on the Frenchman. "He just put twenty-five dollars to every sale. Now if that is not just the same as rebating, what is?"

"That ain't rebatin'," came back O'Malley. "That twenty-five dollars is the money I earned in the garage. It came out of my own pocket, always, and if I'da worked there three days more I'da had fifty dollars and I could a gotten two seven hundred dollar checks for two six hundred and seventy-five dollar ones. All those twenty-five dollars comes out of this bonus, not out of my commission. Ten one hundred dollar bills in my pocket and none will fly away, chickadee, chickadee, happy and gay, chickadee, chickadee, fly away—"

"Can you beat that," grunted the old man, as he tore down the bonus sign.

Myra's Miracle

By ASHLEY MILLER

"IT isn't the truth," said Myra steadily.

"D'ye mean I'm lyin' about it?" The speaker rose slowly, menacingly to his full six feet and glared down at the girl. She shook her head thoughtfully.

"No," she said and then, with a wraith of a smile, "no, you've been stating facts, but truth is more—" She stopped, then went on: "To men the truth is that God gave us this dear little farm and He doesn't change his mind."

Jason Purdy relaxed. "Don't try to mix religion with business," he said. "'Tain't the first time a mortgage has had to be foreclosed, and you can't even pay the interest next Tuesday. What d'ye expect?"

"I expect a—a miracle, I guess," said Myra wistfully, "but I do expect it."

It was a very old story that was being summed up by the conversation. Myra's father had left the little farm free and clear. She and her mother had been cheated by having it "worked on shares," they had borrowed money when the mother became ill and they couldn't pay it back.

Things looked so black that even Myra admitted the look, but with strange obstinacy and absolute unreason, she insisted that they could not lose the farm. They loved it so and, as indicated, she believed that it was theirs by a sort of Divine right.

Each morning when she went to the well—for her father had never replaced the old-fashioned sweep—she looked out across the small acreage and thanked God for it and for life.

But as a matter of fact the farm had not been theirs for a long time. Purdy had gone right ahead with the business of finding a buyer for it, and a week before the conversation with Myra had two prospects ready, either of which meant a twenty per cent turn over on his investment. Practically the little farm was his to dispose of, for on Tuesday at noon the law would establish what was already the fact.

It was as Myra said, "a dear little farm." The land sloped gently to the little trout stream and to the south was partly covered by a fine old orchard, now in full bloom.

The rose-covered house, outhouses and barn were of an old-time architecture, quaintly simple and very charming to the eye, while Myra's flower-beds were the admiration and joy of every automobilist that passed along the State road. Little wonder that the girl shut her mind to the idea of losing so much beauty and loveliness.

For Purdy and his buyers it represented just so many fruit trees and so many acres of very excellent farmland, land that could be made to yield a comfortable profit when joined to the next farm—which was one of his plans—or might be found the covering of a very valuable underground treasure, for there were evidences of oil which might be worth the gamble of a prospector. Purdy played safe. He loaned money. He did not gamble, but the prospector would pay more for the farm if the deal went through. He wasn't as conservative as Purdy. He handled other people's money.

After Purdy had gone Myra went to the side door and stood a long time looking off across the fields, trying not to believe in the facts as they appeared and insisting to herself, as she had to him, that they were not the truth. Her mother found her there and, still weak from the long illness, dropped down on the little settle as she asked, "Can we keep the place?"

"Not if Mr. Purdy can help it, mother."

"You mean he's going to foreclose?"

"So he says."

"Don't evade things, Myra."

"I'm not evading, mother, just trying to see straight and not believe all the terrible things—"

"Not believe the evidence of your senses, you mean," corrected Mrs. Duncan miserably.

"Perhaps so; they aren't always right."

"But in this case facts are facts. It don't help matters to lie about them, even to yourself."

"I'm not lying, mother," the girl said. "The facts are, we haven't paid and we can't pay, but I believe, if we just *won't* get scared, a way will be shown us."

"You've said that all along, Myra, and look where we are. But—" added Mrs. Duncan tearfully, "I don't know what more you could have done." She got up wearily. "There's only the factory—and one of their dirty cottages now. Oh, how can I bear to see you there, Myra?" And she clung to her little daughter, sobbing aloud.

Myra hugged her close. Trouble and illness had made her mother more the child than she. Words of comfort came to her lips, but she didn't speak them. How could she make her mother realize that all this looked to her like some bad dream, a dream that they could awake from and find themselves without harm or loss. Her mother just wouldn't understand.

II.

"SHOOT that scene again," Craig Mallory's tone indicated that something was wrong.

"What did we do, Craig?" asked young Radcliffe, the leading man.

"You didn't open the door at the back in rehearsal and you did open it in the take. Shoot it again, Kent."

"But there's a backing of trees," laughed long Bill Bond, who had just been given the worst of it in a rather trying scene.

"True. And on location we may find a lake or a rose garden. Take it over."

"Why not cut in a close-up there?" suggested John Vail, the author, as the players took their places.

Somebody pulled him quickly aside. It was Alice Brooke, pretty enough to be forgiven anything, even if she had not been the leading woman, and she whispered, "Never talk back to the director, Mr. Author. Craig Mallory is too nice to bawl you out as some of them would, but—a word to the wise."

"Make a note of that, Chippy," said Mallory to his intent little assistant. "We must get Radcliffe's exit on location and he has his hat on. Now—" turning to the set again, "let's get a close-up of your faces, boys, eye to eye, just before the clinch."

While the camera-man shifted his apparatus to the new position Mallory glanced over his assistant's shoulder at the script. "That cleans up this set, doesn't it. We'll jump right out to the location while they're getting the sheriff's office dressed for us."

"The new man says he has a place that

is a pippin, out on Burford Highway. I hope he knows what you want."

Mallory laughed comfortably. "You're the only one that does that, Chippy," he said and the tense little assistant flushed with fervid joy at the commendation. It meant a great deal, for the director was not easy to please. He was an artist as well as an efficient craftsman. He strove for simplicity in everything, but demanded that it be dramatically effective. He insisted on human naturalness in every scene, but no actor was allowed to loaf on the job. He was proud of his production values and a beautiful location, which afforded vistas of pictorial worth and lighting that were artistic and telling meant much to him.

At high noon the company in three big cars was speeding along the Burford road. At twelve thirty the leading chauffeur pulled up at a model, spic and span farmhouse, built in careful imitation of an English country place. Mallory took one long look at it, sat very still and bit his first finger in a way he had when he wanted to explode but wouldn't. After a few seconds of ominous silence he turned. All he said was: "Where shall we go, Chippy?"

"We might try the cross cut toward the State road," suggested the little assistant, thinking hard.

It is no joke to bring a cast away out into the country, spend time on the road and then find the "location" unsuited to the scenes that must be taken. So, with orders to "step on it" the three cars shot off to the east and turned into a smooth country turnpike. At the State road they debated a moment, took a gambler's chance and turned south. Mallory, seated in apparent abstraction, did not miss a single detail of the passing scenery and Chippy's eyes fairly stood out of his head in his eagerness to see a possible location before his chief did. To the players it was all in the day's work.

On and on they flew. It was after one o'clock. Suddenly Mallory touched Chippy's shoulder. "I see an old-fashioned well-sweep way ahead. Tell Collins to slow down."

In another minute the cars had pulled up and, with the look Napoleon might have worn when offered the job of emperor, Mallory was studying the aggregation of beauty spots that Myra's little farm spread before him.

"See if they'll let us use it, Chippy," he said with a hopeful sigh and the little assistant, hat in hand, sped up the front walk and addressed Myra who, having heard the unaccustomed sound of automobiles stopping at their gate, had come to the front door. Chippy explained; "Only a few scenes and no rough stuff to hurt the flowers or the shrubbery."

"You mean you want to take movies here?" she asked.

"Yes, just a—a few scenes—this afternoon and—a day or two—or just a little longer." Chippy was afraid to tell her how much work they had for fear they wouldn't want to be bothered.

Myra had seen very few pictures and from the papers and magazines she had acquired a vague impression that movie people were a rather dubious lot. But these seemed very good to look at and Chippy spoke like a gentleman. They couldn't harm her or the farm and perhaps the incident might serve to keep her mother's mind off the loss of the place.

"Why, yes. You are quite welcome," she said at last and Chippy sped like Mercury to report the verdict to Craig Mallory. Not until then did that august personage give the signal to alight.

"You understand that you don't *own* this place, folks," he said quietly. "Just be as careful of it as if—" he smiled, "as if you did."

In half an hour they were hard at work. The place was so unusually lovely that Mallory changed some of his plans. "We'll take the whole parlor sequence out here, instead of inside," he said to Vail. "Suppose you think over the last episode too. We might do well to keep that out in the atmosphere of the apple blossoms instead of indoors."

"Then I'll cancel the order for the parlor set, sir?" asked Chippy.

"Right!" answered Mallory cheerily.

"That's a good idea," said Vail, forced to admit that his story would profit and gain beauty by the suggested change.

As a result of these altered plans the work took longer than they had anticipated. It consumed the next four days. It was on Saturday that Mallory heard a conversation that ultimately was to affect his whole future. Alice Brooke was bantering Vail.

"You'll break the heart of that little girl," she said.

"Not I," laughed the tall author.

"Then she'll break yours."

"Still less likely. I try experiments on girls of various types, and by watching the results I get a lot of valuable pointers for my stories. But there she is. I fly."

"To acquire some more local color—or the fun of flirting with an unsophisticated pretty girl," laughed the leading lady as Vail started toward the house.

Mallory looked round and saw the author take hold of Myra's arm in a familiar way and with an air of ownership, drawing her toward the covert of an old grape arbor. Just then Mrs. Duncan appeared in the doorway, watched them a moment and then called Myra to her. Vail returned to the scene which was being taken, with a shrug of his lean shoulders.

To Mallory two things became suddenly clear; Myra was a very pretty girl and because of that Mrs. Duncan's kindness to them was being abused by one of his own party. He had always tried scrupulously to leave every "location" so that he would be welcome to come again. He called Vail to him and said softly, "Hands off, Vail."

"Your property?"

"No."

"Morality stuff, then?"

"No. These people are decent and I don't want their hospitality abused."

"Suppose you attend to your own affairs."

"We won't argue this. Either do as I say or you will not be one of this party when it comes out to-morrow."

"My contract calls for—"

"So does mine. Which will the management back up? A new author or a director whose work they *know* gets them the money? Think it over." And Mallory calmly returned to his rehearsal.

The incident served to center the director's attention on Myra and made him realize that she was distinctly pleasing to the eye. Before it he had hardly noticed her. He was later to get a glimpse at the girl's soul and to be surprised at its beauty and clearness.

It was on Monday that he accepted Myra's invitation to lunch, while the rest of the company was sent to the nearest village for theirs, and tasted a broiled trout from the little brook among other good things. Myra and her mother both enjoyed the meal as well as he did, for Craig Mallory had a quiet appreciation of everything about the little farm that won their interest and warmed it to a veritable glow of cordiality before the hour was over.

They found this movie man knew many things beside motion picture technique. In fact he talked more of world politics, books and celebrities that any one they had ever met. For one belonging to the world of make-believe he seemed strangely interested in what Myra called the real things of life, beauty, ideals and things that poets love. When Mrs. Duncan spoke of Myra's annoying habit of holding out for what she called the truth, no matter what appearances seemed to show, Mallory fairly beamed. It interested him immensely. He had found something original and new.

Having been many years in the business of making motion pictures, he warily kept the conversation away from them, for Myra was so sweet and pretty that he felt sure she would have aspirations for movie fame. Once when she spoke of having written something for a school paper he shivered; she was getting ready to offer him an amateur scenario. Everybody did, these days. But Myra somehow failed to take advantage of her opportunities and after lunch Mallory allowed himself the luxury of talking with her while awaiting the company's return, without fear or even reservations. She had a quaint air of living in a world apart, where the so-called actualities of life were of little value because of the beauty and truth that she saw through and behind them.

Mallory found himself thinking of her and of her original point of view as he worked. He began to wonder how his handling of a certain scene would strike

her fresh, unsophisticated mind. When she came out to watch some of the rehearsals he was surprised to realize that he wanted them to seem very straight and true in her eyes. At first he laughed at himself. Then he decided that she represented a type of spectator that he wanted his pictures to appeal to. That was all there was to it.

Myra in turn watched the director as some fascinating magician. Without consulting the script or having apparently any guide save the inspiration of the moment, he deftly brought out in illuminative action wonderful things, things that made one want to laugh or cry. He worked quietly, encouraging or correcting his players, always getting the best they were able to give. He seemed to see everything and without self-assertion to be always in absolute though quiet control of the situation.

She had never read of a motion picture director who didn't wear puttees and jump on his hat when anything went wrong. She thought that this man might have a mother that loved him. Then suddenly a thought whose poignancy startled her and sent a queer, numbness over her heart; perhaps he had a wife! What ailed her? Why should she care? This movie man had been in her ken for four days. Why such acute interest? And he was finishing his work to-day—now. Then what? Myra thought the sun must have sunk abruptly behind Bolton Hill; it seemed somehow so dreary, all at once.

But they did not finish that day after all. A thunder storm at three o'clock sent them all scurrying to cover in the old barn and when they drove home at six it was still pouring. The storm and cloudy weather following it lasted three days, three days that seemed interminable to Myra. The beauty which she had always seen in a rainy day, when leaves and grass were lush and sweet-smelling, now failed to make her happy. She was frankly lonely. It was harder than ever to keep her faith in the eternal rightness of things with a strange void in her heart, and Purdy's day of judgment drawing nearer and nearer.

Craig Mallory too felt a most unaccountable new depression. The offices and even the big studio seemed stuffy and crowded, after the grateful days of open air and sunshine at the farm. The artificiality of it all got on his nerves. He felt, in the midst of the bustle and restless activity of many people, strangely lonesome. Chippy was frankly troubled. Was the chief going to break down from overwork? No. He wasn't and he didn't want to be bothered.

Mallory's mind kept drifting back to the farm. Then he realized that the farm was only the background. What nonsense! He must not let himself lose his perspective on life. That little girl at the farm was pretty —but so were the fifty girls on the lot. She had a quaint philosophy—yes, that was it. It was her philosophy that interested him. That was all. Absolutely all.

Tuesday morning dawned clear and bright on the farm. And to-day Purdy would formally take possession. He had told them they might stay on for the rest of the month—his selling chances were better if the house looked open and well cared for—after that—but Myra refused to entertain that thought. The farm *was* theirs. God was good.

At nine thirty the company appeared and set busily to work. They meant to finish up by two o'clock—if none of the unforeseeable obstacles in which picture production abounds interfered. Mallory was quite himself again, deft, cheery, efficient and the work went swinging along. At eleven thirty Purdy appeared with the papers. He was much disgruntled when he found the front door barricaded and a camera trained to catch some action connected therewith. He started to go through, but was waved away by Chippy. He angrily inquired the reason and when he learned that he must go to the side door, lost his temper.

"Who runs this outfit?" he demanded in stentorian tones.

Mallory turned quietly and in markedly even pianissimo said: "I am the director in charge. What do you want?"

"I want you to get off this place!" said Purdy with growing emphasis.

"Do you own it?" inquired Mallory suavely.

"Yes, I do. What d'ye know about that?"

Mallory didn't know, but just then Myra

appeared and the situation was made clear in a few seconds.

"It seems then that we have only fifteen minutes in which to do four hours' work," commented Mallory. "Suppose we pay you a little more than we would consider a fair rate for use of the place?"

"No. You can't have it, mister," snapped Purdy. "You're too all-fired fresh. Just get out!"

"You put me in a very unpleasant predicament," mused Mallory. "My company expects me to bring back a complete series of scenes. It would cost us three or four days salaries and expenses to retake the work we have done here and—"

"That's your business, not mine!"

"We had intended to pay a hundred and fifty dollars for the locations which we used in this picture—" Mallory paused, calmly took a roll of bills from his pocket and counted off several, as he went on, "I'll pay you two hundred—"

"Thank you—God! I knew it!" It was Myra's fresh young voice, vibrant with excitement that cut his sentence short. He looked up. Her eyes were shining with unshed tears as she looked into his. "I knew the way would be shown me!" she whispered.

Mallory nodded his dead.

"All right," broke in Purdy with a sudden illumination, "I'll take your two hundred and—"

"You interrupted this little lady," said Mallory easily. Then he turned to Myra, an understanding light in his eyes. He smiled as he said, "Yes, we intended to pay you, you know."

"No. I didn't know—" The girl was trembling now. "—but I—well, a hundred and fifty dollars would pay the interest and he couldn't put us out for six months!"

"Good enough!" laughed Mallory. He turned to Purdy, but that individual held his watch in his hand and shook his head triumphantly."

"It would have been good enough" he said, "—just thirty seconds ago, but it is now past twelve and the place is mine. Now, will you get off or get put off?"

Several watches came out. Mallory took one look at his and turned swiftly to his company. "You are witnesses that at one minute before twelve, for Miss Myra Duncan, I pay this man the interest on his mortgage!" He flashed a dangerous look at the money-lender. "Your watch is one minute fast, Mr. Purdy, as my witnesses will prove." And he thrust the wad of bills into Purdy's astonished hands.

"It's a trick!" sputtered that worthy, throwing the money angrily at the smiling Mallory. "I tell ye, this place—"

"Boys!" said the director softly, as Purdy advanced, "this man has been paid. He has no rights in this property. Isn't he a trespasser?"

"He is!" shouted the ten able-bodied men of the cast and the four ladies of the company gleefully agreed.

"Well, then?" laughed Mallory easily. He winked at young Radcliffe and long Bill Bond and in another instant the irate Purdy was lifted bodily by a dozen strong arms, carried joyously down the walk and deposited outside the gate. Chippy picked up the scattered bills, Mallory quickly snapped a rubber band about them and, tossing them to Radcliffe, who stood guard at the wicket, said genially, "Don't let him forget his interest, boys. He nearly lost it with his temper!"

Purdy turned, white hot and with maledictions loud and deep, but was promptly, firmly and expeditiously lifted into his little car and given a running start down the hill, while the director called gayly, "Good-by, Mr. Purdy. Drop in again!"

Then, with characteristic discretion the players were called and the interrupted work progressed until the sun began to send its long shadows level under the trees.

III.

On the following Sunday Myra went down to the little brook right after breakfast, to be alone and realize that the farm was still theirs. She was very grateful, very, but her thoughts refused to dwell on this. For the first time in her close-kept, young life they traveled afar. How far she had not realized until a step on the grass startled her and brought her back. She turned—and caught her breath.

"Good morning, Myra," said Mallory. He seemed somehow younger and more vibrantly buoyant to-day and his eyes had an odd brightness in them, like a boy's when he has a secret he means to tell—some time.

"Good morning, Mr. Mallory." Myra felt that her voice shook a little but she couldn't help it.

"The dear little farm is very lovely, this morning." Mallory paused. It seemed a long time before he spoke again. Then he said shyly, "I—I hope you'll forgive me, but I—I have bought the mortgage from Purdy."

Myra swayed a little, dazed by the sudden readjustment of ideas made necessary by this news and Mallory hurried on. He seemed to be embarrassed.

"I—I wanted it for—that is—to—to give to—my wife!"

He was not prepared for the reaction that followed this devastating announcement. If he had struck Myra a physical blow she could not have turned whiter nor looked more terrified. But all she said, in a scared, tremulous, little whisper was "It—it isn't—true!"

She wondered what made him laugh—how he had the heart to do so when her heart hurt so horribly. But he seemed strangely elated and, nodding his head in a joyous, care-free way, insisted:

"It is true, though!" Then he went on very seriously, "of course you may keep the place all to yourself for the full six months, if you want to. But—I hoped you'd—marry me—right away!"

For some seconds there was no sound but the purling of the little brook over its pebbly bottom, but after a while Myra managed to get her breath and stammered, "You—you want—me?"

"Exactly!"

Again she hesitated. "But, why? You—there are so many wonderful girls—in your work—" She could not quite let herself credit this Arabian Nights dream, though it seemed so vivid, so like a reality.

"You are different from every other girl in the world!"

"But how? I—I don't see."

Mallory laughed jubilantly, mischievously. "You are the only girl," he said. "—absolutely the only one I've met in ten years, Myra, that hasn't asked me *how she could get into the pictures!*

Myra laughed incredulously, but further argument was prevented by circumstances quite beyond her control.

ʊ ʊ ʊ

THE EVERLASTING BEAUTY

TO-DAY, as in that other autumn, see
The mountains wear a long-forgotten hue,
Their loveliest, I call it lonesome blue
So distant and alone they seem to be.
I like to think that this rapt company
Is pondering some beauty that they knew,
A spring long fled, an age forever through.
Some tumult turned to cold tranquillity.

Of course it's fancy, I know they cannot know
The flowers of light that bind their brows at dawn,
Do not regret the flames of dying fall.
Theirs is to stand and wear God's great moods so,
Divinely stone to lesser beauties gone:
The change and hurt are in my heart—that's all.

T. Morris Longstreth.

Aspirin

Say "Bayer" and Insist!

BAYER

Genuine

Unless you see the name "Bayer" on package or on tablets you are not getting the genuine Bayer product prescribed by physicians over twenty-two years and proved safe by millions for

Colds	Headache
Toothache	Lumbago
Earache	Rheumatism
Neuralgia	Pain, Pain

Accept "Bayer Tablets of Aspirin" only. Each unbroken package contains proper directions. Handy boxes of twelve tablets cost a few cents. Druggists also sell bottles of 24 and 100. Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacture of Monoaceticacidester of Salicylicacid.

Get This Wonderful Ring. If You Can Tell It From a Genuine Diamond Send It Back

These amazing, beautiful CORODITE diamonds positively match genuine diamonds in every way—same blazing flash and dazzling play of living rainbow fire. They, alone, stand the diamond tests, including terrific acid test of direct comparison. Lifetime experts need all their experience to see any difference. Prove this yourself.

Wear a Corodite Diamond 7 DAYS FREE

Make this test. You risk nothing. Wear a genuine Corodite and a diamond side by side on the same finger for 7 days. If you or your friends can tell the difference, send it back; you won't be out a single penny. That's fair enough. If you keep the ring, price printed here is all you pay. No installments. Remember, Corodites alone have the same cutting as genuine stones.

No. 1—Ladies' Solitaire 14K Gold S. Ring	$2.84
No. 4—Ladies' Hand-Carved Basket Setting, plat. finish	$3.96
No. 5—Ladies' Solitaire Bridal Blossom Engraved	$3.54
No. 7—Gents' Heavy Belcher 14K Gold S. Ring	$3.68
No. 8—Gents' Massive Hand-Carved Octagon Gypsy	$4.28

Carat size gems. Beautiful mountings of most modern design. Choice of gold or latest white platinum finish. Unqualified 20-year guarantee. Handsome art leather case free with each ring.

SEND NO MONEY Keep your money right at home. Just send name, address and number of ring wanted and size as shown by slip of paper, fitting end to end around finger joint. Your ring will come by return mail. When ring arrives deposit amount shown above with postman. If you decide not to keep ring after 7 days' wear, send it back and your money will be immediately returned. Send today.

E. RICHWINE CO.
19 West Jackson Blvd., Dept. 760, Chicago, Illinois
Sole Importers Genuine Corodite Diamonds

EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can make $15 to $60 weekly in your spare time writing show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We instruct you by our new simple Directograph system, pay you cash each week and guarantee you steady work. Write for full particulars and free booklet.

WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE, LIMITED
Authorized Capital $1,250,000.00
72 Colborne Building Toronto, Can.

NEW-TREAD TIRES AT 40¢ ON THE DOLLAR

Send No Money!

Here is a real opportunity to cut your season's tire bill notwithstanding advances in prices. For a limited period only we offer our famous New-Tread Tires—as illustrated—at less than ½. Made of NEW LIVE RUBBER and built on the best carcases money can buy.

Special Sale Prices

Size	Tire	Tube	Size	Tire	Tube
28x3	$4.95	$1.25	36x4	$8.65	$2.35
30x3	4.95	1.35	32x4½	8.85	2.40
30x3½	5.85	1.40	33x4½	9.00	2.45
32x3½	6.60	1.60	34x4½	9.15	2.50
31x4	7.00	1.60	35x4½	9.25	2.60
32x4	7.50	1.85	36x4½	9.45	2.70
33x4	7.85	2.15	35x5	9.75	2.80
34x4	8.10	2.25	37x5	9.85	2.90

ALL OUR TUBES ARE NEW FRESH STOCK and Guaranteed for One Year. Shipment made same day order is received. Pay on arrival and if not satisfied, return AT OUR EXPENSE. Specify whether straight side or clincher wanted. FIVE PER CENT DISCOUNT when cash accompanies order. DEALER AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY LOCALITY.

STANDARD TIRE & RUBBER CO.
3259 S. Morgan St., Chicago, Illinois

Stop Using a Truss

Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal

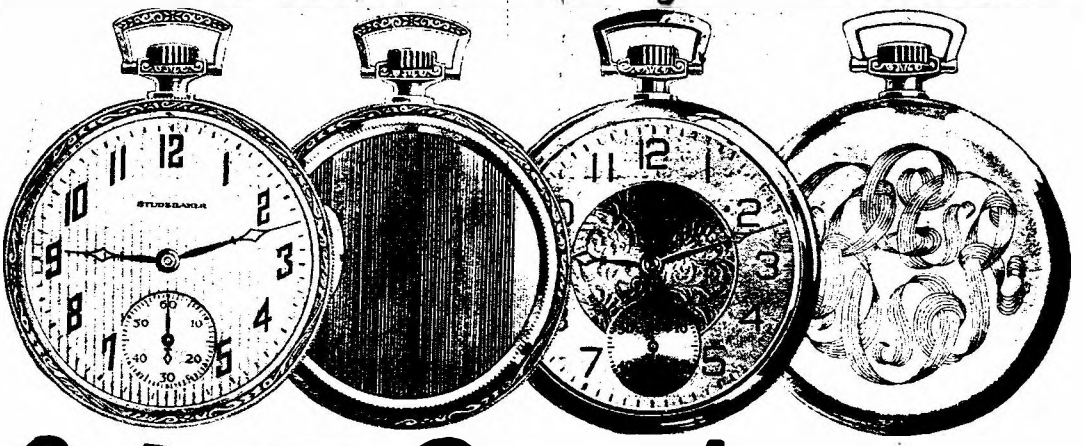
STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being mechanico-chemico applicators made self-adhesive purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. No straps, buckles or spring attached—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone. Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered. Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We prove it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely FREE. Write name on Coupon and send TODAY.

Reduced Fac-Simile Grand Prix

Plapao Co., 848 **Stuart Bldg., St. Louis Mo.**

Name .....
Address .....
Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao

"Buy a Studebaker Direct from the Maker"



Only $1 Down!

Just $1.00! The balance in easy monthly payments. You get the famous Studebaker, 21 Jewel Watch—Insured for a lifetime—direct from the maker at lowest prices ever named on equal quality. Send at once for FREE Book of advance Watch Styles.

21 Jewel STUDEBAKER

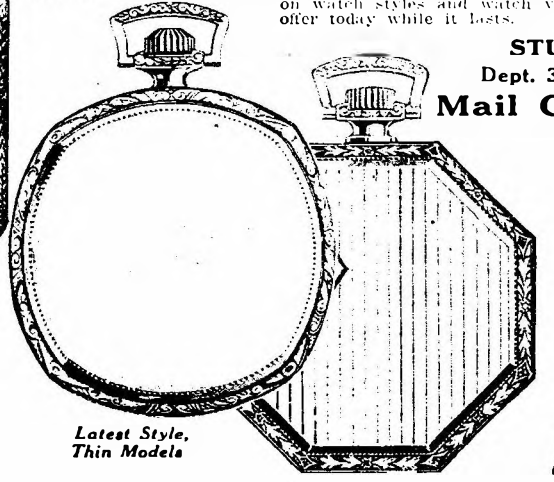
-the *Insured* Watch

FREE! Watch Chain

For a limited time we are giving away *free* with every Studebaker Watch a beautiful Watch Chain. Write now while offer lasts.

Choice of 54 latest, thin model, Art Beauty Cases in yellow gold, green gold or white gold; 8 adjustments, including heat, cold, isochronism and 5 positions. Direct to you from the factory—the greatest watch value in America today.

Write for Style Book! Send at once and get a copy of this book—FREE! See the newest, beautiful, advance styles in Studebaker Art Beauty Cases and Dials. Read how you can buy a 21 Jewel Studebaker Insured Watch *direct from the maker*—save big money—and pay for it while you are using it. Write for our Free Book. It will post you on watch styles and watch values. Send coupon at once. Get Free Chain offer today while it lasts.



Latest Style, Thin Models

STUDEBAKER WATCH CO.
Dept. 3811 South Bend, Indiana

Mail Coupon for FREE Book

Studebaker Watch Co.
Dept. 3811, South Bend, Indiana

Please send me your Free Book of Advance Watch Styles and particulars of your $1.00 down offer.

Name.....

Address.....

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

Rich Silk
Plush Coat

Real Fur Collar and Cuffs

$1 Down

Be dressed in the very newest style. Send only **$1** for this handsome black silk plush coat with **real fur** collar and cuffs. A wonderful bargain; lined throughout with fine grade fancy pattern satin finished venetian of *excellent wearing quality.* Shapely collar as well as cuffs are of beautiful dark brown Coney fur, all of fine selected pelts. Can be worn loose back or full-belted all-around with self belt tying in sash effect in front. Has two neat pockets. Sizes 34 to 44. Length 45 inches.

Order by No. F-29. Terms $1 with Coupon, $4.85 monthly. Total price, $29.95.

Write for Free Catalog Showing Other Styles

6 Months to Pay

Use the credit we offer as thousands do and save money! Send only **$1** for this latest style silk plush coat on approval. If you are delighted with the coat and wish to keep it, you may pay the balance in small monthly sums, so small you will scarcely miss the money. *Only* **$4.85** *a month pays for this coat.* An easy and delightful way to secure a plush coat with **real fur** collar and cuffs. Buy on credit the Elmer Richards way. Open a charge account with us. Compare our prices with **cash** prices in retail stores. No charge for credit. One price always. Send the coupon with only **$1** TODAY.

Mail this Coupon Today!

No C.O.D. Charges to Pay

Elmer Richards Co., West 35th Street Dept. 8278, Chicago, Ill.

I enclose **$1.** Send me Silk Plush Coat **No. F-29.** Size ..... If I am not delighted with the coat, I can return it and get my **$1** back. Otherwise, I will pay easy terms, **$1** with the coupon, **$4.85** monthly, total price, **$29.95.**

Name .....

Address .....

P. O. .....*State* .....

YOUR OWN INITIAL ON EVERY PIECE

32 Pieces Genuine Rogers Silverware

YOU have big dinners, appetizing suppers, and all kinds of good times. How is your dining-table dressed for these occasions? Does it have that definite touch of distinctiveness—good silverware? If not, here is your chance to get, AT A VERY LOW PRICE, and on the EASIEST TERMS a big 32 Piece Set of Rogers Silvermetal with your own initial on every piece. Every one of the 32 pieces is Genuine Rogers Made. Every piece is guaranteed to wear a lifetime. The design is daintily ornamental and attractive—a design that will constantly grow in your regard. The bright finish is lustrous and attractive. All pieces are of substantial weight. These 32 Pieces are not plated—they are solid nickel silver clear through. Expensive plated ware, even sterling, will tarnish, and the knife edges will wear off and turn black. Silvermetal will not tarnish, turn black or wear off; it is easily cleaned. Hot water or silver polish will immediately restore its original brilliance. Every piece bears the Rogers trademark—the quality guarantee of one of the world's best known silversmiths.

SPECIAL 30th ANNIVERSARY

Sale Price Only $9.95

Easy Monthly Payments

30 Days' FREE Trial

I want you to know the pride of possessing a 32 Piece Silver Set that has your own initial on every piece. I want to send it to you on 30 Days' Free Trial in Your Own Home; you can use it in your table service every day. Then when the 30 days have passed if your satisfaction is not complete you can return the set. Your first payment and return postage will be refunded. The trial will not cost you a penny. **Order No. RA2502. Price $9.95. Terms $1 with Order, $1 Monthly.** Postage Prepaid by Me Right to Your Door.

$1 WITH ORDER

ATTRACTIVE FLANNEL ROLL

Each set comes in a Maroon Flannel Roll. There is a separate compartment for every piece. When open, this roll displays the 32 Pieces admirably. When closed, it protects them securely and makes a small, compact, easily handled package.

The Set Consists of:

12 Teaspoons
6 Large Spoons
6 Knives
6 Forks
1 Butter Knife
1 Sugar Shell

A complete service for 6 people; two teaspoons at each plate. This Silver Set will make a most desirable gift—and the holidays are coming. We will gladly supply the 32 pieces with Any Initial You Desire.

Big Free Book!

Be sure to write for my Big Free 30th Anniversary Bargain Book Today. It shows Astounding Bargains in **Furniture, Bedding, Springs, Mattresses, Bed Spreads, Rugs, Carpets, Linoleum, Lace Curtains, Portieres, Dishes, Baby Carriages, Glassware, Stoves, Ranges, Lamps, Enamel Cooking Sets, Aluminum Ware, Refrigerators, Washing Machines, Sewing Machines, Table Linen, Guns, Silverware, Clocks, Cameras, Phonographs, Children's Automobiles and Wagons, Bicycles, etc.**

NATHANIEL SPEAR, Pres.

SPEAR & CO.

Dept. W-7, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Home Furnishers for the People of America

SPEAR & CO., Dept. W-7, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Send me the 32-piece Initial Silver Set with Flannel Roll. I enclose $1.00 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of the 30 days' trial I am satisfied, I will send you $1.00 Monthly. Order No. RA2502 Terms: $1.00 with order, $1.00 Monthly. Price $9.95. Title remains with you until paid in full. Send me your Big Free Catalog also.

Print plainly in box the initial you desire

Name..... Occupation.....

R.F.D., Box No. or Street and No. .....

Post Office..... State.....

FREE CATALOG If you want Free Catalog Only, Send No Money, put X here ☐ and write your name and address plainly on above lines.

THE MUSSEY PRESS, NEW YORK.